

# SOAN 350 Global Political Economy: Social and Cultural Perspectives

Linfield College  
Fall 2018

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**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 10-12, 1-3; Wednesdays 2-5; Thursdays 1-3; or by appointment. Please take advantage of my availability during these times. Also please respect these hours, since at other hours I am busy with research, class preparation, committee meetings and departmental matters.

**Course meets:** MW 11:00-12:40 in Walker 130. Longer class sessions (100 mins.) give us time to develop discussions and really engage these ideas. Be sure to have made space for the **required all-day field trip** to the Port of Portland – exact time/date TBA, but likely on Friday, 9 November.

**Course Description:** SOAN 350 Global Political Economy: Social and Cultural Perspectives (4 credits) deals chiefly with understanding the social history of and major socio-cultural processes involved in the origins, development, and future course of the modern world system, and how those forces play out in the everyday lives of ordinary people in various parts of the world.

This is an ambitious course, with lots of reading, organized in a seminar format. This year I'm reframing the course somewhat to tie to our PLACE "Revolutions" theme. It's important to take at least some of our time this fall to step back and understand the origin of "recent" political economic issues (e.g. "globalization") in the socio-political processes generating complexity. These long precede capitalism, having been set in motion as humanity moved from food foraging to settled ways of life and attendant population growth – the "**Neolithic or Agricultural Revolution.**" Social complexity took another huge inflection with the fossil-fueled machine-based "**Industrial Revolution,**" coincident with but not the same as "capitalism," and this current political economy is powerfully driven by the false distinction between "modern" and "traditional" cultures. We'll need the semester to deconstruct these weighty concepts and get our bearings to understand the unsustainable globalization of late modernity that we're now in, presaging a third major revolution in human history that seems to already be underway – what we might call the "**Sustainability Revolution.**"

I developed and titled the seminar this way for four basic reasons:

- first and foremost, to indicate that in this course I want us to focus on how central cultural and social processes are to the operation of our political and economic systems (the latter are not discrete systems, as we're often taught);
- second, to understand the challenge all this poses to the social sciences to develop models robust enough to make sense of processes at this scale (which in turn calls for recapturing the vision of a unified social science to which classical political economy aspired);
- third, to point toward the nature and scale of the systems and problems with which humanity is now unevenly embroiled ("globalization", the "Anthropocene"); and
- fourth, to point to central concerns of sociology and anthropology – how do these large-scale processes play out on the ground in the everyday experience of ordinary people, since everyone's experience of all these large processes like globalization is, finally, "local"?

We'll quickly learn that the trends we've recently named "globalization" have been long in the making. While there has indeed been a quickening of these processes in the post-WWII period, particularly since the 1970s, what are the origins of "globalization" and the historical geography of its spread? What is the nature of this post-WWII Bretton Woods global order (now seemingly ending with the rise of nationalist/protectionist regimes), in which a set of "free trade"-related policies has been pursued by dominant political regimes around the world? Large, complex societies like ours require substantial order, so more conceptually we need to interrogate "power" and how is it exercised in late modernity. What can we tell about the effects of globalization and what are we to make of them?

Turning to more immediate issues for you as young adults soon to leave college – debt and the nature of career options. Debt was a huge issue in the wake of the 2008 financial meltdown, and the accumulation of private, government and corporate debt in recent decades is of enormous concern. Along with this – why are so many career options deadening and often meaningless, even if remunerative?

Such considerations are all the more relevant now as looming energy and resource shortages threaten/promise to undo much if not most of what we have come to associate with globalization – especially "growth." (This points toward the inevitability of the third Sustainability Revolution.) Volatility in oil prices is wreaking havoc on the political economies of both producing and consuming countries. More broadly, a growing number of indicators suggest that serious problems lie ahead for maintaining human population; studies have estimated that without our current massive fossil fuel inputs, the carrying capacity for earth is something like 2 billion humans and for the United States roughly 2/3 the current population, or about 200 million. Another issue: the US has become heavily reliant on cheap labor in other countries for the production of even many basic necessities; we now import huge quantities of things from China, from Christmas ornaments to toilet seats. What have been the effects on China and the US of this new division of labor? What about the rapid push toward robotic assembly and even service industries? What have been the effects of the spread of western diets and consumption standards on other societies, especially the emerging BRIC countries? On a cultural level, to what extent can we agree with Marshall Sahlins' recent claim that far from being a uniform process of westernization, flattening out cultural differences, people's actual experience with globalization around the world is to "indigenize" or domesticate it into surprisingly familiar, often homegrown cultural patterns?

