

Reuse as a Sustainability Strategy Course Syllabus OLLI at Illinois Fall 2017
September 13- November 1, 2017; Wednesdays 9:00 -10:30 AM

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Course materials (including this syllabus, a list of suggested readings, and PDF versions of lecture slides) will be available on the course site,

<http://olli.illinois.edu/downloads/courses/2017%20Fall/Reuse%20as%20a%20Sustainability%20Strategy/>. If you miss a session, presentation slides will be posted AFTER the presentation date has passed. It may take 1-3 days after the scheduled session for those to be available online—thanks for your patience.

None of the readings are required, but are provided as a way for you to “dive more deeply” into the subject. Please note that as I finalize presentations, I may think of additional relevant readings that may be of interest. Those resources will be included at the end of the presentation in the PDF version of the slides, which will be posted to the course site as stated above. If you would like more information on any of the topics covered, or have questions that you think of after our session, please don’t hesitate to contact me directly. If you’re into social media, please feel free to connect to me on Twitter or LinkedIn; I share lots of resources via those networks, so it can be a great way to continue exploration of reuse and sustainability after the course is over!

Overview: When thinking about how to decrease their own "carbon footprint," or to improve the overall sustainability of our society, many people typically consider strategies involving reduction of consumption or resource use, or increased recycling and use of recycled materials. This course will focus on the often overlooked "third R," reuse, and why it is an important component of sustainability. Students will be introduced to sustainability, the waste management hierarchy, and the circular economy. The course will explore different forms of reuse (e.g. repair, food recovery, etc.), and their economic, environmental, and social impacts.

During our final session we’ll spend some time reflecting on the concepts covered throughout the course and students will brainstorm ideas for how they might apply those concepts to their own lives and/or communities—e.g. in day-to-day lifestyle choices, as part of their business or a volunteer effort, or in congregations or other groups in which they may participate. In other words, we’ll consider how you might take what you’ve learned and use it to be a force for positive change, or more broadly, how these concepts might be applied in the Champaign-Urbana area to make it a more sustainable place for all inhabitants.

Course Format: Each 90-minute session will include lecture/discussion with roughly the last 20-30 minutes dedicated to questions and in-depth discussion. Real world case studies and examples will be presented to illustrate reuse strategies. Students will be encouraged to share examples of which they are aware, as well as brainstorm how strategies discussed could be implemented in their community, neighborhood, organization, etc.

Course Outline

Week 1 (Sept. 13): Sustainability and Circularity. An introduction to sustainability, the waste management hierarchy, and the circular economy. We’ll explore the differences between reuse and recycling, the

environmental impacts of reuse (beyond solid waste reduction), as well as related concepts and terms, such as “zero waste,” “cradle to cradle,” “biomimicry,” etc.

Week 2 (Sept. 20): Design Paradigms: Durability vs. Disposability. An exploration of the origins of planned obsolescence, as well as related concepts like technological and perceived obsolescence, and what it all means in terms of the way we interact with products, both from the consumer and designer perspectives. We’ll look at examples of how some products are being designed with reuse and materials reclamation in mind.

Week 3 (Sept. 27): Repair is Noble. This tag line is used by the repair-oriented company iFixit to convey how repair is tied to values such as freedom, respect, and conservation. We’ll discuss the extension of the product life cycle through repair, and how that not only reduces solid waste generation, but also consumption of “embodied” resources. Case studies of projects tied to fostering repair will illustrate economic and social benefits through community building and making technology accessible to more people. The “Right to Repair” movement will be outlined, including relevant legislation (proposed or on the books) in various states, including IL. Related concepts, such as refurbishment and remanufacturing, will be defined.

Week 4 (Oct. 4): Feeding People, Not Landfills. An exploration of food recovery as an important strategy to fight food waste as well as hunger and poverty. The magnitude of food waste both nationally and globally will be conveyed. Opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, relevant policy, and challenges related to infrastructure and logistics will be discussed.

Week 5 (Oct.11): Secondhand Solutions. We’ll examine enterprises and organizations that contribute to our economy and culture by making commodities out of reused and reclaimed goods. Materials for the Arts, thrift stores, and reclaimed building and home décor warehouses will be presented as familiar examples, along with virtual examples, and tools for connecting individuals for the purposes of exchanging or sharing goods and surplus.

Week 6 (Oct.18): Finding Your Repurpose. An analysis of repurposing—reusing or redeploying products or objects with one original use value for an alternative use value. The “beneficial reuse” of buildings, products, vehicles, and materials will be examined, along with the reuse art movement.

Week 7 (Oct. 25): Repackaged: Packaging with Reuse in Mind. A survey of packaging waste issues and impacts along with opportunities for change through creative design. Examples of retailers, restaurants, and manufacturers employing reusable packaging strategies will be highlighted.

Week 8 (Nov. 1): Full Circle: Summary and Applications Brainstorming. A review of points about environmental, economic, and social impacts of reuse which were touched upon throughout the course, including potential negative impacts as well as positive ones. We’ll delve into ideas for how the strategies discussed are and might be applied in our community, organizations, businesses, policies, personal lives, etc. How might you reuse the information and inspiration gleaned from this course to be a force for positive change?