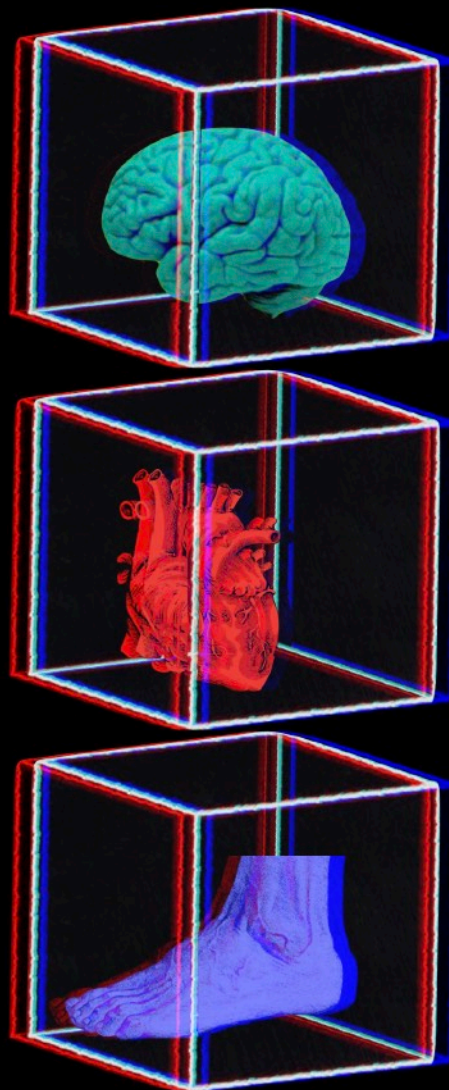


# CONSUMER CULTURE

2024



MLI26C730

6 CREDITS

# KEY INFORMATION



## Course Content:

This course takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study of consumption, describing key theories from such fields as sociology, social theory, cultural studies, material culture and cultural anthropology, as they relate to consumer culture. Distinct from psychologically oriented and experimentally driven sub-fields of consumer research (e.g. consumer psychology; consumer behaviour), Consumer Culture research is mainly qualitative in its methodologies and methods, and relatively critical in its perspectives. Central streams of inquiry seek to advance consumer research knowledge by illuminating sociocultural processes and structures related to 1) consumer identity projects, 2) marketplace cultures, 3) the socio-historic patterning of consumption, and 4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies.

## Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion, include the ability to:

- 1) understand the key concepts, theories, and frameworks of consumer culture theory and interpretive consumer behavior;
- 2) apply these concepts, theories, and frameworks in critically examining and analyzing consumption in different international contexts
- 3) conduct consumer/market research and interpret the results for managerial implications.



### **Instructor Name & Profile:**

An active researcher for the past 30 years, Dr. Maurice Patterson has co-written two textbooks, published 10 chapters in books, 46 peer-reviewed journal articles, and 80 peer-reviewed conference presentations. His publications have appeared in the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Marketing Theory, Psychology & Marketing*, *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, the *Journal of Marketing Management*, and a variety of other journals. He is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* and the *Journal of Customer Behaviour*.

Maurice has experience teaching the full range of marketing subjects and specialising in Consumer Culture, Marketing Communications and Marketing Theory. He received an Outstanding Teaching Award from Warwick Business School (2012), was nominated for a Shannon Regional Consortium Teaching Award (2015), and short-listed for a Teaching Excellence Award at the University of Limerick (2011).

### **Email address:**

maurice.patterson@ul.ie

### **Office Hours:**

13:00 - 14:00 Each Day

### **Required Reading:**

No textbook. Journal articles and web resources are used for each session.

**NB:** Please read material in advance of each session.

# COURSE SCHEDULE



## **Contact Hours:**

12 x 3.25hr Sessions and 2 x 3hr Sessions comprising formal lectures, discussion and classroom exercises.

## SESSION 01 - 10th June 2024 - 3hrs

### Introduction, The Domain of Consumption & Does Consumption Make You Happy

**Read:** Shankar, A., J. Whittaker and J. Fitchett (2006) "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now", Marketing Theory, 6(4): 485-505.

