

ANTH X SOCI 2912 Qualitative Research Methods
Project Descriptions (Fall 2015)
Guest Principal Investigators or PIs/Clients

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Individuals, Institutions and the University Archives as Resource

Exploring Consumer Culture: How do People Use Consumption to Express Identity?

The Zeitgeist Movement: An Investigation of its Origins, Ideology and Implications

Individuals, Institutions and the University Archives as Resource *(PI/Client Alan Delozier, University Archivist/Special Collections Librarian, University Library)*

Project abstract. Living your own student experience is a work in progress, but what about others who have followed this path? Our goal is to provide the student with exposure to the historical and sociocultural ties to other individuals like themselves, or someone from a totally different background who attended or worked at the school at some point in the time. The historical and recent present of Seton Hall University and the varied aspect(s) of school life---people, culture, economics, religious themes, philosophy, other social factors and circumstances---can help to build a better understanding of past experiences which have shaped the present day. Research selections can be shaped by preference by focusing on individuals---such as tracing a former student, administrator, professor, or possibly a current student who is a class behind or ahead of you---or by looking at programs of study, departments or schools. By utilizing the University Archives a particular project can be developed that includes primary source documentation, broader resources, potential connections to oral history, and personalizing a project in line with the goals of learning associated with a wide-range of information tools.

Project needs. The study seeks the assistance of a student-led research teams to conceptualize a research strategy and identify appropriate methods that may be used to address the following questions:

- From the perspective of individuals. Tracing the student life on campus during their time at Seton Hall and the factors that helped shape them intellectually, socially, culturally, etc. (if a family member attended this is a bonus). (Example, John Doe, 1964. Looking at life on campus, student activities, popular music, films, political activity, life in South Orange, tracing where they came from, information about their hometown, schools attended, if still alive maybe interview the person, their classmates, others, etc.)
- From the perspective of academic disciplines or departments. Tracing how programs/departments/schools developed, the people involved with the founding, development and transformation of these, exploring the range of thought and teaching within a particular area and how these have helped to shape your own interests in a particular field or subject area.

Note: There are various resources/starting points such as general histories of Seton Hall, specific publications (The Setonian, Yearbooks, General Catalogues, Student Handbooks, etc.), primary source documents (Letters, Register Books, Journals, etc.), databases, books, etc. This is our starting point, but from here we can explore your interests as well as the methods and strategies you wish to use.

Exploring Consumer Culture: How do People Use Consumption to Express Identity? *(PI/Client Michael Taylor, Associate Professor of Political Science & Director, Environmental Studies Program)*

Project Abstract. I have a broad and general interest in understanding the relationship people have with the goods and services that they purchase. To this end, I have lots of questions and very few answers. These questions cluster around a few key ideas: In what ways is consumption a social activity? Do we construct our identities through the products or services we purchase or use them to signal status or membership in a community? If we argue that we live within a consumer culture, how is it defined? What are its key features and who belongs to this culture? In this exploratory study, I am especially interested in how the concept of consumerism and/or consumer culture may be better understood using innovative ethnographic methods focusing on the internet and how social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook may be used to delineate the meanings and processes in how people use consumption to express identity.

Project needs. The study seeks the assistance of a student-led research team to conceptualize a research strategy and identify appropriate methods that may be used to address the following questions:

- How do we conceptualize consumerism and/or consumer culture and begin to describe its members?
- Does consumerism/consumer culture exist across demographic characteristics such as wealth and age?
- Does the emergence of social networking and digital identity promote consumerism and/or consumer culture? How do we describe or measure these effects?

The Zeitgeist Movement: An Investigation of its Origins, Ideology and Implications (PI/Client Mark Horowitz, Associate Professor of Sociology & Director, Social & Behavioral Studies Program)

Emerging in 2008, “The Zeitgeist Movement” (TSM) describes itself as “a global sustainability advocacy group currently working in over 1000 Regional Chapters across 70 countries” (<http://www.thezeitgeistmovement.com/mission-statement>). Viewing the monetary system as unsustainable and destructive of the natural world, TSM advocates a scientific approach to problem-solving and a systemic transformation of the economy toward automated labor, abundance, and shared resources. In light of widely-viewed documentary films by the movement’s presumed founder – Peter Joseph -- TSM has been met with sharp criticism for its alleged apocalyptic, cultish and conspiratorial tendencies. Yet despite tens of millions of internet viewings – and widespread discussion in blogs and popular media – the movement has garnered virtually no serious academic examination. This preliminary study seeks to address that gap by exploring the ideology, activities, and social composition of the movement.

The study seeks the assistance of a student-led research team to conceptualize a research strategy and identify appropriate methods that may be used to address the following questions:

- What is the shared ideology or belief system of members of TSM? Is the movement unified in its beliefs or are members divided over basic questions of vision and strategy?
- What is the social composition of the membership? What class, race, gender or other background characteristics are associated with membership?
- What activities do members of the organization engage in? How significant is participation in the movement to members’ life goals or personal identities?

How might the emergence of the movement be explained? What psychological, social-psychological or social forces may account for participation?