



COURSE OUTLINE

GEOG 491: Geographies of Waste



Waste disposal at Hartland landfill



Waste Pickers working at COOPCENT cooperative, Brasilia

Email: gutber@uvic.ca (Insert GEOG491 under subject)

Lectures: CLE A217 Tuesday 2:30pm-5:20pm

Office: DTB, Room B-312 **Office Hours:** Tuesday 11:30 to 12:30

Course Description

Waste has become one of the greatest challenges to civilization and a critical, highly complex and transversal topic, pervading everyday life in unprecedented ways. Studying waste allows us to draw connections to key societal issues ranging from environmental degradation and climate change to poverty and justice, policy, community development or the SDGs. Applying a Social Sciences lens to waste allows for cross examination of geographic, cultural, social, economic, political and environmental aspects and processes related to generation, discard, management and avoidance of waste. In this course we study significant differences and similarities in waste management among cities and regions throughout the globe. We examine the spatial, technical, and social aspects of garbage in a geographic context. International development perspectives are compared throughout the course. Waste issues due to environmental impacts of waste technologies, especially incineration and sanitary landfill will be examined. We will take a *project-based learning* approach to gain a better understanding of the challenges and solutions attached to waste and learn about the social significance of waste. Basic concepts such as waste systems, waste streams and waste regimes will be introduced and applied to a geographic lens. This course provides hands-on learning and is highly relevant to contentious urban planning and governance issues, to sustainability as well as livelihoods and climate change questions. Guest speakers from the field will contribute to the practical and theoretical significance of waste studies. This course is particularly relevant to students from Social Sciences, Environmental Studies and Engineering.

Course Objectives

The course aims at providing students with the theory and practical skills to examine different operations related to municipal solid waste management systems, touching on physical, financial, social, institutional and governance aspects in specific geographic contexts. For that we take a project-based learning approach. Students will develop some of the tools required to study waste governance and explore how research can inform policy and practice. A key objective is for students to develop critical thinking skills and to be able to conduct complex analysis. Students will contribute in small groups to the content and delivery of course topics and will work on a course project. The course should help develop key professional skills, such as developing a course project from scratch, which will include the communication of ideas, principles and theories.

Learning Outcomes

Course Objectives	Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria
Communicate effectively.	Produce written material.	Produce written material that effectively communicates complex issues. Correct use of spelling, punctuation, sentence and paragraph construction. Correct use of citations and reference material.
	Produce oral presentations.	Present your findings in an effective and engaging way
	Take part in class discussions	In class and online.
Critical thinking and Analysis.	Creatively analyze and interpret issue scenarios and propose solutions.	Be able to determine principal features of a situation. Analyze possible implications for each case study. Discuss the pros and cons of solutions.
Knowledge on waste management and waste related issues.	Familiarity with local, provincial, national and global scales and problem contexts.	Determine principal features of waste management and waste governance. Recognize and describe global and historical context for barriers and solutions. Propose individual and integrated solutions.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand and explain how different wastes are generated by various sectors, in a local as well as global context.
- Be able to describe and assess the components of a local waste management system (e.g., collection, transport, treatment, disposal and prevention).
- Discuss the financial, social, regulatory and environmental aspects of local waste management; and how local waste management is impacted by governance approaches.
- Justify the transition from linear waste management to a resource value approach, focused on social inclusion and circular economy.
- Understand the links between waste management and climate change, global environmental change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Contribute to the communication and education on waste related topics.