We increasingly live according to the rhythm of desires provoked by the market. Advertising, for example, evokes a search for well-being, for the so-called "good life" and its promise of happiness and optimism through consumption. While reading consider whether consumption really makes you happy.

**Check Out:** Happiness Machines (Youtube)

The story of the relationship between Sigmund Freud and his American nephew, Edward Bernays. Bernays invented the public relations profession in the 1920s and was the first person to take Freud's ideas to manipulate the masses. He showed American corporations how they could make people want things they didn't need by systematically linking mass-produced goods to their unconscious desires. While watching think about the nature of desire and how it is connected to the things you buy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPmg0R1M04>

## SESSION 02 - 11th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Nature of Culture

**Check Out:** Crash Course Sociology. What exactly is culture? (Youtube)

Explaining the difference between material and non-material culture and looking at three things that make up culture: symbols, values and beliefs, and norms. While watching think about the symbols, values and norms that make up your own culture.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGrVhM\\_Gi8k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGrVhM_Gi8k)

## SESSION 03 - 12th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Consumer Culture Theory

**Read:** Arnould, E. and C. Thompson (2005) "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research", Journal of Consumer Research, 31(March), 868-882.

This paper provides a synthesising overview of previous consumer research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. The paper assesses how CCT has contributed to consumer research by illuminating the cultural dimensions of the consumption cycle and by developing novel theorisations concerning four thematic domains of research interest.

## SESSION 04 - 13th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Metaphors of the Consumer

**Read:** Munthiu, M. (2009) "The Buying Decision Process and Types of Buying Decision Behaviour", Sibiu Alma Mater University Journals. Series A. Economic Sciences, 2(4): 27-33.

The dominant perspective on consumer behaviour remains the information processing perspective which positions the consumer as a logical, rational, decision maker. This paper details this perspective. While reading, think about your consumption of clothing and determine the degree to which it follows the pattern outlined in the paper.

**Read:** Celsi, R., R. Rose and T. Leigh (1993) "An Exploration of High Risk Leisure Consumption through Skydiving", Journal of Consumer Research, 20(1): 1-23.

This paper provides a wide-ranging account of the experience of skydiving as a high-risk leisure pursuit. While reading, think about how many of the issues are applicable to other forms of consumer experience. Also think about what might be missing from this account of the consumption experience.

**Read:** Wattanasuwan, K. (2005) "The self and symbolic consumption", Journal of American Academy of Business, 6(1): 179-184.

The cultural imperative to work upon identity has become inescapable, demanding symbolic work of consumers at unprecedented levels such that they process 'an ever-expanding supply of fashions, cultural texts, tourist experiences, cuisines, mass cultural icons, and the like' (Holt 2002: 87). This cultural imperative is underscored by the waning influence of long-established social categories such as class, gender and occupation and by the dilemmas of the self that include fragmentation, powerlessness, uncertainty and a struggle against commodification. While reading think about the degree to which your own consumption carries meaning.



## SESSION 05 - 14th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Cultural Meaning & Meaning Transfer

**Read:** McCracken, Grant (1986) "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods", Journal of Consumer Research, 13(June): 71-84.

In this paper McCracken accounts for the movement of meaning between three locations: the culturally constituted world, the world of goods, and consumers. While reading, think about McCracken's ritualistic modes of consumption and those that are important in your own life.

**Read:** Holt, D. (1995) "How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices", Journal of Consumer Research, 22(1): 1-16.

Using baseball as a context, Holt considers the mundane and everyday means by which we move meaning from the world of goods to our selves. Unfortunately, the baseball example isn't particularly illuminating outside of North American contexts. While reading, think about his typology in terms of a consumer experience that you regularly engage with.

## SESSION 06 - 17th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Researching Consumer Culture I: Ethnographic Approaches

**Check Out:** Metal: A Headbanger's Journey (Documentarymania)

The film follows 31-year-old Sam Dunn, a Canadian anthropologist, who has been a heavy metal fan since the age of 12. Dunn sets out across the world to uncover the various opinions on heavy metal music, including its origins, culture, controversy, and the reasons it is loved by so many people.

