

Technology in the Contemporary World: Cars and the Environment

Syllabus updated 16 January 2010.

Honors 353, section 1. George Mason University. Spring 2010

Robinson B 102. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3 - 4:15 pm.

Course Blackboard site: courses.gmu.edu

General advice: www.schrag.info/teaching

Professor Zachary M. Schrag

E-mail: zschrag@gmu.edu (please include "353" in subject header).

Office: Robinson B 357A. Tel. 703/594-1844. <http://www.schrag.info>

Office Hours: Mondays, 2-4 pm.

While I greatly enjoy meeting students individually, department meetings and other commitments occasionally force me to cancel scheduled office hours, so please let me know in advance if you are coming to office hours. If you would like to meet some other time, please send me an e-mail with two or three proposed times.

Course Description

This course will ask how people can travel to work without destroying the planet. It will explore policies that seek to provide alternatives to driving alone in a gasoline-powered car, including alternative fuels, traffic and road rules, city and regional planning, and mass transit. Readings and student research will cover policies in the United States and abroad.

Goals

In this course, students will:

- Reflect on the significance of the automobile in shaping the world we know today, including their own daily lives.
- Consider who has the power to shape the use of technology.
- Use history as a guide to the present and future.
- Practice critical reading of primary and secondary sources, including texts, images, music, and motion pictures.
- Practice research skills using sources in electronic databases, on paper, and in the world around us.
- Practice skills of writing, editing, and revision.

Administrative information

All assignments are governed by the George Mason University **honor code**, online at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>. You are expected to work independently and to acknowledge all sources, including assigned texts and materials found online.

Gordon Harvey's *Writing with Sources* is required reading and should answer most questions about **citation**, but ask me if you need clarification. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote. Any collaboration, such as consultation with the Writing Center, should also be acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course.

All work for this course must be original. You may not submit work based whole or in part on work you have done for credit in **other courses** without written permission of the instructor.

In case of **inclement weather**, please call the main switchboard at 703-993-1000 or consult the main web page at <http://www.gmu.edu/> to see if classes are cancelled. I expect to cancel class only when the university cancels all classes.

If you are a student with a **disability** and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

All students are expected to check their **gmu.edu e-mail** regularly and are responsible for information sent to their GMU addresses.

Please do not send **Microsoft Works** (.wps) attachments; I cannot open them. If you need to send me word-processing documents, save your files as .doc, .rtf, or .pdf formats.

Laptops may be used for notetaking and other course purposes, provided they do not become a distraction. If they do, permission to use them may be revoked for individual students or the class as a whole.

Please do not eat in the classroom, before or during class.

Readings

- Tom McCarthy. *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment*. Yale University Press (2009), Paperback. ISBN-10: 0300158483. ISBN-13: 9780300158489
- Daniel Sperling and Deborah Gordon. *Two Billion Cars: Driving Toward Sustainability*. Oxford University Press (2009). ISBN13: 9780195376647. ISBN10: 0195376641
- *TR News* (July-August 2009): *Pricing Road Use to Address Congestion*, 3-42. <http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews263.pdf>.
- Virginia HOT Lanes, <http://www.virginiahotlanes.com/>
- Gordon Harvey. *Writing With Sources: A Guide for Students*. Second edition. Hackett, 2008. ISBN13: 9780872209442
- Zachary M. Schrag, "Guidelines for History Students," <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/teaching.html>.

Collaboration

This course is designed to encourage the kind of collaboration that makes scholarship so much fun. While you are responsible for your own essays, you rely on each other to identify primary sources and to help you revise your work.

You must credit your classmates for the help that they give you, since a scholar should be proud of the use she has made of others' work. Citation need not be terribly formal, but I suggest the following form for citing sources discovered by your classmates:

- Lisa Rein, "Daring to Dream of Reducing Tysons Traffic," *Washington Post*, 10 December 2009 (posted by Joanna Student).

