

COLL-C 103: Critical Approaches to the Arts & Sciences, Fall 2013
TOPIC: Pleasure, Pain, and Peak Oil

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Class meetings: Mon/Wed 1:00-2:15 in Education 1230

Course Description:

American society is addicted to oil. Halting any addictive behavior is bound to bring pain, sacrifice, and moments of crisis, as well as new opportunities and novel forms of flourishing and well-being. This course focuses on the question of how to define human well-being and prosperity as we move into an era of increasingly scarce resources. We will consider the many ways in which a post-carbon future will likely transform our day-to-day lives and our communities, as well as our fundamental and often cherished ideas of what constitutes the good life in America. Pressing environmental issues such as peak oil and climate change may well bring a radical reevaluation of our current notions of pleasure and convenience, including pleasures stemming from travel, food, leisure, relationships, productive labor, and economic reward. Consequently, one focus of this course is the way in which these pleasures may be threatened but also *enhanced* by resource depletion.

Many ethicists argue that dependence on fossil fuels has made our lives less happy and less secure, that it has generally given us declining satisfactions. Coping with historic environmental challenges, they believe, will lead us to find profound satisfaction and meaning in our own resilience and the resilience of our local communities and natural environments. Could they be right? Do our current environmental and economic difficulties signal that our way of life is dysfunctional? To what sort of lifestyle are humans as a species best adapted, psychologically or biologically? Are we capable of significant sacrifice? Does adapting to peak oil and related challenges mean turning our backs on progress? Do peak oil prophets and “preppers” paint an unnecessarily bleak, even apocalyptic, portrait of the future? (Do fearful scenarios actually motivate people to change, or do they trigger denial?) How much will external factors like technology aid us in this transition, and to what extent will the transition be an internal, personal one? We will critically examine these and many related questions as we consider what it means to *live well* in the 21st century and beyond. As we reflect on this question, we will also benefit from the insights and expertise of various individuals from IU and the Bloomington community who are working to respond to these environmental and ethical challenges (see the **guest lecturers** listed below).

Texts: Available at Boxcar Books <http://www.boxcarbooks.org/> include:

World Made By Hand, (a novel) James Howard Kunstler
Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future, Bill McKibben
The Post-Carbon Reader, Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, eds.
“Redefining Prosperity” (Bloomington’s Peak Oil Task Force Report:
<http://bloomington.in.gov/media/media/application/pdf/6239.pdf>)

Additional required readings are on Oncourse, under the course “**resources**” tab. Files are listed under the author’s name. Occasionally, readings can be accessed through links on the syllabus.




Please bring readings to class!

Course Objectives:

- >Familiarize students with different approaches (including disciplinary approaches) to coping with resource depletion and climate change.
- >Prepare students to be engaged, lifelong citizens of their own communities.
- >Develop tools needed to envision better communities for the future.
- >Help students articulate their *own* view of what constitutes a “better” community or way of life, and why.
- >Encourage students to reflect more critically on the relationship between a “good” life and a healthy and sustainable environment.

Course Requirements/Grading (out of 100)

- >Attendance: 15%. Attendance will be monitored regularly, though not necessarily every day, through a variety of means and in-class exercises.
- > Written reflection/community engagement exercises: 25% (2x /semester. Details will follow) Due Oct 16, Nov 20 in class.
- >Quizzes/Mini-exams (8 throughout the semester, drop two) 30%
- >Final Project 30% (5% of which is allotted to an outline due in advance of the final project). Due Dec 15 on Oncourse

 **Quizzes**  Rather than the usual exams, there will be frequent in-class quizzes throughout the semester, 8 in all (5 points each). You may **drop** your two lowest (or, if you miss one, it will be dropped). There will be no make-up quizzes. Each quiz will cover recent material—lectures, readings, etc. *not* including material read for the day on which the quiz is given. In general quizzes will not be cumulative, except insofar as we will be building on core concepts throughout the course. The format will vary: some quizzes will be short answer or even multiple choice. Others may ask you to write a couple of paragraphs in response to one or two questions. If you have kept up on readings and reviewed notes, these should not be difficult. Quiz dates are marked with this symbol on the syllabus  and are as follows: **September 4, September 18, October 2, October 14, October 28, November 13, December 4, December 11.**

Final project. In lieu of a final exam, a *final project* will ask students to draw on course materials, and particularly on Bloomington as a *case study* (utilizing Bloomington’s Peak Oil report, for example), to analyze a particular community of their choosing. Students will evaluate that community’s prospects for transitioning to a post-carbon existence, with reference to a set of overlapping metrics, such as: prospects for local food security (e.g., presence of urban agriculture, community gardens and farmer’s markets,

food banks); energy sources, transportation options and possible alternatives (e.g., solar/wind sources of energy; bike lanes and community bike projects, mass transit, walkable neighborhoods, mixed zoning); homegrown opportunities for leisure, recreation, and commerce (local arts or music culture, percentage of local businesses, parks or other nature-based sources of recreation, historic preservation efforts). Your paper should be 8-10 double spaced pages, not counting any graphics you might wish to include. (If you wish to include those, please put them in an appendix.) **You will need to choose a town, and provide a brief outline of how you plan to pursue your research for your project, due Nov 6th.**

Academic Honesty. Please note: **plagiarism** is a type of theft and an evasion of responsible learning, and as such will be dealt with severely. You are responsible for understanding and avoiding plagiarism in all your written work. For further information, consult the following short, helpful summary, or ask one of the instructors:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

Please bring readings to class. Laptops in class are generally discouraged, and are to be used only for licit purposes—note taking or referring to readings. Violations of this policy will result in loss of laptop privileges while in class. For the sake of a respectful classroom atmosphere, please silence cell phones and put away all handheld electronic devices, and refrain from texting during class.