<http://www.documentarymania.com/player.php?title=Metal>

## SESSION 07 - 18th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Consumer as Identity Seeker

**Read:** Parmentier, M-A. and E. Fischer (2011) "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Unsustainable Identity Projects in the Fashion System," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 14 (1): 7-27.

This paper addresses identity projects by investigating the identity trajectories experienced by women who strive for successful careers as fashion models. It argues that while end consumers in a symbolic field such as fashion may experience nearly limitless postmodern potential for identity play, those individuals who strive for positioning in the production systems of such fields have more limited scope for identity construction. While reading think about the potential we have to play with our identities through consumption.

**Check Out:** Why Clothes Matter. (Youtube)

The clothes we choose to wear constitute some of our most crucial and carefully chosen lines of autobiography. While watching think about what your clothes say about you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8da1nXckEy4>

## SESSION 08 -19th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Consumer as Culture Producer

**Read:** Schouten, J. and J. McAlexander (1995) "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Biker", Journal of Consumer Research, 22(1): 43-61.

This paper introduces the subculture of consumption as an analytic category through which to better understand consumers and the manner in which they organise their lives and identities. Recognising that consumption activities, product categories, or even brands may serve as the basis for interaction and social cohesion, the concept of the subculture of consumption solves many problems inherent in the use of ascribed social categories as devices for understanding consumer behaviour. While reading think about the consumption communities of which you are a part.

**Check Out:** The Story of Skinhead (Youtube)

The Story of Skinhead. Don Letts looks at a very particular British subculture. He traces the history of skinhead from the late 60s to the present, looking at the music and styles of skinhead from the reggae-influenced ska to the punk-influenced Oi. While watching think about the the role of consumption objects and experiences in signalling membership of such groups.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reGXa3vgeF4>

## SESSION 09 - 20th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Consumer As Enactor of Social Roles

**Read:** Holt, D. (1997) "Distinction in America? Recovering Bourdieu's theory of tastes from its critics", Poetics, 25(2-3): 93-120.

In an interpretive study of cultural capital and patterns of taste in the United States, and based on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper identifies six dimensions of taste that vary across cultural capital resources. While reading, think about your own forms of cultural capital.

**Check Out:** Bourdieu: Cultural Capital, the Love of Art & Hip Hop (Youtube)

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was interested in how the organisation of culture and the social world around us could affect our individual view of the world. How we didn't just pick the culture we liked, but in some ways culture picked us - made us more or less likely to act in certain ways. While watching think about the ways you mobilise your own cultural capital.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th0eYWnGZ\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th0eYWnGZ_4)

## SESSION 10 - 24th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Consumer As Interpretive Agent

**Read:** Cherrier, H. (2009) "Anti-consumption discourses and consumer-resistant identities", Journal of Business Research, 62(2): 181-190.

This paper identifies two anti-consumption discourses (the voluntary simplicity discourse and the culture jammer discourse) to show the importance of anti-consumption practices in the construction of consumer identities. Each resistant identity is produced by, and produces, overreaching cultural discourses against consumer culture, namely resistance to exploitative consumption and resistance to positional consumption. While reading think about the consumption-resistant aspects of your own identity project.

**Check Out:** Killing Us Softly (Youtube)

Killing Us Softly. Pioneering activist and cultural theorist Jean Kilbourne has been studying the image of women in advertising for over 40 years. In this rapid-fire, passionate, and highly entertaining talk, she discusses the experiences that inspired her to create this new field and vividly illustrates how these images affect us all. You'll never look at an ad in the same way again. While watching think

## SESSION 11 - 25th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Researching Consumer Culture II: Multisensory Approaches

**Read:** Patterson, M. and G. Larsen (2019) "Listening to Consumption: Towards a Sonic Turn in Consumer Research" Marketing Theory, 19(2) 105-127.

