DIMENSIONS OF MATERIAL CULTURE
An Interdisciplinary, Team-Taught Course
University of Wisconsin-Madison

It's a material, a material, a material, a material world.
--Madonna

The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.
--Hannah Arendt

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course introduces the highly interdisciplinary field of material culture studies. It is intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in any professional endeavor that requires training in material culture, including careers in artistic performance, museums, galleries, historical societies, historic preservation organizations, and academic institutions. During the semester, students have varied opportunities to contemplate "things" (the material world) to which people give meaning and which, in turn, influence their lives. The course takes the perspective that what we make, see, inhabit, eat, acquire, cherish, and discard--all are important agents of communication and part of broad social and cultural contexts.

The class meets once each week. Sessions typically combine in some way (a) presentations from faculty members and other professionals on a phase of material culture related to their own work and (b) discussion of foundational readings in the field, readings assigned by visiting presenters, and students' individual research projects.

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FACULTY:
Professor Emerita Virginia Terry Boyd
Design Studies Department
245 Human Ecology
262-9983
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Office hours: Thursdays, noon-2:00 pm;
also by appointment

Professor Jean B. Lee
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Institute for Research in the Humanities
263-1837 or 263-1800
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Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-4:00 pm;
also by appointment
**COURSE READER:** A packet containing required readings is available at Bob's Copy Shop, 616 University Avenue. In addition, the packet is on reserve at the Kohler Library (Chazen Bldg.).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION:**

**Class Participation** (20% of course grade):
Students are expected to attend class regularly and to participate actively in discussions of assigned readings and in-class presentations. Absences are strongly discouraged, for each weekly class covers a great amount of information. If you must be absent for a valid reason, contact one of the professors in advance.

**Doing-Seeing-Writing Activities:** Each student will produce two kinds of assignments.

1. **(30%) A synopsis of designated assigned reading.** On the day each designated reading is assigned, bring to class a typewritten synopsis. In no more than 500 words for each designated reading, state the author(s)’ major argument (interpretation) and evaluate it. What does the reading tell you about material culture? Does it relate to other assignments and/or the lectures, and, if so, in what way(s)? You will receive further information about writing synopses during the first class meeting.

2. **(10%) Faculty and fellow students will alert the class to relevant outside lectures and exhibits scheduled during the semester. Attend at least three such events and write a synopsis of what you observed and learned.** Keep in mind the questions asked in the preceding paragraph. **No later than the last day of class,** turn in the reviews of outside lectures and exhibitions.

Through these assignments you will enhance your ability to analyze, succinctly summarize, and recall scholarly writings and will create a readily accessible compilation of class readings.

**Material Culture Case Study:**
In consultation with Professor Boyd or Professor Lee, each student will develop an independent research project related to her/his area of academic specialization or interest.

1. **No later than September 23,** consult with Professor Boyd or Lee about possible topics for your independent case study. For this you will need to schedule an appointment.

2. **Due October 21 at the start of class (10% of class grade):** Turn in a list of all the sources you have identified, examined, and found useful for your research project. For published items, give the complete bibliographic citation for each. For objects or collections of objects, cite the location of each. If you conduct an interview, name the person, location, date, and topic of the interview. Briefly state (a phrase or two will do) why each source appears useful for your topic.

3. **Due November 25 at the start of class (10%):** Turn in a virtual exhibition entry for
your object. Include a visual, caption, and 200-word entry. Submit it to the course Project Assistant on a disc or flash drive.

4. (a) Beginning on December 2 (20%): Graduate students will offer a 20-minute class presentation on their individual research projects. (Schedule to be arranged.) Graduate student papers due on the day of the class presentation (4,000-5,000 words).

(b) Due December 9 at the start of class (20%): Undergraduate papers due (2,000-3,000 words).

**Grading Policies:**
Each project is due on the date it is assigned. Work submitted late will carry a reduction in the grade.

Evaluation of the synopses will be as follows:

1 – We think that you can get more out of the reading, as well as write about it more clearly and meaningfully.

2 – A completely adequate synopsis. You are getting out of the assignment what you need. This score will be given most frequently.

3 – Considerably more content is abstracted and evaluated. Writing is advanced.

**Special Needs:**
Any student having special needs should make them known to the professors in the first two weeks of classes so that reasonable accommodation can be arranged.

**Religious Holidays:**
According to University policy, any student who expects to be absent from class work because of religious holidays must, within the first two weeks of class, notify the instructor(s) of the specific date(s) on which s/he will be absent. Students bear the responsibility for arranging make-up assignments. If necessary, reasonable limits on the total number of days claimed by any one student will be set.
NOTE: Access the MadCat library search engine at the UW-Madison Home page or "MyUW" (click on "Libraries)

Week 1  Sept. 2  Introduction to the course
Discussion of successful analysis and writing

Week 2  Sept. 9  Preview of the field of material culture
***Bring to class a favorite mug or other drinking vessel

Readings:

Week 3  Sept. 16  American ceramics as material culture
Guest: Prof. Ann Smart Martin (Art History)

Readings:

Week 4  Sept. 23  An archeologist’s use of material culture
Guest: Nicholas Cahill (Art History and Classics)

Readings:

Week 5  Sept. 30  Working with visual documents (maps and photographs)
Guest: Prof. Matthew Edney (Director, History of Cartography Project, UW Dept. of Geography)

Readings:
Week 6 Oct. 7 Expositions
Guests: Prof. Virginia T. Boyd (Design Studies) & B.A. Harrington (MFA and Art History)

Week 7 Oct. 14 A curator’s view of material culture
Guest: William Brewster (Curator, Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum)
Assignment: TBA

Week 8 Oct. 21 Artistry
Guests: Prof. Jennifer Angus (Design Studies)
Readings: Joan Fischer, "Insect Artistry" [interview of Jennifer Angus], Wisconsin Academy Review (fall 2003), 25-32.
Charlotte Perkins Stetson (aka Charlotte Perkins Gilman), The Yellow Wall-paper (Boston, 1899).

Week 9 Oct. 28 History, memory, and material culture
Guest: Prof. Jean B. Lee (History and the Institute for Research in the Humanities)

Week 10 Nov. 4 Cultural landscapes as material culture
Guest:
Week 11  Nov. 11  Textiles as material culture  
**Guest: Beverly Gordon (Design Studies)**


Week 12  Nov. 18  A folklorist looks at foodways  
**Guest: Prof. Janet Gilmore (Folklore and Landscape Architecture)**

***IN ADVANCE OF CLASS:*** Using the "Classlist" tab at the Learn@UW website for this course, email all class members and the professors a copy of a favorite Thanksgiving recipe.

Readings:

The only contemporary accounts of the first Thanksgiving in English America, written by Edward Winslow and William Bradford.  
**Online** at [http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm](http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm)

Week 13  Nov. 25  (1) Entry for virtual exhibition due, as per instructions to be given in advance  
(2) Research Day—class does not meet

Week 14  Dec. 2  Graduate student presentations

Week 15  Dec. 9  Virtual exhibition presentations