Online Components

Except for the peer-editing, this course is designed to be paperless; all assignments except for the essay drafts should be posted on Blackboard, <http://courses.gmu.edu>. You will also receive essay comments electronically.

Assignments

Please note that 105 points are available, in order to allow for illness, family emergencies, and other mishaps.

Attendance and Participation (15 percent)

Much of this course is discussion based, which means that each student's learning depends on the other students' being prepared, punctual, and active. The participation grade is designed to encourage you to help other students learn, and to prepare you for a lifetime of meetings.

The participation grade is based on your prompt arrival and active participation in discussions. The highest participation grades will go to students who animate class discussions by asking questions of their peers. The most valuable contributions often begin with the words, “I don’t understand.” Answering such questions, and questions posed by the instructor, is also helpful.

You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at 3 pm; chronic tardiness will lower your grade. To be counted as on time, you must sign in by 3 pm. To be counted present, you must sign the late attendance sheet. If you need to leave early, please speak to me before class. If you leave early without notifying me, you will be counted absent.

You are expected to attend class twice a week. To allow for family and medical emergencies, up to two weeks’ absence is excused. After that, absence for any reason will sharply lower your grade, until you have missed half the course. At that point, you will receive no credit for participation. Chronic absence or tardiness will also affect the grades on your written work.

At the end of each unit, you will submit a **participation memo**, explaining your contribution to the class discussions and your plans for future discussions.

Reading Responses (7 percent, 1 percent each)

On seven occasions during the course, you are assigned secondary readings and short responses. They are **due at 9 am on the day indicated**.

Questions will be posted on Blackboard. Choose one of the questions for that day’s reading and write a one-paragraph response, roughly 125 – 175 words. Write your response as if it were part of a longer essay. Begin with a clear topic sentence (See <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/topicsentences.html>) that makes an argument rather than just stating facts. Then support that argument with specific facts and quotations from the reading. Use parentheses to indicate page numbers. I suggest you compose your response in a word processor or text editor, then paste it into the discussion board.

On discussion days for which you submit a response, you should be prepared to be called on to describe your findings to the class.

Research Responses (10 percent, 2.5 percent each)

On four occasions, you are asked to complete small research assignments. The class will be divided into four groups, with each group responsible for specific assignments.

Specific assignments will be posted on Blackboard. All research assignments require the following steps:

1. Find a document or image according to the specific assignment instructions.
2. Write a one-paragraph analysis of the document or image following the examples at “Document Analysis” <<http://www.schrag.info/teaching/documentanalysis.html>> or “Image Analysis”
3. Post the document on the appropriate Blackboard discussion, along with the document as an attachment.

Museum Review (10 percent)

At some point before April 15, you should tour an automobile-related museum exhibit and write a three-paragraph response. You may tour “House of Cars: Innovation and the Parking Garage” at the National Building Museum, “America on the Move” at the National Museum of American History, or, with advance permission, another exhibit of your choice. While we will not tour a museum as a class, you are welcome to form your own groups to go.

The review is due on Blackboard on April 15. See Blackboard for specific instructions.

Essays (60 percent. 20 percent each)

On three occasions, you are assigned essays of roughly 1200 - 1500 words. Please keep in mind the instructions at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/index.html>, especially those on thesis statements and topic sentences.

The essays require the following steps:

1. Read the essay question, posted on Blackboard.
2. Assemble evidence from the assigned readings, from the documents you and your classmates have gathered, and from music and films played in class. Each essay should contain a mix of evidence from primary and secondary sources from the appropriate unit. Please cite specific facts and arguments from the assigned readings and **at least four primary sources gathered by your classmates**. Evidence from other units of the course may be helpful as well.
3. Develop a thesis statement that answers the question and can be supported by your evidence. See <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/thesistemplate.html> for a suggested form.
4. Write a rough draft of your essay. **Bring two copies to class.**
5. Share your rough draft with two of your classmates during the peer editing session. If you do not receive helpful comments, demand them.
6. Revise the draft according to the helpful comments you received. Submit the final version on Blackboard, and hand in the marked-up drafts in class. For the final paper, you need not submit the marked-up drafts.