Our vantage point on these complex, linked questions is primarily that of anthropology and sociology, and within that the linked subfields of economic anthropology and economic sociology. Economic anthropologists converge on such issues from roughly three different angles, discussed thoughtfully by Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett, depending on whether one sees human beings as primarily social, moral or self-interested beings. They argue that different assumptions about human nature have led to diverging and often mutually hostile models of 'the (political) economy.' Our work in this seminar lies at the intersection of these three central traditions in the social sciences, and it focuses directly on what I consider to be the central task of the social sciences generally and anthropology particularly (my point #4 above): to understand how large-scale processes (in our case, global capitalism) play out on the ground in the everyday lives of ordinary people. What motivates people to the political and economic behavior they demonstrate? Everywhere, everyday, human beings are engaged in forms of economic behavior ("working," making means/ends choices, producing, exchanging (buying and selling), consuming, etc.) in industrial and non-industrial, capitalist and non-capitalist societies. Some of this economic activity is "mainstream", directly affected by government policies, but much of it is "informal" (i.e., not state-regulated).

Since people are never simply one-dimensional "workers" or "voters" or "producers" or "consumers," anthropologists and sociologists always attempt to understand the "economic" or "political" activities by locating them in the wider social and cultural contexts in which they occur. For example, many businesses right in our own communities depend for their economic survival on seasonal consumer

purchases stimulated by reciprocal gift-giving obligations during the holiday we call Christmas. Without such religiously motivated social obligations, or status competition, consumption of X-boxes, camcorders and big screen TVs would be much lower. Economic anthropologists also make sense of these similarities and differences in economic behavior by relating them to their historical position within the experience of European expansion over the planet and the joint construction of the capitalist-dominated modern world system. We will carefully examine several specific small-scale socioeconomic systems as well as compare some aspects of economic systems of different societies around the world.

Such “economic” behavior in turn exists in political fields of varying strength and scale. The state is not simply an appendage of the economy (whatever that is). Governmental policies directly affect economic behavior (think of taxation, conscription, mandatory public education, regulation of behavior at all levels, judicial and legal frameworks), and the state can marshal armies, technologies, surveillance and force through both legitimate and covert means. Political activity is in turn affected by the interests of social class-located actors and various interest groups linked to them.

So we need both a global and local, “stereo” view of such complex processes and connections. While such topics may seem rather distant, abstract, and/or scarcely pertinent to your lives as young North Americans living in a rather provincial region of the dominant social formation in the modern world system, in fact study of distant as well as nearby small-scale and local economic activity yields enormous insights into both the nature of our lives here as well as the nature of the modern world system we all share. Everywhere people living in formerly autonomous small-scale societies are being incorporated in a variety of ways into global economic processes, and their behavior increasingly affects us as much as ours affects them. Yet we now are coming to understand that these processes of integration are likely reaching their apogee, and that with fossil fuel depletion humanity is poised to relocalize, perhaps rather quickly. Anthropology and sociology provide a unique, grounded perspective on the nature of this rapidly evolving, purportedly “post-modern,” digital world we all inhabit.

**Course Goals:** From this course you will:

- better appreciate global interconnectedness, the degree to which our lives are much more tightly connected politically, economically and culturally with other peoples than most of us realize.
- develop historical-mindedness as we better understand the nature and origins of looming, converging problems facing humanity and the modern world system.
- understand the wider dynamics which shape decisions you make as consumer and producer.
- develop habits of mind and writing and speaking skills commensurate with your upper division standing at a liberal arts college.