Course Schedule (by week) M=Monday; W=Wednesday.

Section I. Peak Oil: A Crash Course

Week 1. Aug 26/28


M: Introduction to course themes and assignments, etc.

READ “The End of Cheap Energy,” by Richard Heinberg (from *Powerdown*) on Oncourse

W: READ “Non-Petroleum Energy Sources: Can the Party Continue?” by Richard Heinberg (from *The Party’s Over*) on Oncourse

Week 2. Sept 2/4

M: **No class—Labor Day.** But begin reading Kunstler, *World Made by Hand* (read up to p. 76 by today)

W: Kunstler, up to p. 76 

Week 3. Sept 9/11


M: READ: **Film screening:** “The End of Suburbia.” Continue Kunstler, *World Made by Hand* (up to p. 177 by today)

W: READ: “Ethical Framework for Biofuels,” by Buyx and Tait (Oncourse), and continue reading Kunstler. ****Guest lecture: Prof. Ben Brabson on energy and climate change****

Week 4. Sept 16/18

M: READ: aim to finish Kunstler, *World Made by Hand* by today and read: “Disaster Movies and the Peak Oil Movement” by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, on Oncourse.

W: READ: “The Whole Fracking Enchilada,” by Sandra Steingraber, on Oncourse

and “Oil Shale Development: Looming Threat to Western Wildlands” by George Wuerthner, on Oncourse 

Section II. Rethinking Pleasure? Slow Food, Slow Motion

Week 5. Sept 23/25

M: READ: “Dangerously Addictive: Why We are Biologically Ill-Suited to the Riches of Modern America” by Peter Whybrow (*The Post-Carbon Reader*)

W: READ: “Are We Getting Happier?” by Richard Layard (from *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*) on Oncourse

Week 6. Sept 30/Oct 2

M: READ: “The Pleasures of Eating” by Wendell Berry available on Oncourse and on this link: <http://thecontraryfarmer.wordpress.com/2009/12/10/the-pleasures-of-eating-wendell-berry/> and “Getting Fossil Fuels off the Plate” by Michael Bomford (from *Post-Carbon Reader*)
****Guest Lecture**** by Prof. Christine Barbour, on local eating.


W: READ: “The Year of Eating Locally” by Bill McKibben (*Deep Economy*, chapter 2) 

Week 7. Oct 7/9

M : READ: Introduction and Chapter One (“Footloose in the Geography of Nowhere”) by Kurt Hoelting (from *The Circumference of Home*). On Oncourse, in one document.

W: READ: “Transportation in the Post-Carbon World,” by Richard Gilbert and Anthony Perl (from *Post-Carbon Reader*)

Week 8. Oct 14/16

M: READ: “Bikes, Sticks, Carrots,” by Justin Williams (from *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice*) On Oncourse 

W: READING (TBD)

****Guest lecture**** by Prof. Rasul Mowatt on tourism/travel

REFLECTION PAPER I. DUE WED OCT 16 in class.

Section III. Rethinking Prosperity? Sacrifice and Shrinking Pains

Week 9. Oct 21/23

M: READ: “Ordinary and Extraordinary Sacrifices: Religion, Everyday Life, and Environmental Practice” by Anna Peterson (from *The Environmental Politics of Sacrifice*). On Oncourse


W: READ: “The Geography of Somewhere” by Scott Russell Sanders (from *A Conservationist Manifesto*) On Oncourse ****Guest lecture**** Prof Scott Russell Sanders

Recommended reading: “Better Places” by James Howard Kunstler, (from *The Geography of Nowhere*) on Oncourse.

ALSO READ: “The Tyranny of Comfort,” by Rob Dietz, available at <http://steadystate.org/the-tyranny-of-comfort/>

And “A Mindful Path to a Steady State Economy,” by Rick Heller, available at <http://steadystate.org/a-mindful-path-to-a-steady-state-economy/>

Week 10. Oct 28/30

M: READ: *Deep Economy*, chap 1, “After Growth” by Bill McKibben 

W: READ: *Deep Economy*, chap 3, “All for One, or One for All”

Week 11. Nov 4/6

M: READ: *Deep Economy*, chap 4, “The Wealth of Communities”


Film screening: “The Economics of Happiness”

W: Finish *Deep Economy* (including *Afterword*)

Section IV: Resilience and Change: Re-visioning the Future

Week 12. Nov 11/13

M: READ: “The Psychology of Peak Oil and Climate Change” by Richard Heinberg (from *Peak Everything*) on Oncourse

W: READ: “Understanding the Psychology of Change” by Rob Hopkins, on Oncourse 

Week 13. Nov 18/20

M: READ: “Thinking ‘Resilience’” by William Rees (from *The Post-Carbon Reader*)

W: READ: “Personal Preparation” by Chris Martenson, and “What Can Communities Do?” by Rob Hopkins (both from *The Post-Carbon Reader*)

REFLECTION PAPER II DUE WED NOV 20 in class.

Week 14. THANKSGIVING BREAK!!

Catch up or get ahead on reading; work on final projects

Week 15. Dec 2/4

M: READ: “The Competitiveness of Local, Living Economies” by Michael Shuman (from *The Post-Carbon Reader*) Film screening: “Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil.”

W: READ: “Children and Peak Oil,” by Paul Tranter and Scott Sharpe, on Oncourse 

Week 16. Dec 9/11

M: READ: “A Vision for 2030: Looking Back Over the Transition” by Rob Hopkins, on Oncourse

W: READ: “How to Be Hopeful” by Barbara Kingsolver (from *Moral Ground*) on Oncourse



Final Project DUE on Oncourse by Sunday Dec 15th by Midnight.