Course Overview

Week	Dates	LECTURE TOPICS
1	02.09.	No classes. Semester starts on 03.09.2025
2	09.09.	Introduction to the course and course work: Different scales and diverse perceptions and approaches to waste
3	16.09.	Waste governance. Theories, concepts and research methodologies (Urban Political Ecology, urban metabolism, waste regime, sustainable livelihoods approach, Participatory Research)
4	23.09. ^{1 2 3}	Local waste systems in the global South and the global North (e.g., collection, transport, treatment, disposal, prevention, policies)
5	30.09.	Waste pickers and waste workers (Social, environmental, economic, occupational health issues. Education and capacity building)
6	07.10.	Fieldtrip (mandatory)
7	14.10. ⁴	Electric and electronic waste Literature review due Oct. 14th
8	21.10.	Plastic waste including plastic packaging waste in different sectors (e.g. agriculture, construction), beauty waste, etc.
9	28.10. ⁵	Organic waste and biodegradability including food waste, garden waste, agricultural waste and alternative resource flows for organic waste.
10	4.11.	Textile waste and fast fashion. The problematics involved in producing and discarding textiles and global flows of textiles.
11	11.11.	Reading Break
12	18.11	Waste, the environment and climate change. Analysing the footprint of waste, the dissemination of plastic waste and impacts from different waste management technology and the greenhouse gas emissions of waste. Climate justice and global mobilization.
13	25.11.	Zero Waste, Repair, Reverse Logistics and Circular Economy. Alternatives to avoid the generation of waste and to revalue wasted resources.
14	02.12.	Student Conference Communication of research projects Course project due Dec. 12th

¹ Last day for 100% reduction of tuition fees (16.09.)

² Last day for adding courses (19.09.)

³ Last day for paying first term fees without penalty (30.09.)

⁴ Last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees (07.10.)

⁵ Last day for withdrawing from first term courses without penalty of failure (31.10.)

Course Readings

Required course readings are listed below and posted on Brightspace. It is highly recommended to read before coming to class.

Week	REQUIRED READINGS
2	<p>Different perceptions and perspectives of waste Moore, S. A. (2012). Garbage matters: Concepts in new geographies of waste. <i>Progress in Human Geography</i>, 36(6), 780–799. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512437077</p>
3	<p>Waste governance and theories, concepts and research methodologies Bell, L. (2019). Place, people and processes in waste theory: a global South critique. <i>Cultural Studies</i>, 33(1), 98-121.</p>
4	<p>Local waste systems Wilson, D. C., Rodic, L., Scheinberg, a., Velis, C. a., & Alabaster, G. (2012). Comparative analysis of solid waste management in 20 cities. <i>Waste Management & Research</i>, 30(3), 237–254. https://doi.org/10.1177/0734242X12437569 Kaza, S. et al. (2018). <i>What a waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050</i>. Urban Development Series Knowledge Papers.</p>
5	<p>Waste pickers and waste workers Dias, S. M. (2016). Waste pickers and cities. <i>Environment and Urbanization</i>, 28(2), 375–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247816657302</p>
6	<p>Fieldtrip City of Victoria (n. d.) Zero Waste Victoria.</p>
7	<p>Electric and Electronic waste Lepawsky, J. (2020). Sources and Streams of Electronic Waste. <i>One Earth</i>, 3(1), 13–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2020.07.001 Schulz, Y. (2015). Towards a New Waste Regime?. Critical Reflections on China’s Shifting Market for High-Tech Discards. <i>China Perspectives</i>, 2015(2015/3), 43-50. WHO (2021). Children and digital dumpsites. E-waste exposure and child health. <i>Report</i></p>
8	<p>Plastic waste Gutberlet, J. (2023). Global plastic pollution and informal waste pickers. <i>Cambridge Prisms: Plastics</i>, 1, E9. doi:10.1017/plc.2023.10 Karasik, R. et al. (2020) <i>20 Years of Government Responses to the Global Plastic Pollution Problem. The Plastics Policy Inventory</i>. Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions. <i>Report</i></p>
9	<p>Organic waste Fraser, C., & Parizeau, K. (2018). Waste management as foodwork: A feminist food studies approach to household food waste. <i>Canadian Food Studies / La Revue Canadienne Des Études Sur l'alimentation</i>, 5(1), 39–62. https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v5i1.186</p>
10	<p>Textile waste Stanescu, M.D. (2021). State of the art of post-consumer textile waste upcycling to reach the zero waste milestone. <i>Environ Sci Pollution Res</i>, 28, 14253–14270. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-021-12416-9 Boykoff, M., Chandler, P., Church, P., & Osnes, B. (2021). Examining climate change and sustainable/fast fashion in the 21st century: ‘Trash the Runway’. <i>Oxford Open Climate Change</i>, 1(1), kgab003.</p>
11	<p>Reading Break</p>

