

Zero Waste Communities
ENST 391.01B
Summer Session I, 2020
May 11-June 19

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Meeting times: M-Th, 1-2:50pm (via Zoom)

Office hours: By appointment

“There is no such thing as away. When you throw something away, it must go somewhere.”

-Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff*

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The environmental, social, and economic effects of solid waste have come under increased scrutiny in recent years, exacerbated by the ever-evolving challenges faced by the recycling industry. The concept of Zero Waste has emerged to challenge the presumption that waste is inevitable and pose alternatives to our current wasteful tendencies; thus presenting unique solutions to the issues associated with solid waste and recycling. This course is an exploration into the Zero Waste paradigm, grounding students with basic knowledge of solid waste management, as well as the history of Zero Waste and its current status in communities throughout the United States. Individual Zero Waste practices will be examined along with community-wide Zero Waste initiatives and policies, with particular emphasis on Zero Waste opportunities and planning in Missoula.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

This course has been designed to convey three main lessons:

1. **What:** Zero Waste is a **systemic approach** to *prevent* waste from being generated in the first place, and to manage residual materials sustainably.
2. **Why:** Waste harms people and planet at every stage of its existence (from extraction to disposal).
3. **How:** Waste is not inevitable – it can be designed out of our economic and political system through individual action, social organizing, industry accountability, and policy changes.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All course materials will be available on the Moodle site. Many of our discussions will draw upon ideas from the book listed below; **purchasing your own copy of the book is not required** but is recommended if you are interested in further reading on Zero Waste.

Connett, P. (2013). *The zero waste solution: Untrashing the planet one community at a time.*
White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing.

UM POLICIES

The policies quoted below can be found here:

[UM Catalog Policies and Procedures](#)

- **Attendance:** “Students are expected to attend all class meetings and complete all assignments for courses in which they are enrolled... Instructors may excuse brief and occasional absences for reasons of illness, injury, family emergency, religious observance, cultural or ceremonial events, or participation in a University sponsored activity... Instructors shall excuse absences for reasons of military service or mandatory public service.”
- **CCR/CR/NC and Incomplete Grades:** See the link above for information on the Credit/No Credit grade option and incompletes. Registration deadlines for Summer Session I can be viewed here: [UM Registrar summer 6 week registration deadlines](#)
- **Disability Services:** “Disability Services for Students ensures that programs of the University of Montana are as accessible and usable by students with disabilities as they are for any student.” If accommodations will help improve your academic success, please contact Disability Services at dss@umontana.edu or (406) 243-2243, or visit the DSS website: [UM Disability Services](#)
- **Plagiarism:** “Plagiarism is the representing of another's work as one's own. It is a particularly intolerable offense in the academic community and is strictly forbidden. Students who plagiarize may fail the course and may be remanded to Academic Court for possible suspension or expulsion.”
- **Student Conduct Code:** “The Student Conduct Code, embodying the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, human rights and responsible citizenship, governs all student conduct at The University of Montana-Missoula. Student enrollment presupposes a commitment to the principles and policies embodied in this Code,” available at [UM Student Conduct Code](#)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Participation** – You are expected to attend each class prepared to participate in class activities and discussion. This means you will have completed each day’s assignments and readings **prior to** class time. **Please check your University email regularly** to be aware of any changes that might be made to the Course Schedule below. **Attendance is mandatory** – unexcused absences will result in a loss of participation points for that day. Please let me know beforehand if you know you will be missing class, and I will work with you to figure out a make-up. More than 6 unexcused absences will result in a failing grade.
- **Waste Audit** – During the first unit in our course, you will perform a personal week-long waste audit. Each day for 7 days, keep track of the materials you dispose of (trash, recycling, AND compost!) with a photo journal. At the end of every day, write a short, 1-2 paragraph summary of your waste stream (this can be informal – use a bullet point list if you prefer). Answer the following questions in this daily journal: What did I waste today? Why did I dispose of these items? Where are they going to go now that I am done

with them? After completing the 7-day journal, pick the item/material that you wasted the most of or that you think has the biggest environmental impact, and reflect on it. Write 1-2 pages (double spaced) about the resources that were utilized in making this item and transporting it to you (in other words, what was the “before life,” or upstream impact, of this item?), the impact its disposal will have, and what a Zero Waste alternative to this item might be. **The photo journal, daily summaries, and final reflection will be due at the beginning of class on Thursday, May 21.**