In seeking to orient consumer research towards the sonic, this paper has three objectives. First, to chart the emergence of the 'sonic turn' in the social sciences and, relatedly, to register the echoes of such a turn in consumer research. Second, to draw together the implications of this turn for the ontological, epistemological and methodological foundations of consumer research as a culturally framed social science. Third, to tease out the potential impact of the turn to sound in an intellectual context that remains relatively silent, by addressing the question: what does it mean to listen to consumption? While reading think about the everyday sounds of consumption that you encounter.

## SESSION 12 - 26th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### The Embodied Consumer

**Read:** Murphy, S., M. Patterson and L. O'Malley (2019) "Learning How: Body Techniques, Skill Acquisition and the Consumption of Experience" Marketing Theory, 19(4): 425-445.

In laying the foundation for the experiential perspective, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) recognise that experience is the first and foremost grounded in the body and emphasise the immediacy of embodied experience as it is lived. It might be reasonable to expect, then, that lived embodiment might have garnered greater attention within consumer research. But, comprehensive accounts of the embodiment of action remain relatively elusive. This paper looks at the role of bodies in high-speed motorcycling. While reading, think about how your body is implicated in the experience of clothes shopping.

**Check Out:** Pumping Iron (Youtube)

A 1977 American docudrama about the world of professional bodybuilding, with a focus on the 1975 IFBB Mr. Universe and 1975 Mr. Olympia competitions. The film also served to popularise the culture of bodybuilding, which was somewhat niche at the time, and helped inspire the fitness craze of the 1980s; following the film's release, there was a marked increase in the number of commercial gyms in the U.S. While watching think about the role of gyms in promoting a particular kind of body culture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wiXxifU5ilQ>



## SESSION 13 - 27th June 2024 - 3hrs 15mins

### Cultural Strategy

A cultural icon is a powerful cultural symbol that champions an ideology that resonates, that people care about, and so they use the brand in their everyday lives, an important component of their identities. In this session we will bring together our learning about consumer culture to identify how such knowledge might be used to drive marketing strategy.