12	<p>Waste, the environment and climate change</p> <p>Kalina, M. (2020). Waste management in a more unequal world: Centring inequality in our waste and climate change discourse. <i>Local Environment</i>, 25(8), 612-618.</p> <p>Koop, S. H., & van Leeuwen, C. J. (2017). The challenges of water, waste and climate change in cities. <i>Environment, development and sustainability</i>, 19(2), 385-418.</p>
13	<p>Zero Waste, Repair and Circular Economy</p> <p>Hannon, J., & Zaman, A. U. (2018). <i>Exploring the Phenomenon of Zero Waste and Future Cities</i>. 1–26. https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci2030090</p>
14	<p>Student Conference</p> <p>Communication of research projects</p>

COURSE WORK AND EVALUATION

To truly grasp abstract concepts and theories, students must move beyond passive learning methods and need to actively engage and observe how these concepts play out in real-world scenarios. We will apply 'project-based learning' in this course and your course project will connect you to authentic problems or questions that require a deep understanding of the subject. This means that the student will have the opportunity to design, develop, and construct hands-on solutions to real-world problems and challenges, or to find answers to complex questions. You will see that all assignments are somehow connected and will help expand your knowledge and experience. All written assignments need to be handed in via **Brightspace**, with the basic cover page information and should use **APA formatting**.

Class structure

During the first half of our class I will provide thematic and theoretical course content, and we will discuss the readings assigned for that week. Students should come prepared with questions to discuss the assigned readings.

Following a short break, during the second half of the class, the students will lead a group presentation with one or more case studies on the weekly topic, covering different geographic contexts between the global North and the global South. A class discussion follows, focusing on linking the case studies with the theory.

Assignment I. Group Presentation & Discussion in Class (20%)

In Week 2 you will sign-up for one of the course topics offered between week 4 and week 13. The students that have signed up for the same day will prepare a group presentation (preferably small groups of 2 or maximum 3 students) with one or more case studies on the weekly topic, covering different geographic contexts between the global North and the global South. In that way your presentations will complement the theoretical content on the weekly topic provided by the lecture. Your focus should be on providing regional contexts for your case studies and describing and analysing your specific case in as much detail as possible (avoid too technical content). Your

presentation should be focused on contrasting global North with global South perspectives, always aiming to identify the specific contexts for each of the regions. Each group will have approximately 30 minutes (depending on group size) to present their cases. Your presentation must be **uploaded to Brightspace before your presentation**.

Assignment II. Literature review (20%)

The students will write a critical review of **one** of the provided references. **Maximum wordcount: 2000 words bibliography included + 300 words summary.**

Due date: **October 14th**. Upload to Brightspace.

Assignment III. Course Project (40%)

You will be developing a **hands-on, field-based or investigative research project** rooted in real-world systems, materials, and geographies.

Chose one of the following five topics, inspired by the concept “*Follow the Material Chain*”, where students trace the life of a material, process, or practice in the waste ecosystem. These research questions are designed to integrate **fieldwork, mapping, observation, policy analysis, secondary data collection and analysis/interpretation**.

Maximum wordcount: 3000 words, bibliography included.

Due date: **December 12th**. Upload the assignment to Brightspace.

Assignment IV. Communication of course project (10%)

In week 14 the students will share key findings from their projects. Detailed information on how much time each student will have available will be provided later in the course, since it depends on student numbers.

Assignment V. Participation with Active Engagement (10%)

Evaluation of your active and passive participation in class. You will be asked to participate in specific activities during the semester and provide your contribution online in a discussion forum. You will be marked based on the level and frequency of your engagement. It will not be the length of your comments but rather the sharpness of your reflection that will impress.

Attendance is mandatory (in case you must miss a class due to a justified cause, get in touch).