**Linfield Curriculum:** This course satisfies the Individuals, Systems and Societies (IS) or Global Pluralisms (GP) portions of the Linfield Curriculum (<http://www.linfield.edu/catalog/reqs/linfield-curriculum.html>). There are obvious projects in which you will likely best develop these skills and aptitudes; keep in mind, however, that the thoughtful linking of your work in this seminar with these LC learning goals is finally your task. In order to earn either IS or GP for this course, you must submit relevant exemplars of your work to Taskstream by the last day of finals week.

**IS Learning Goals:** (the first and one of the other goals)

1. Understand individual, systemic, and/or social processes. Examination of interconnections among cultural, political, social, economic and other processes using the holistic, synthetic perspective of sociology/anthropology.
2. Analyze individuals, systems, and/or societies through multiple frames of reference. Anthropology’s macro-micro, stereoscopic approach to seeing how large-scale processes play out on the ground in the everyday lives of ordinary people is central to this course.

3. Think critically about the ways that society affects individual behavior and/or individual behavior affects society. Individual/societal relations examined thoroughly through written and oral analysis and presentations on ethnographic material.

4. Articulate how key theoretical principles can be used to explain individual and social processes, inform public policy and/or develop practical approaches to human problems across local, regional, and/or global contexts. Multiple opportunities to develop and document this skill.

**GP Learning Goals:** (one of these goals)

Develop an understanding of a people outside the US from a disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspective. Anthropology is at its core global and cross-cultural in perspective, and we will be examining particular cultures in some depth.

From one or more disciplinary perspectives, articulate and analyze the power relations (e.g., imperialism, colonialism, political or cultural hegemony, or marginalization) between two or more nations or groups of people. Examination of such power relations is a key thread running through the course.

Examine the impact of global interdependence on the lives of individuals. Focus on cultural continuity of people living in small scale societies in the face of increasing globalization and attendant political, economic and cultural processes.

What you get out of any course depends a great deal on what you put into it. This is especially true of this course, which demands intellectual responsibility and accountability, as well as imagination. Since enrollment in this writing intensive course is typically small, I plan to run the course in a seminar format, with some lecture/discussion. The emphasis will be on discussion of readings, and therefore demands your active participation. I expect, of course, that you will abide by rules of academic performance, such as no plagiarism.

**Prerequisites:** SOCL 101 (for Sociology majors), ANTH 111 (for Anthropology majors), POLS 210 (for Political Science or International Relations majors), or ECON 210 (for Economics or IR majors). If you're deficient in these respective areas, please see me as soon as possible.

**Texts:** This is a reading-intensive course, so plan accordingly. There are three books and a number of other selections on our course Blackboard website that we'll be reading this semester:

Robbins, Richard H. 2019 *Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Pearson.

Graeber, David 2018 *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

Wilk, Richard & Lisa Cliggett 2007 *Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

**Grading:** Participation in class is essential to the learning process, especially given our seminar format. Engage yourself with the class and the material, beginning now. Assume responsibility for your learning. Your grade (I use letter grades, A-F) for the course will be based on the following:

Precis on 6 readings (@ 5%)	30%
Active participation in class discussion	35%
Analysis of a scholarly lecture	5%
Term paper	<u>30%</u>
	100%

There are no conventional exams in this course. Consequently, as you can see, the bulk of your grade for this course will be based on how well you participate in seminar discussions, how comprehensive, incisive and succinct your précis of readings are, and the quality of your term paper.

**1) Précis on 6 readings (30%).** There are about 45 readings in all (chapters of our two books and reserve material), all but two of which take place after the first week. **Starting the week of 10 September,** everyone will prepare précis on 6 of these readings – only one/week, submitted through Blackboard by no later than 10 p.m. the night before seminar. These précis should be no more than one page in length and should include at least one discussion question and a summary of your critical thoughts and responses to the reading. Two of your 6 précis must come from each of the two course books. Other possible topics include (but are not limited to) connections you make between that week’s readings and other readings from this course or materials from other courses, questions raised by the readings about which you’d like to know more, and possible alternative explanations / interpretations / conclusions to those offered by the author(s). The best précis identify themes and critically engage the assigned readings. **These précis will be used for everyone to prepare for discussion,** so it’s a huge disservice to your seminar mates and me to post these late. Late précis will be accepted, but will receive at most 50% credit. (See handout, and my evaluation rubric, on Blackboard.)