**Read:** Holt, D. (2003) "What becomes an icon most", Harvard Business Review, 81(3), 43-49.

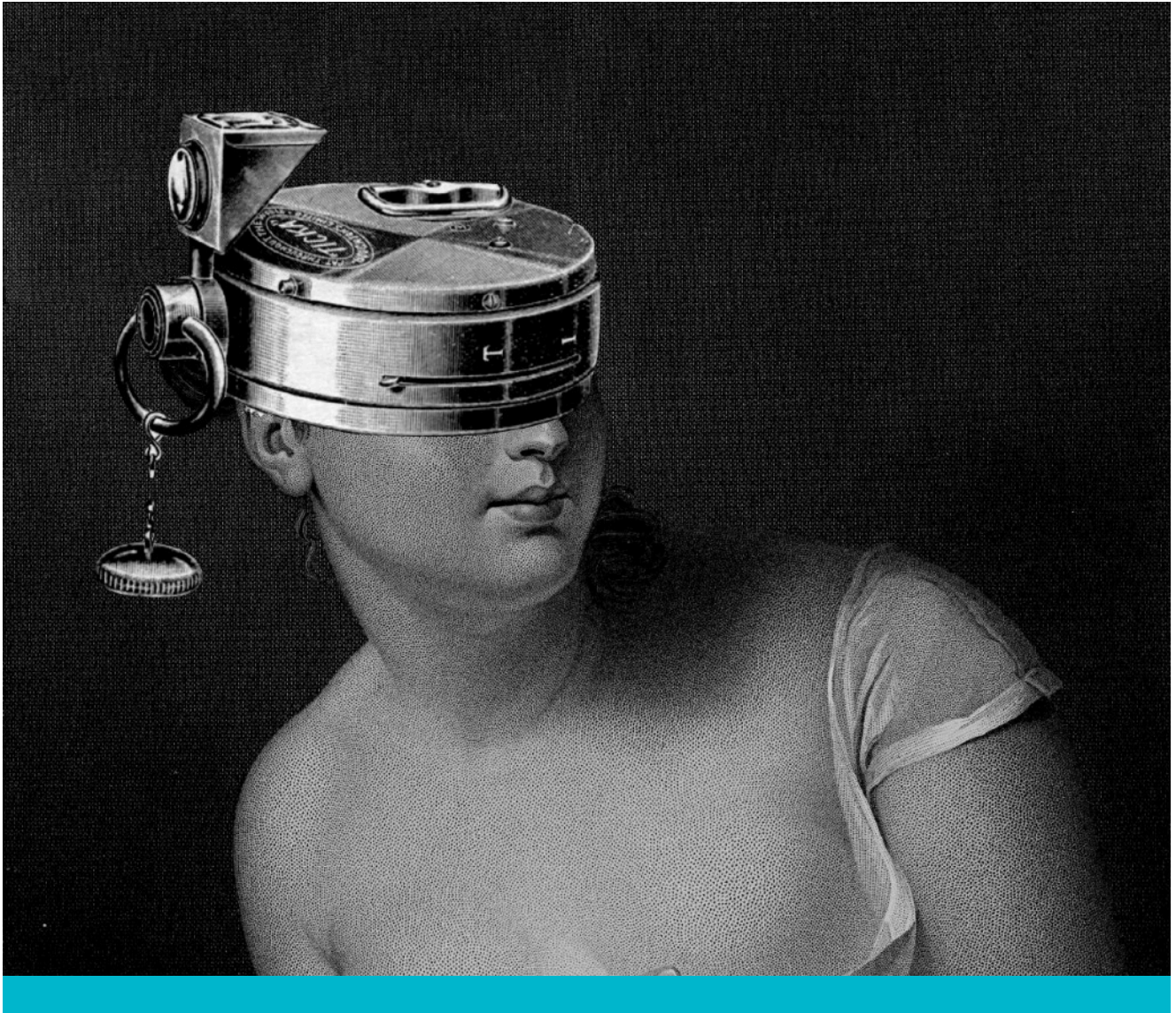
Few marketers, have any notion of how to turn their brands into icons, and that's because icons are built according to principles entirely different from those of conventional marketing. These brands win competitive battles not because they deliver distinctive benefits, trustworthy service, or innovative technologies (though they may provide all of these). Rather, they succeed because they forge a deep connection with the culture. In essence, they compete for culture share. While reading this paper think about brands that you believe have iconic status.

# SESSION 14 - 28th June 2024 - 3hrs

**Module Review**

**Group Assignment Performance and Presentation**

# GRADING



## **REQUIREMENT I: Significant Object Essay (30%)**

### **Submission Deadline: Friday 14th June 23:55**

You are required to write a short story (3 pages accompanied by a picture) about an object that belongs to you and that other people might consider insignificant. The purpose of your story is to use your narrative to transform this 'insignificant' object into a significant one by giving the reader access to the meaning that this object holds for you. I want you to reflect carefully on the object and what it means. In this way we begin to think more critically about the place of consumer objects in our lives.

This is a reflective and creative exercise that seeks to recreate emotions experienced in everyday life and to bring consumers, consumption and consumption contexts 'into form'. To this end, I want you to pay particular attention to the senses and to consider the elocutionary nature of your story - it should provide the reader with vicarious experience triggering their own stock of knowledge.

There is no need for academic references for this exercise.

Marks will be awarded on the basis of how the assignment meets the following criteria (all criteria carry equal marks):

- \* The ability to reveal the significance of an 'insignificant' object.
- \* Insights produced by the reflection about consumption, consumption objects, and ourselves.

### **Useful Reading:**

For examples of a similar exercise please see [significantobjects.com](http://significantobjects.com)

Holbrook, Morris (2005) "Customer Value and Autoethnography: Subjective Personal Introspection and the Meanings of a Photograph Collection", *Journal of Business Research*, 58(1), 45-61.

## **REQUIREMENT II: Experiential Essay (30%)**

### **Submission Deadline: Thursday 20th June 23:55**

You are required to write about a consumption experience (6 pages) with various components: a self description (1 page), a detailed description of a consumption experience (2 pages), a critical analysis and reflection on that experience and what it says about you (2 pages), and a reference list (1 page).

