

Simple Living in a Complex Age

Summer 2006 Syllabus is available on [Blackboard](#)

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Simple living is a complex subject.

It is often related to the quality of one's personal life and how one spends money and time or finds peace of mind. This personal dimension is important, but there are other dimensions, namely the social and the ecological, and I would like to pursue them as well with you this summer. The social dimension is our search for "good work", work that expresses our values and ideals and that puts us in touch with people we enjoy. Here the context is society. The ecological dimension searches for low-impact living and a restorative economy. Here the context is the earth.

We will conduct the course as a reading and discussion seminar with practical experiments.

1) **Participation** (33%). You are responsible for reading all of the assignments and coming to class prepared for discussion. By prepared I mean having a cache of questions and comments and having a point of view on the reading and ideas for that class. Participation in our trip to the Levering Orchard is part of participation.

2) Begin your **Experiments in Simplicity** (33%) right away. Consider them a daily practice for the entire course. Keep a Journal, 5 entries/pages per week. The final entry should be a 2-page evaluation of your Experiments in Simplicity. Hand in journal, see below. You are to choose **three** experiments.

a) **Self**: Replace quantity with **quality** (less is more.). Take on a behavior that complicates and drains life and replace it with a positive one. You may be dealing with a burden, a distraction, or an addiction, and you may want to turn off (or throw away) the TV, reduce spending by 25%, or give away your possessions.

b) **Work**: Experiment with and think about work life. Am I doing what I want to do? Does my work express my values and ideals or is it simply a way to make money? Am I in a rut? If so, how do I get out? Use this part of your experiments to think about alternatives, get in touch with yourself and other people who can help, and actively explore possibilities.

c) **The Earth**: Take a significant step toward connecting with the earth and/or decreasing your Ecological Footprint. This must be more than recycling. Look at your home, yard, church, club or place of work. What can you begin doing, i.e., gardening, alternative transportation, energy use, reducing waste, etc. that you haven't been doing before?

3) **Paper** (33%) At the end of the course you will write a 5-page paper and present your view of simplicity based on the readings. You will write your philosophy of simple living based on a discussion of the books we have read. You are to show me how well you grasp the concepts and how well you can integrate diverse ideas into a sensible and intelligent view of simple living. You are not to summarize author's arguments but use them in constructing a workable philosophy.

I think you will find each of the books to be provocative. They are, roughly in order of our reading,

Affluenza

Peace is Every Step

In Praise of Slowness

John De Graaf, et al

Thich Nhat Hanh

Carl Honore

Seven Lessons of Chaos John Briggs
Simple Living Frank Levering and Wanda Urbansha
The Ecology of Commerce Paul Hawken

SCHEDULE

- May 23 Introduction to the course and the Simple Living Journal
Video: "A Poor Man Shames Us All"
- May 25 The Symptoms and Causes of Affluenza
Reading: *Affluenza*, Parts I and II.
Take Affluenza Self-Diagnosis Quiz, pp. 168-70.
Peace is Every Step, pp. 5-31
Video: "The Overspent American"—the cycle of work and spend.
- May 30 Making a Case for Simple Living
Reading: *Affluenza*, Part III continues our study of affluence
Peace is Every Step, pp. 31-48
Video: *Escape from Affluenza*
Take the Ecological Footprint Quiz at www.rprogress.org.
Analyze your score and determine what you can do.
Compare it with other countries and draw conclusions.
- June 1 Slowness and Simplicity, I
Reading: *In Praise of Slowness*, chapters
Peace is Every Step, pp. 67-91
- June 6 Slowness and Simplicity, II
Reading: *In Praise of Slowness*, chapters
Peace is Every Step, pp. 95-108
Video: *The Ad and the Ego*
- June 8 Going with the Flow
Reading: *Peace is Every Step*, pp. 108-134
The Seven Lessons of Chaos, "Before Word", & chapters 1-4
- June 11 Trip to Levering Orchard with Wanda Urbanska and Frank Levering
Simple Living, read all in preparation for our day at the Orchard
- June 13 The Aesthetics of Nature and Time
Reading: *Chaos*, chapters 5 -7 & "After Words"
Video: on Andy Goldsworthy's work with natural forms and processes
Reading: *Ecology of Commerce*, Introduction and chapters 1-3
- June 15 Ecological Simplicity JOURNALS DUE
Reading: *Ecology of Commerce*, chapters 4-12
Video: *Biomimicry*, Vol 1
- June 20 Colloquium on Simplicity PAPERS DUE
Presentation of Papers