For each essay, please write a brief **edit memo** explaining how you improved your paper based on the peer comments you received. Please include this as an appendix to your essay.

Peer Editing Instructions

Your job as a peer editor is not to correct spelling and minor errors, or to provide uncritical encouragement. Rather, it is to demand that your peers teach you something you did not know before.

Your comments should begin with one of the following forms, or a close approximation:

1. Your paper corrected a misconception I had. Before reading it, I thought _____. But you showed me . . .
2. Your paper answered a question I had. Before reading it, I could not understand why _____. But you showed me . . .
3. Your paper explained the significance of _____. Before reading it, I couldn't understand why _____ was important. But you showed me . . .
4. For the most part, this paper did not teach me anything that wasn't pretty obvious from listening to the lecture and reading the book. But I was struck by your comment that "_____." This comment [insert phrase 1, 2, or 3]. Could you expand this point into a thesis for the whole essay?

Extra Credit (1 percent each; up to 3 percent)

The goal of this assignment is to get you to think about the course in relation to your daily life. For each week of the course, you may write a two-paragraph journal entry. Up to three entries will count toward course credit, but you may only submit one per week. The first paragraph should describe something that happened to you or that you witnessed involving ground transportation. It can be something that just happened, a news story or article you saw, or a story from your past—but make it something you're willing to share with the class. The second paragraph should explain how that event or item illustrates or complicates the themes of the course.

Schedule

Week 1

- January 19 Introduction—Cars and Choices
- January 21 Workshop: reading primary sources.
Read: “How to Read a Primary Source,” “Document Analysis,” and “Image Analysis.” <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/>

Unit 1: Choosing a Problem

Week 2

- January 26 Movie: Industry Films
- January 28 Discussion. **Reading 1 due:** *Auto Mania*, 99-129, 148-75

Week 3

- February 2 Discussion. **Group 1: Research 1 due:** government documents
- February 4 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 1 due:** government documents

Week 4

- February 9 Discussion. **Reading 2 due:** *Auto Mania*, 176-230
- February 11 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 2 due:** historical newspapers

Week 5

- February 16 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 2 due:** historical newspapers
- February 18 Peer Editing. **Essay 1 draft due**

Unit 2: Choosing a Vehicle

Week 6

- February 23 Movie: *Who Killed the Electric Car?*
Essay 1 final due. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.
- February 25 Discussion. **Reading 3 due:** *Auto Mania* 130-147, 231-52

Week 7

- March 2 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 3 due:** advertisements
- March 4 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 3 due:** advertisements

SPRING BREAK

Week 8

- March 16 Discussion. **Reading 4 due:** *Two Billion Cars*, 1-45
- March 18 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 4 due:** advocacy websites

Week 9

- March 23 Discussion: **Reading 5 due:** *Two Billion Cars* 47-77, 151-178.
- March 25 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 4 due:** advocacy websites

Week 10

- March 30 Peer Editing. **Essay 2 draft due**

Unit 3: Choosing a Road

- April 1 Movie: *Contested Streets*
Essay 2 final due. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.
- Week 11*
- April 6 Discussion: **Reading 6 due:** *TR News* (July-August 2009): *Pricing Road Use to Address Congestion*, 3-42.
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews263.pdf>
- April 8 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 5 due:** foreign periodicals
- Week 12*
- April 13 Discussion: **Group 1: Research 5 due:** foreign periodicals
April 15 Discussion: Museums. **Museum review due.**
- Week 13*
- April 20 Discussion: **Reading 7 due:** Virginia HOT Lanes,
<http://www.virginiahotlanes.com/>
- April 22 Discussion: **Group 2: Research 6 due:** blogs
- Week 14*
- April 27 Discussion: **Group 3: Research 6 due:** blogs
April 29 Peer Editing. **Essay 3 draft due.**
- Monday, May 3 **Essay 3 final due on Blackboard. Edit memo due. Participation memo due.**