I do not want you to focus on purchase, but rather on the fantasies, feelings and fun involved in engaging in experiences. I am also interested here in you exploring the cultural factors (consumer culture) that influence your thirst for these experiences.

Marks will be awarded on the basis of how the assignment meets the following criteria (all criteria carry equal marks):

- \* The ability to produce thick description (cultural context and meaning) and verisimilitude (a story that feels real)
- \* Insights produced by the analysis and reflection on consumer experience.
- \* Demonstrable understanding of relevant theory

### **Useful Reading:**

Kole, S.K., 2010. Dance, representation, and politics of bodies: 'thick description' of Tahitian dance in Hawai'ian tourism industry. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 8(3): 183-205.

## **REQUIREMENT III: Group Performance & Presentation (20%) and Paper (20%)**

### **Submission Deadline: In-Class 28th June**

Working in groups (4 members per group) you are required to choose a movie with significant coverage of, or commentary on, Consumer Culture. In class, groups will 'perform' an excerpt from the movie (3-5 minutes) and deliver a 10-minute presentation (with a printout of all slides) offering a critical analysis of the movie with respect to consumption issues. This presentation should be accompanied by a 6-page critical paper (plus references).

The presentations may make use of Powerpoint and other presentation materials.

Performance and Presentation marks will be awarded on the basis of the following criteria (all criteria carry equal marks):

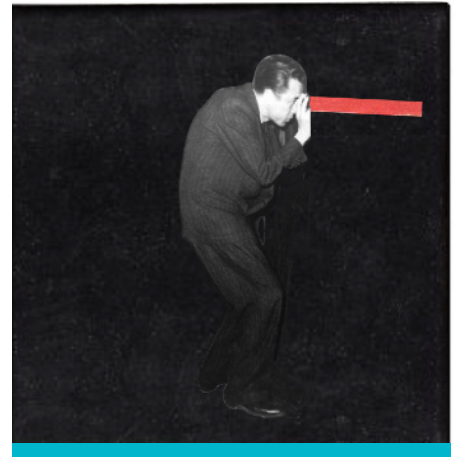
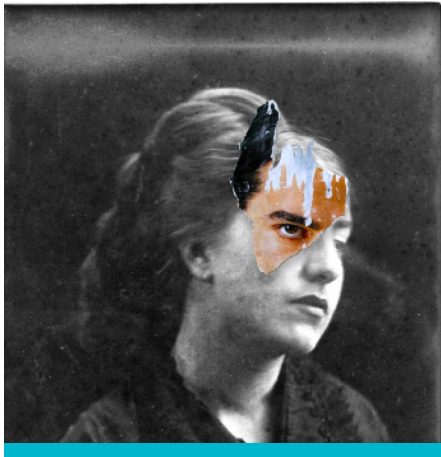
- \* Performance of the movie excerpt.
- \* Uniqueness and degree of polish of the presentation
- \* Critical engagement with key issues
- \* Degree of coherence and insight in both the paper and presentation narratives

Report marks will be awarded on the basis of the following criteria (all criteria carry equal marks):

- \* Planning (description of context and aims)
- \* Research (support from the literature)
- \* Communication
- \* Insight

<b>Conversion Scale</b>	<b>Final grade (official scale)</b>
90 - 100	5
80 - 89	4
70 - 79	3
60 - 69	2
50 - 59	1
0 - 49	0

