Social Problems
Final Research Project

Check your course syllabus and/or Canvas for due dates. This research project is broken down into 4 steps:

- **Step 1:** Research topic summary (30 points)
- **Step 2:** Outline of research paper and annotated bibliography (70 points)
- **Step 3:** Final draft of paper (100 points)
- **Step 4:** Presentation (50 points)

**Assignment:** This assignment asks you to investigate the sources of the products you consume. You’ll be asked to choose a specific product and trace it from source to consumption. This type of project is called “commodity chain analysis,” since it starts with a product (a commodity) and uncovers the chain of events, people, and materials that produced it.

*The goal of this research project is to uncover the hidden social, economic, and environmental relationships behind the products that we consume.* What follows are the instructions for each stage of the project.

**STEP 1: Research Topic Proposal (30 points)**

*Requirements for Step 1 - Due September 18:*

- Write a 1 page (typed, double spaced, 12pt font) summary on the commodity that you have selected to investigate for your “commodity chain analysis”.

- You will pick one of the commodities you consume on a regular basis—food, clothing, materials for school/work/leisure, etc.—to explore further for this project.

- What is the commodity that you have selected to investigate in your “commodity chain analysis”?

- Discuss the significance of the commodity to you and to society

- Discuss one or two questions that you will attempt to answer about the commodity in your research.
Step 2: Outline of research paper and annotated bibliography (70 points)

Requirement for Step 2- Due November 1:

- An outline of your paper

- A minimum of six sources of information about your commodity from academic articles, newspapers, or websites (at least 2 from peer reviewed sources)

- These sources need to be presented in APA style bibliographic form and annotated.

After you have chosen your commodity and I have approved it, you want to conduct in-depth research on your commodity and begin to put your analysis together.

- Try to trace the factors which pertain to your product’s production, distribution, and consumption—what resources are necessary for this product to reach you?
- What institutions or types of companies are involved? Does national or international law affect the production, transportation, or disposal of your product?
- What are the environmental consequences of using this product from its initial production to its disposal as waste?
- Try to locate information about those who work in the companies producing, distributing, and selling this product— at every step of the commodity chain. Do they face any environmental or health hazards in their work?
- Where does the manufacturing take place? Or, if this is an agricultural product, where does the planting and harvesting occur?
- What are the environmental conditions in the countries or areas where the manufacturing or harvesting takes place? What are the political, economic, and labor conditions there?
- How did the product get from one point in the commodity chain to another (e.g., from the manufacturer to the place where you bought it, from the supplier of raw materials to the manufacturer, etc.)? How far did it travel? What can you say about the environmental impacts of this activity? What can you say about how this connects you to other parts of the country or the world?
- You may not be able to treat all aspects of the commodity chain in equal depth because of lack of information on certain aspects of your commodity. Try to cover everything, but you may have to write about some aspects of the commodity in greater depth than others.
Answering these questions will require a good amount of work, using a variety of resources—library materials, and web-based resources. You’ll need to use your best detective skills in order to complete the assignment. Even so, you’ll probably hit some dead-ends in the process. A few dead-ends are acceptable, but if you have trouble getting any useful information, you should choose a different product.

**Step 3: Final draft of Research Paper (100 points):**

**Final Paper requirements- Due November 15:**

- Paper should be 5-7 pages long (typed, double spaced, 12pt font)
- You need to have a work cited page
- Paper will be graded for both content and writing quality. Please re-read, proofread, and revise your work before turning it in.

Your final paper should answer the following questions:

1. Describe the product you have chosen and how it fits into your everyday routines. How often do you use/consume it? Why do you use/consume it? Does it have any special meaning to you?

2. Describe the results of your commodity chain analysis and the process by which you came to these results. Try to describe as much of the full commodity chain as you were able to uncover. Diagrams might help in some cases but are not required. Also, be sure to make it clear how you went about getting this information. Explain what sources you used for different pieces of information (and cite them), so that someone else could, in theory, can re-trace the commodity chain and find the same things you found.

3. Explain and describe the hidden social and environmental relationships behind your commodity. How does the production and consumption of this product affect social relationships locally, nationally, globally?

4. Explain some alternative ways of producing and consuming your commodity and how it will improve the social and environmental relationships behind your commodity.
5. Conclude with a discussion of what you learned about the social relationships of production and consumption by examining your commodity chain.

**Step 4: Final Presentation requirements (50 points):**

**Presentation Requirements:**

- 10-15 minute presentation of major research findings
- Visual aid is strongly encouraged
- Questions to address in your presentation:
  - Why did you pick this commodity and what role does it play in your life?
  - How is the commodity produced, distributed, and consumed?
  - What role does this commodity play in social relationships and social inequality?
  - What are some alternative ways of producing and consuming your commodity and how will it improve social and environmental relationships behind your commodity?