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### Course Abstract for UW Experimental College Garbology 101

The purpose of this class is to integrate and synthesize the practice of garbology into the lives of both UW students and the general public in Seattle. Seattle and the Pacific Northwest have a reputation for not only accepting, but also demanding progressive change. In light of the recent social changes that have been approved in the state of Washington, such as laws supporting physician assisted suicide and gay marriage, is it so unthinkable that WA residents cannot also support changes to their waste habits?

Our current waste system is founded upon and derives much of its power from the fact that it is a hidden and removed aspect of our daily lives. Everyday millions of people throw away billions of pounds of waste, the vast majority of which goes directly into a landfill. As the global population continues to increase we also continue to throw away more and more garbage, yet the land available for such practices does not grow with our waste: it only shrinks. The modern waste system, not only in the US but on a global scale, is unsustainable and only a temporary fix to a problem that has baffled humanity since the rise of dense urban populations.

Garbology is an essential aspect to this global discourse because it provides answers to important questions that influence decision-making and policies. It also has the potential to alter the mindset and outlook of people around the world. What we deem important and what will receive resources and proper attention are all crucial factors that garbology can help with. Garbology works to reveal truths behind current waste practices and brings transparency to the public about issues such as the actual footprint and costs of

recycling, to tracing the flow of plastic from the manufacturers to consumers, its entry into the waste system and its final resting place. This final location can range from a landfill, a recycling center, the beach, or a floating garbage patch in the Pacific Ocean. The idea is for garbology to bring such previously unknown information into the realm of known fact and assist in identifying solutions.

The greater Seattle community has a significant number of waste management resources at its disposal. One such opportunity is Cedar Grove. This is a local composting company that strives to reduce the amount of compostable waste that is mistakenly sent to the landfill everyday. A different avenue for waste reduction is the recently adopted citywide plastic bag ban and surcharge for paper bags. This requires residents to take a more active role in their daily habits by encouraging the adoption of new lifestyle choices that are better for the environment. The bag ban also works to highlight the very real impacts that a simple change to the consumption process can have. When these private and municipal factors are combined with resources from the UW community, such as the UW Garbology Project, the collective effort represents a wealth of knowledge and opportunity for concerned individuals.

One desired outcome of this course is to increase the dialogue and outreach between these different communities so that they may change their waste practices. Garbage represents a substantial and long lasting legacy. As archaeologists can attest, the material remains of human culture continue to endure long after the people themselves are gone. It is time that people become responsible for this legacy of waste and this course is a phenomenal first step to simultaneously foster education and community outreach at the same time.