# ECTS GUIDELINES



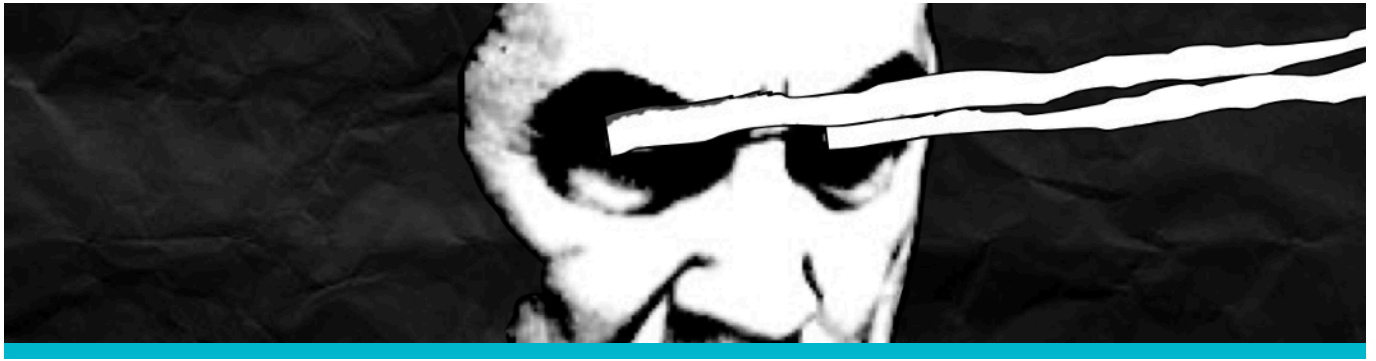
This course is a 6 ECTS unit course, following the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) guidelines of Aalto University School of Business. The number of hours the average student is expected to work in the course is 160 (including in-class and out-of-class work).

## ECTS Student Workload

	Number of Hours
Classroom Contact Hours	45
Out-of-class Hours:	
Work with course materials (e.g. Required Reading)	45
Individual research & writing	50
Team projects (meetings, research, preparation, etc.)	20
Sub-total of out-of-class hours	115
Total of all student workload hours	160



# ACADEMIC POLICY STATEMENTS



## **Codes of Conduct**

Academic excellence and high achievement levels are only possible in an environment where the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity are maintained. Students are expected to abide by the Aalto University Code of Academic Integrity, other relevant codes and regulations, as well as the canons of ethical conduct within the disciplines of business and management education.

In addition, the BScBA Program has strict exam regulations in force which must be followed in all test-taking situations.

## **Textbook Policy**

All required textbooks and other course materials are the responsibility of the student. It is the expectation of faculty that all students will have access to the textbooks and other reading material. If a student is not able to purchase his/her own copy of the textbook or other required reading materials, it is nonetheless the student's responsibility to find a way to complete the reading for the course.

## **Class Attendance and Participation**

Class attendance and participation are considered integral parts of teaching and learning at the BScBA program in Mikkeli. Therefore, regular class attendance is required of all students and attendance records are kept for each class. Students are also expected to be in class on time.

If the student participates in the final exam/assessment, it will be graded and counted towards the final grade.

The attendance policy of the BScBA program provides that:

- 1) **A maximum of three absences of any kind** is allowed for a 3-week, 6-credit course. Four or more absences will result in being dropped from the course.
- 2) Whenever taking an absence, **the student bears the risk of missing class**, and the consequences, which may include a lower participation grade, missing a graded activity, etc. It is up to the course instructor to decide whether or not a graded activity can be completed later.
- 3) **An absence on the first day of the course** will result in 5 points (on a 100-point scale) being deducted from the student's final raw score before converting it to the final grade. If a student is absent on the first day due to illness, and provides the Manager of Academic Operations with a medical certificate, the 5-point deduction will be waived. The Manager of Academic Operations will then inform the instructor of the waived deduction.
- 4) **A student getting to class after the session has started** will not be able to enter the classroom until the first break and will get an absence for the day.
- 5) It is expected that **students marked present for the day are in class the entire time**. Students leaving class early may be marked absent.
- 6) **The instructor may include class participation as a component of the grade**; up to 15% of the total points that can be earned toward the final grade.
- 7) **The instructor may identify up to three days of the course (in addition to the first day) as mandatory**, ie taking an absence on those days would have a direct impact on the course grade.

The instructor for the course will take attendance in classes. The decision to drop a student from a course will be made by the instructor, who will inform Mari Syväoja, Manager of Academic Operations: mari.syvaoja@aalto.fi.