**2) Active participation (35%).** I expect active participation from everyone in **all** seminar meetings and on the field trip (TBA). Participation requires attendance (which is mandatory), careful reading of all materials assigned, regular, active participation in discussions, and being prepared to talk about your term paper related work.

**3) Analysis of a scholarly lecture (5%).** You will attend a scholarly lecture either on campus, at a sister institution in the region, or perhaps an online lecture, and analyze it through the lens of course concepts. This 3-4 page project is **due no later than Wednesday, 28 November.** (See handout on Blackboard.)

**4) Term paper (30%).** A central part of your work in this seminar is your term paper. My preference is that you identify some globally traded commodity and trace its life cycle, carefully describing human activity, organization and culture as thickly as possible at each step of the commodity chain, from production through distribution, exchange and consumption, and clearly identifying relevant political economic and cultural contexts at each of these steps. Wolf Chapter 11 will be useful. You must look at your commodity in specific ethnographic settings as much as possible; e.g., if you were to choose “natural gas,” you’d want to look at NG production and processing in, say, Kuwait or Russia, etc., not just delve into macroeconomic statistics (useful as those are) on NG production in general. There should be some participant observation with or interviewing of people who are directly engaged with this commodity at a point in its life cycle, to the extent possible. Trace your commodity as well through the three revolutions, paying particular attention to what might happen with this commodity in a post-fossil fueled world. I will meet with each of you early on to help focus.

Note due dates for the various steps in writing your term paper:

24 September, Monday	<b>Initial term paper <u>topic</u> statement due</b>
10 October, Wednesday	<b>Final term paper <u>topic</u> statement due</b>
12 November, Monday	<b>Annotated term paper bibliography due</b>
28 November, Wednesday	<b>Rough draft due</b>
12 Dec, Wednesday	<b>Term paper due by 17:00, with ALL previous materials</b>

### **Course policies**

**Late Work:** You are part of an intellectual and classroom community. Your fellow students are depending on you to complete homework and groups tasks on or before the class period in which they are due. When you fail to complete your work on time, you are letting down the entire class and preventing all of us from

moving forward. You are also preventing me from assessing your performance in this class in ways that fully represent your abilities. Please do not be late in your work for this class. If you are unable to submit work on time for any reason, please contact me beforehand so I can better understand the circumstances surrounding your late work. If you fail to do so, I will not accept your assignment, the only exception being late précis, which as noted will be accepted, but will receive at most 50% credit.

Disability Statement: Students with disabilities are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you are a student with a disability and feel you may require academic accommodations please contact Learning Support Services (LSS), as early as possible to request accommodation for your disability. The timeliness of your request will allow LSS to promptly arrange the details of your support. LSS is located in Melrose Hall 020 (503-883-2562). We also encourage students to communicate with faculty about their accommodations.

Laptops, cell phones: If you use an electronic device for a purpose other than note taking during class, e.g. for web surfing, chatting, facebooking, or texting, you do so at risk of your grade.

Recording lectures/class discussion. Please see me before the start of the first class session if you intend to record any portion of any of our sessions.

Grading criteria:

A---Excellent or superior quality work, effort and insight. Discussion indicates a high level of integration of materials, conveying exceptional levels of expended time and effort. Superior effort in drawing from a variety of sources, including articles, class discussions, class texts, movies, etc., and clearly conveying the ideas learned from them.

B---Above average, but not exceptional work, effort and insight. Good integration of materials, but missing the thoroughness required for an "A" grade.

C---Average work and effort. Some good insights in places, and adequate representation of materials in the work. Discussion conveys some working knowledge of the materials, but lacks depth with regards to the application and range of ideas drawn upon.

D---Passing, but below average work. Problems with relating materials to one another, and a haphazard ability to discuss the subject at hand. Spotty work with little effort expended to integrate or organize materials.