GRADING SYSTEM

Grade	Grade point value	Grade scale	Description
A+	9	90-100%	Exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. Normally achieved by a minority of students. These grades indicate a student who is self-initiating, exceeds expectation and has an insightful grasp of the subject matter.
A	8	85-89%	
A-	7	80-84%	
B+	6	77-79%	Very good, good and solid performance. Normally achieved by the largest number of students. These grades indicate a good grasp of the subject matter or excellent grasp in one area balanced with satisfactory grasp in the other area.
B	5	73-76%	
B-	4	70-72%	
C+	3	65-69%	Satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory. These grades indicate a satisfactory performance and knowledge of the subject matter.
C	2	60-64%	
D	1	50-59%	Marginal Performance. A student receiving this grade demonstrated a superficial grasp of the subject matter.
F	0	0-49%	Unsatisfactory performance. Wrote final examination and completed course requirements; no supplemental.
N	0	0-49%	Did not write examination or complete course requirements by the end of term or session; no supplemental.

GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT INFO

- Geography Department website: uvic.ca/socialsciences/geography/
- Undergraduate Advising: geogadvising@uvic.ca

POLICY ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS

We encourage you to stay on schedule as you work through your course material and assignments. To help you satisfy the course requirements, deadlines for each of the course assignments have been established to provide ample work time in which to complete the readings and undertake the activities and discussions. You should review all course requirements and due dates at the beginning of the course, compare these to your own schedule, and plan ahead accordingly. If you anticipate conflicts with your work schedule, please let the course instructor know immediately.

You are expected to work through the course materials and submit all assignments on time. All course participants are expected to complete all assignments and are graded on the same criteria. Evaluation rubric will be provided for each individual assignment type. In order to be fair to students who meet the deadlines, if you submit an assignment late you will lose marks. The late penalty is 10% per day.

POLICY ON ATTENDANCE

Our classes start on time. **As a sign of respect to the instructor and the rest of the class, late arrivals are discouraged, as are early departures.** Students are expected to do the assigned readings to be prepared to participate in the Thursday class discussions. No cell phone use allowed during class.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It is every student's responsibility to be aware of the university's policies on academic integrity, including policies on **cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized use of an editor, multiple submission, and aiding others to cheat**. **Policy on Academic Integrity:** web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html. If you have any questions or doubts, talk to me, your course instructor. For more information, see uvic.ca/learningandteaching/cac/index.php.

ACCESSIBILITY

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a documented disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) as soon as possible (uvic.ca/services/cal/). The CAL staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

POSITIVITY AND SAFETY

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing and protecting a positive and safe learning and working environments for all its members.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE AT UVIC

UVic takes sexualized violence seriously and has raised the bar for what is considered acceptable behaviour. We encourage students to learn more about how the university defines sexualized violence and its overall approach by visiting uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in the important prevention work taking place on campus, you can also reach out:
Where: Sexualized violence resource office in EQHR; Sedgewick C119. Phone: 250.721.8021
Email: svpcoordinator@uvic.ca; Web: uvic.ca/svp

COURSE EXPERIENCE SURVEY (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. The survey is accessed via MyPage and can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will remind you and provide you with more detailed information nearer the time but please be thinking about this important activity during the course.

DISCLAIMER:

The above schedule, policies, procedures, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

STUDENT WELLNESS

A note to remind you to take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this semester by eating well, exercising, getting enough sleep and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone.

Counselling Services - *Counselling Services can help you make the most of your university experience. They offer free professional, confidential, inclusive support to currently registered UVic students.* <https://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/>

Health Services - *University Health Services (UHS) provides a full-service primary health clinic for students, and coordinates healthy student and campus initiatives.* <https://www.uvic.ca/services/health/>

Centre for Accessible Learning - *The CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.* <https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>

Elders' Voices - *The Office of Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) has the privilege of assembling a group of Elders from local communities to guide students, staff, faculty and administration in Indigenous ways of knowing and being.* <https://www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/students/programming/elders/index.php>



XAXE TTE SĀÁ, ŁTE TEYEW. XAXE TTE SĀÁ, ŁTE SĀÁL - Our land is sacred. Our language is sacred. Artwork by David Underwood (2018).

We acknowledge with respect the Lkwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSANEC peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.