

**** DRAFT FOR PREVIEW PURPOSES ****
SUBJECT TO CHANGE BEFORE F25

GEOGRAPHY*2230: Commodity Chains and Cultures of Consumption
Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics
Fall 2025

Instructor:

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Office Hours: Mondays, 3:30-4:30pm

Teaching Assistant:

See Courselink for details

Territorial acknowledgement

All of Canada resides on the traditional territories, treaty or unceded lands and/or homelands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The University of Guelph campus sits within the Dish with One Spoon wampum. The Dish with One Spoon is an agreement between Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabeg and their allied nations to live peaceably on the lands throughout what is now known as the Great Lakes Region. The circle at the centre is a dish with a beaver's tail, indicating that they will have one dish and what belongs to one will be shared among all. We are to eat of the beavertail, using no sharp utensils, to prevent the shedding of blood. We all share resources and everything the Creator has provided for us upon our arrival to Mother Earth.

Reflecting with intention about where we live, learn and work is one way to show respect to Indigenous histories, peoples and territories. To learn more about Canada, colonialism and reconciliation, please visit the website of the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) and read the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action](#). The Territorial Acknowledgement above is adapted from resources by the Jake Thomas Learning Centre.

Course description and objectives:

This course is an introduction to the spatial structure, distribution, and social dynamics of economic activity. We will learn about key economic actors, institutions, and relationships and will examine extractive activities, manufacturing, retail, marketing and consumption. Course material, activities, and assignments will reveal interconnections between changing resource harvest technologies, business finance, commodity movement, marketing, and labour. We will use commodity chain analysis, case studies, discussion and argumentative essay writing to explore and reinforce course material.

By the end of the semester, students will be in a position to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of definitions and concepts covered in lectures and readings;
- Apply these to examine and assess different case studies and commodity chains;
- Reflect on the roles of different actors (government, firms, individuals) in commodity chains; and,
- Construct and support evidence-based arguments regarding contemporary patterns and processes in commodity production and consumption.

Student Evaluation:

In-Class Multiple Choice Test: 15%

Virtual Research Labs: 15% (3 x 5% each; full points if submitted on time; half points if submitted day late; no points thereafter; answers posted by end of Oct. 15 to study for test and exam)

Diary of a Shopper Written Assignment: 15%

Commodity Chain Video: 25%

Commodity Chain Panel Contributions and Audience Participation: 5%

In-Person Final: 25%

Class Schedule

	DATE	TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY
	Sept. 5	Course welcome & overview
1	Sept. 8	Course intro and structure, key definitions & ice breaker activity
	Sept. 10	Question: How does economic activity connect us to others around the world?
	Sept. 12	Lens & case study: Production networks & commodity chains
2	Sept. 15	Question: How do space and place influence what people want to buy?
	Sept. 17	Lens & case study: Retail geographies
	Sept. 19	Virtual research lab
3	Sept. 22	Question: What is capitalism?
	Sept. 24	Lens & case study: Uneven development
	Sept. 26	Virtual research lab
4	Sept. 29	Question: How do economic actors see nation-states and governments?
	Oct. 1	Lens & case study: Political-economy
	Oct. 3	Virtual research lab
5	Oct. 6	Question: 'Free markets' – are they a thing, a structure, or a metaphor?
	Oct. 8	Lens & case study: Economic embeddedness
	Oct. 10	Introduction to the 'Commodity Chain' and 'Diary of a Shopper' course assignments + Sign up for your commodity of choice
6	Oct. 13	STATUTORY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS
	Oct. 15	Diary of a shopper #1: Consumption and identity <i>I am what I buy. Or am I?</i>
	Oct. 17	Diary of a shopper #2: Certification and standards <i>What makes a product sustainable, and who decides?</i>

	DATE	TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY
7	Oct. 20	Diary of a shopper #3: Ethical consumption and its limits <i>Can we shop our way to a better future?</i>
	Oct. 22	Question: How do economic actors see 'labour'?
	Oct. 24	Lens & case study: The politics of work and wage-workers
8	Oct. 27	MULTIPLE CHOICE TEST – IN CLASS, ALL MATERIAL TO DATE
	Oct. 29	Question: How do economic actors see 'nature'?
	Oct. 31	Lens & case study: Production of nature
9	Nov. 3	Question: How do economic actors see the internet and social/digital platforms?
	Nov. 5	Lens & case study: Platform capitalism
	Nov. 7	Free to work on Commodity Chain Video
10	Nov. 10	Free to work on Commodity Chain Video
	Nov. 12	Commodity Chain Day: Barley
	Nov. 14	Commodity Chain Day: Grapes
11	Nov. 17	Commodity Chain Day: Salmon
	Nov. 19	Commodity Chain Day: Lentils
	Nov. 21	Commodity Chain Day: Seaweed
12	Nov. 24	Commodity Chain Day: Cotton
	Nov. 26	Course Overview and Conclusion Exam Structure Revealed, including topic of commodity case study
	Nov. 28	NO CLASS

Required Textbook:

Coe, N.M., Kelly, P.F., Yeung, H.W.C. Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction (2nd ed). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Other Required Readings:

Ch. 2 in Castree, N. Castree, N., Ward, K., & Coe, N. (2003). *Spaces of work: Global capitalism and geographies of labour*. DOI: 10.4135/9781446221044

Bernstein, S., & Cashore, B. (2007). Can non-state global governance be legitimate? An analytical framework. *Regulation & governance*, 1(4), 347-371.

Folke, C., et al. (2019). Transnational corporations and the challenge of biosphere stewardship. *Nature ecology & evolution*, 3(10), 1396-1403.

Ch. 4 in Mansvelt, J. (2005). *Geographies of Consumption*. DOI: 10.4135/9781446221433

Ch. 2 in Sadowski, J. (2020). *Too Smart: How Digital Capitalism is Extracting Data, Controlling Our Lives, and Taking Over the World*. ISBN : 9780262538589

Silver, J. J., & Hawkins, R. (2017). "I'm not trying to save fish, I'm trying to save dinner": Media, celebrity and sustainable seafood as a solution to environmental limits. *Geoforum*, 84, 218-227.

Please note that the textbook is available for purchase via the campus bookstore and several copies are on reserve at the campus library. Estimated cost of a new softcover version of the textbook is \$55-65. If acquiring a used textbook (e.g., a friend, online), please be sure that it is the **3rd edition**. All other required readings are freely downloadable from our Courselink page and the U of G Library Ares site.

University Policy Statements

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement. When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration

Accessibility. The University of Guelph is committed to creating a barrier-free environment. Providing services for students is a shared responsibility among students, faculty and administrators. This relationship is based on respect of individual rights, the dignity of the individual and the University community's shared commitment to an open and supportive learning environment. Students requiring service or accommodation, whether due to an identified, ongoing disability or a short-term disability should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible. For more information, contact SAS at 519-824-4120 ext. 56208 or visit the [SAS website](#).

Academic Misconduct. The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor. The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.

E-mail Communication. As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly. E-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

Drop Date. The last date to drop one-semester courses, without academic penalty, is Friday, November 29, 2019.

Copies of out-of-class assignments. Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Recording of Materials. Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources. The Undergraduate Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.