#### **Addition to the attendance policy of the BScBA Program, Mikkeli Campus:**

- This addition concerns absences in addition to the normal maximum of three that would fall under a category called Medical and Family Emergency cases.
- Students who want to use this option to complete a course must fulfil these criteria:
  - The total absences of the student will exceed the normally allowed three absences due to a major medical problem or family emergency.
  - The student will be absent no more than 5 days; exceeding that number of days will result in dropping the course.

- Documentation or a detailed explanation concerning the entire period of the emergency (such as a medical certificate) is provided to the Manager of Academic Operations.
- The case-by-case solution will be coordinated by the Manager of Academic Operations, who will deal with the documentation and discuss with the instructor to find a pedagogical solution enabling the student to continue in the course. In case the MAO is on leave, the student should contact the other study office staff.
- The solution must not cause a significant increase in the instructor's workload. The grading elements for the course may be reviewed, and additional assignments may be arranged if feasible. However, a shifting of grading proportions may occur. The course grade might be affected due to the student missing some in-class activities.

# STUDY SKILLS



Many of the concepts and ideas that we will discuss in the module will be new to you. However, Consumer Culture requires you to do much more than learn new concepts and ideas. It will also be necessary for you to consider alternative ways of evaluating and understanding relevant issues and ideas. To help prepare you for the module a few details about the additional skills that you need to develop and practice are given below.

## **Reading Skills**

Reading academic articles is not easy, especially if you are new to the subject. The key to making your load lighter is to read with purpose, identify the contribution that each article makes and critically engage with it to build your understanding of your subject. Below are some tips that will hopefully make your task easier.

### **Read with a Purpose**

Most students read articles because they are on the reading list. This is one of the worst reasons to read. Instead, you should read an article because it will extend your understanding of the subject in a particular way. Identifying the particular reason for reading early is important. An article may contribute to your understanding of theory, method or claimed truths. In many cases, only one of these factors will be the one that leads the instructor to suggest the article. The rest may be of little consequence to you (but important to someone reading for a different purpose). The course outline, your existing understanding of marketing, other recommended readings, the title and abstract should help you identify the purpose.

### **Empowered Reading**

Once you have identified the purpose, you should feel empowered to read the article with that purpose in mind and to stop reading when you are prompted to rethink your ideas. You do not necessarily need to read all the article in depth. Instead, skim read to identify the parts that help with your purpose and your understanding of the context and then concentrate on the sections that add the most value to your understanding of the subject. You should also use your understanding of purpose, to select which articles you will read and in what order.

### **Critical Reading**

Critical reading requires engagement with the subject matter to understand it in the context of our existing knowledge. Does it support our existing way of thinking about the subject? Does it provide a useful example? Does it cause us to think differently about our subject? Does it require reconciliation with contradictory material? In this regard, critical reading should enable you to question received truths and begin to address the relationship between power and knowledge. An essential part of critical reading is to try to build a broad understanding of the subject area. This will allow you to 'slot in' new understandings more easily and means that you don't have to remember the details of each article, only the incremental contribution that they make to your overall understanding.

## **Open Mindedness**

It may surprise you to know that by the time many of us reach the end of our undergraduate education we have actually become quite closed minded and dogmatic about a few fundamental issues. Before we began studying for degrees, we were probably far more open-minded to new ways of thinking and understanding the world. We didn't mind challenging our assumptions and adopting different points of view. For this module, try to re-learn open mindedness and stand outside your accepted and taken for granted view of things.

## **Take Multiple Perspectives**

Debate in marketing is very rarely black and white or so clear cut that there is no room for different points of view. Therefore, look at an issue from many perspectives. Do not privilege the perspective of the academic or manager, but also consider the consumer's perspective.

## **Critical Skills**

A critical approach is vital to this module but this does not mean criticising as in verbally abusing people or telling them off, it means being critical as an art critic or literary critic is. It means not taking the evidence or material at face value but questioning it. You might consider:

- The motivation of the authors, academics or practitioners
- Evaluating the language used
- Appraising the structure of what is being said
- Evaluating the evidence on which the case is built and so on.