- **Case Study** – To gain an understanding of Zero Waste communities in action, you will research and summarize the Zero Waste efforts of one community outside Missoula. Alternatively, you can research a community that is currently employing minimal or no Zero Waste efforts, and make recommendations of Zero Waste actions the community could realistically enact. In this ~5 page (double spaced) paper, you will describe the policies, programs, and other interventions being utilized to reduce this community’s waste, explain why these efforts are (or aren’t) beneficial to the community, and analyze whether these actions truly embody the Zero Waste ideal. Detailed instructions and a list of suggested communities will be provided to you in class. This paper is due **Thursday, June 4 at the beginning of class.**
- **Final Synthesis Project** – The final project will be an open-ended synthesis of the three main lessons we learned in class (what is Zero Waste, why is Zero Waste necessary, and how can we achieve Zero Waste; see “Key Takeaways” above). You will use your creative license to develop a project that demonstrates your understanding of these key takeaways, and any other points that stuck out to you from class. I will provide you with a list of options for this project, but you are welcome to come up with your own upon my approval. Further instructions will be provided in class. **The project will be due the last day of class, Thursday, June 18. You will share your project with classmates through an informal presentation on either June 17 or June 18.**

Late assignments: Unless you have made a prior agreement with me, I will take off five points for each day an assignment is late.

GRADING

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| • Participation | 250 points |
| • Waste Audit | 50 points |
| • Case Study | 50 points |
| • Final Synthesis Project | 50 points |

TOTAL POINTS	400
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COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change – be sure **to regularly check your University email** to keep up-to-date)

Week #	Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
1	5/11	Class Introduction	-
1	5/12	What is Zero Waste?	<i>The Zero Waste Solution</i> , Chapter 1
1	5/13	History of Zero Waste	<i>The Zero Waste Solution</i> , Chapter 5
1	5/14	Zero Waste Hierarchy	A Crash Course in GZW
2	5/18	The Circular Economy	TED Radio Hour podcast: Circular
2	5/19	Consumerism	“Please Do Not Turn Zero Waste into Another Consumer Lifestyle”
2	5/20	Zero Waste Lifestyle Movement	
2	5/21	Common Misconceptions	Waste Audit due
3	5/25	NO CLASS – Memorial Day	-
3	5/26	History of Wastefulness	<i>Gone Tomorrow</i> , Chapter 2
3	5/27	Life Cycle Impacts (1)	<i>Stuff</i> , “Prologue” “Shoes” & “Conclusion”
3	5/28	Life Cycle Impacts (2)	<i>The Story of Stuff</i> , pp. 206-217
4	6/1	Recycling	<i>The Story of Stuff</i> , pp. 228-234
4	6/2	Planned Obsolescence	Throughline podcast: Planned Obsolescence
4	6/3	Plastic	
4	6/4	Waste & Environmental Justice (1)	Case Study due
5	6/8	Waste & Environmental Justice (2)	<i>The Zero Waste Solution</i> , Chapter 16
5	6/9	Zero Waste Policies	<i>The Zero Waste Solution</i> , Chapter 2
5	6/10	Zero Waste in Missoula	
5	6/11	Zero Waste in Missoula	
6	6/15	Zero Waste in Missoula	
6	6/16	Joining the Zero Waste Movement	
6	6/17	Project Presentations	
6	6/18	Project Presentations	Final Synthesis Project due

A Note about COVID-19

I understand that this is an uncertain and challenging time for all of us, and that things may shift for individuals or our community as the course progresses. Your wellbeing is important to me, so I encourage you to communicate openly and honestly with me if anything arises or you need additional support or accommodations. Thank you for your patience with the transition to remote learning, and please let me know if there is any way I can ease the transition. Stay well and keep washing those hands!