

**PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE**  
**GEOGRAPHY\*2230: Commodity Chains and Cultures of Consumption**  
**Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics**  
**Fall 2026**

**Instructor**

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**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 uphold Indigenous histories, peoples and territories. Another is to learn more about Canada, colonialism and reconciliation; if you would like to do so, one way to begin is by visiting the website of the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) and reading the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action](#). The Territorial Acknowledgement above is adapted from university materials and 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.

**PRELIMINARY Assessments and weighting:**

Virtual Research Labs: 15%

In-Person Test: 15%

Diaries of a Shopper: 15%

Commodity Chain Video Assignment: 25%

Commodity Chain Days Self-Assessment: 10%

In-Person Final: 20%

## Class Schedule

<b>TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY</b>
Welcome, syllabus overview & icebreaker activity
Course intro and structure, key definitions
Question: How does economic activity connect us to others around the world?
Lens & case study: Production networks & commodity chains
Question: How do space and place influence what people want to buy?
Lens & case study: Retail geographies
Virtual research lab by video: Consumer Price Index
Question: What is capitalism?
Lens & case study: Uneven development
Virtual research lab by video: Income & Income inequality
Question: How do economic actors see nation-states and governments?
Lens & case study: Political economy
Virtual research lab by video: International trade and tariffs
<b>STATUTORY HOLIDAY – NO CLASS</b>
Intro to ‘Commodity Chain’ and ‘Diary of a Shopper’ course assignments; sign-up for your preferred commodity!
Question: ‘Free markets’ – are they a thing, a structure, or a metaphor?
Lens & case study: Economic embeddedness
Question: How do economic actors see ‘nature’?
Diary of a shopper #1: Consumption and identity <i>I am what I buy. Or am I?</i>
Lens & Case study: Production of nature
Diary of a shopper #2: Certification and standards <i>What makes a product sustainable, and who decides?</i>
In-Person Test

<b>TOPIC and/or ACTIVITY</b>
Diary of a shopper #3: Ethical consumption and its limits <i>Can we shop our way to a better future?</i>
Question: How do economic actors see 'labour'?
Lens & case study: Labour and class politics
Question: How do economic actors see the internet and platforms?
Lens & case study: Platform capitalism
Commodity chain video work
Commodity chain video work
Commodity Chain Day: 3 videos plus panel discussion
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Commodity Chain Day: 3 videos plus panel discussion
Commodity Chain Day: 3 videos plus panel discussion
Course Overview & Conclusion; Exam Structure Revealed

### **REQUIRED Textbook:**

Coe, N.M., Kelly, P.F., Yeung, H.W.C. *Economic Geography: A Contemporary Introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

**PLEASE NOTE** that the required textbook will be available for purchase at the campus bookstore and via other online book sellers. **Estimated cost of a new softcover version of the textbook is \$55-65.** If acquiring a used textbook (e.g., from a friend, online), please be sure that it is the **3<sup>rd</sup> edition**. All other required readings are freely downloadable from our Courselink page and the U of G Library Ares site.

### **Other REQUIRED Readings:**

**Chapter 2** in 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.

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

**Chapter 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.