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ARCHY 499  
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UW Experimental College Syllabus:  
“Garbology 101”: An Introduction to the Study of Garbage  
Commitment: 1-2 hours of class for 6 weeks, one field trip, and one extended weekend  
garbology sort.

## **Course Description**

Trash: Everybody makes it, but almost nobody thinks about it. Trash is hidden, obscure, and invisible. We all throw things away and the vast majority of it goes straight into the garbage. Why? Do we lack the technology to manage our waste in a more environmentally friendly way? What actually goes to the landfill? Where do our recyclable glass and plastic bottles really end up? Are we in trouble? These are just a few of the incredibly important questions that garbology can answer, and in some cases already has.

This class will function as an introduction to the sub-discipline of archaeology that is garbology. Garbology was first developed by archaeologist William Rathje in the early 1970s at the University of Arizona, but has greatly expanded since then. Students will learn about the history of garbology as well as certain aspects of archaeology that it employs. We will look at modern examples of garbology in action, including a focus on the UW Garbology Project and their results.

Students will also learn about the modern US waste stream in general, to include regular trash, compost, and recyclables. We will cover specific waste requirements in Seattle and develop a class project where students complete their own garbology study at home. We will look at the UW Garbology Project, have a guest lecturer from the UW Recycling center, and take a field trip to locally owned and operated Cedar Grove. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of the basic principles behind waste management, to see how garbology can identify problems in the system, and a few examples of ways to improve.

Garbology is not some obscure or useless pursuit; it is a fascinating, pertinent, and practical method that not only helps to alter larger waste strategies, but also provides insight into aspects of consumer behavior. The overall purpose of this course is to educate students about garbology, to help them bring the discipline into their own home, and hopefully change their own waste practices.

## **Projects, Assignments, and Readings**

*Projects:* All students will need to participate in a miniature garbology project at home. The purpose of this project is to highlight, reflect, and reinforce concepts learned from class and

vice versa. There is no substitution for hands on learning and this project will work to synthesize knowledge gained from the classroom and readings.

Specifics – Students will sort one day’s worth of trash each week. Students should not alter anything about their current waste practices. This means that if you already compost and recycle, then continue to do so and incorporate that into your sort. If students do not compost or recycle then, don’t start. The idea is to get a snapshot of your current waste practices. Towards the end of the course students will email their results to the instructor who will compile them. We will then review everyone’s findings in class.

Readings: Students will be required to read *Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair With Trash*, by Edward Humes. While he is not a garbologist or an archaeologist he provides both educational and entertaining insight into the world of garbage, recycling, and waste management.

-Humes, Edward. *Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash*. New York: Avery, 2012. Print.

Additional Resources:

-*Rubbish!: The Archaeology of Garbage*, by William Rathje is the collected result of over 15 years of practicing garbology. Archaeologist and garbologist Bill Rathje identifies waste disposal trends and misconceptions, and applies them to aspects of modern life. He also discusses the fact that there are solutions to modern waste problems.

-*The Garbology Kids* series by Sabbithry Persad is a collection of children’s books that work to inform kids about waste and waste management practices. This is a great resource for students with younger children who want to engage them on issues of waste and legacy.

-The UW Garbology Project [website](#). Here students will find information about the project as well as their results, findings, and student projects. They also have a page devoted to additional resources where students can find a variety of local and national garbology related material.

## **Schedule**

### **Week 1 – Intro to Garbology**

The first class will be dedicated to the introduction of garbology and its history. This week we will also go over student’s at-home garbology projects and identify any specific interests or areas of concern that students have and then work to incorporate them into the course material and discussions.

### **Week 2: Garbology and Archaeology**

This week we will delve into how garbology is a sub-discipline of archaeology. This will include a brief overview of key archaeological methods, themes, and concepts. Students will learn how to ask archaeologically themed questions and how these questions apply to the study of modern waste. The synthesis and intersect of these two practices are crucial to understanding how and why garbology is a legitimate scientifically based discipline, that produces reliable data, and whose conclusions can be relied upon.

**Week 3: Waste Management and the UW Garbology Project**

This week we will cover the basics of the modern waste stream including: trash, compost, and recycling. We will also have guests from the UW Recycling Center and the UW Garbology Project to share their work on the implementation of Solar Kiosks and how the UW Garbology Project helped to identify areas of improvement.

**Week 4: Garbology in Action – Getting Dirty**

The best week!! Learning should be hands on and this week we're getting our hands dirty. We will meet on Saturday to take part in our very own garbage sort. We will work with the UW Garbology Project and UW Recycling in order to utilize their expertise so that students get first hand experience of quality garbology in action. The date of this trash sort will be set during the first class to ensure maximum participation. While not mandatory, this is one of the most important aspects of class and students will miss out on a critical experience if they cannot attend. All efforts to attend should be made.

**Week 5: Field Trip**

This week we will take a field trip to local business Cedar Grove to see their composting facilities and learn about the unique work they do to reduce the volume of waste sent to landfills. Cedar Grove is a great example of a successful local business in action that works to better our community.

**Week 6: Looking at the Results**

This week we will analyze the data from our one garbage sort. While our limited data set will not be a completely accurate sample, we will compare it to UW Garbology's data, look for common themes, and extrapolate our findings.

**Week 7: Presenting Your Home Results**

This week students will present the results from their home garbology project. While this is designed to be informal students should be prepared to present their findings, talk about their personal experience, if it has changed their long-term waste habits and why or why not.

**Week 8: Looking to the Future, What's Next, and Wrapping Up**

The last week we will focus on the future of waste management, what is currently being done, and if we believe these options are better alternatives to our current system. Special attention will be paid to the cities of Portland, OR and Copenhagen, Denmark as examples of ways in which realistic policies can produce tangible change. Here we will wrap-up the course with additional resources for students and potential opportunities for students to stay involved and engaged.

**Garbology Happy Hour:**

For interested and eligible students, an informal happy hour group will be formed to continue the discussion of garbology and waste management after the class has ended. These are important issues and simply because our class is over does not mean that students should stop being involved.