F---Failing Work. Little or no effort expended and no real insights conveyed. No integration of materials, and a haphazard approach that conveys little organization or time spent on the subject. Appears unfamiliar with subject at hand, and unable to discuss issues in a relevant fashion.

Academic honesty: I adhere to the college policy on academic honesty, as published in the Linfield College Course Catalog. Be sure you have read and understand this.

Attendance: Attendance and active participation is required at **all** in- and out-of-class meetings, events, field trips, and group meetings. If you are unable to attend these meetings for any reason, please contact me beforehand so I can better understand the circumstances surrounding your absence. This isn't just a formality; since a goal for this class is to develop your communication and professional skills, it is essential for all students to be vitally involved in our class activities and to take their responsibilities seriously. Students who are not "stepping up" and "plugging in" to the flow of ideas as we move along will be asked to go in front of the class and explain why they are not participating more fully.

Illness/Medical Policy: Please inform me as early and/or promptly as possible about any illness or medical condition that affects your performance in this class.

## TENTATIVE SYLLABUS

### I. FRAMING AND BASIC CONCEPTS

#### AUGUST

- 27 M Introduction and introductions  
General framing for understanding the nature of the modern world system; the fossil fueled basis of industrial growth and the impossibility of continued growth on a finite planet  
First glance at the global political economy in 2018:  
1) pace of world change 2017 (~7 mins.):<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8lBMFw2xFA>  
2) crash course on globalization I (12 mins):<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SnR-e0S6Ic> and II (14 mins):[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_iwrt7D5OA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_iwrt7D5OA)  
3) Paul Gilding 2012 TED (17 mins.):<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZT6YpCsapg>  
4) Peter Alfandary 2015 TED (14 mins.):<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUYNB4a8d2U>
- 29 W What is going on in our late modern globalized world?  
[Wilk & Cliggett Ch. 1 Economic Anthropology: An Undisciplined Discipline]  
Second glance at the global political economy in 2018  
[Robbins I. Introduction: The Consumer, the Laborer, the Capitalist, and the Nation-State in the Society of Perpetual Growth]  
[Appadurai “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” (avail online at <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/linfield/reader.action?docID=10151083&ppg=40>)]

#### SEPTEMBER

- 3 M Video: *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (73 mins.)
- 5 W Basic Concepts I: the economic cycle – production, exchange, consumption; commodity chains  
Production: connecting with nature and technology  
[R/ Heilbroner "The Materialist Interpretation of History"]  
[R/ Wolf Ch. 11 “The Movement of Commodities”]  
[Robbins Ch. 7: Environment and Consumption]
- 10 M Exchange: the social context of transactions; reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange;  
[R/ Appadurai, Arjun. 1986. "Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 3-63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.]  
[R/ Graeber Ch. 2 “The Myth of Barter” from *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*]  
[R/ Bourdieu “Forms of Capital”]
- 12 W preparation for Thirangama visit  
**Set up one-on-one term paper meetings over next two weeks.**
- 17 M with Dr. Sharika Thiranagama, Stanford U

### II. GETTING A HANDLE ON THE NATURE OF WORK AND THE ORGANIZATION OF LIFE IN LATE MODERNITY

- 19 W Basic Concepts II: Origins of the modern world system: the world in 1400  
[Robbins Ch. 3: The Rise of the Merchant, Industrialist, and Financier]

“Modern” vs. “Traditional” Societies  
~~[R/ Latour 1991 excerpt from “We Have Never Been Modern”]~~

24 M **Initial term paper topic statement due (BB)**

A short history of industrial labor

[Robbins Ch. 2 The Laborer in the Culture of Capitalism]

**Why do workers’ incomes seem always to fall behind that of owners of capital?**

Piketty and Graeber conversation 2014: <http://thebaffler.com/odds-and-ends/soak-the-rich>.

The nature of work in late modernity

[Graeber Preface, Ch. 1 What is a Bullshit Job?]

Types of bullshit jobs

[Graeber Ch. 2]

26 W Theorizing economic motivation, behavior

[Wilk & Cliggett Ch. 2 “Economics and the Problem of Human Nature”]

Why Do Those in Bullshit Jobs Regularly Report Themselves Unhappy?

[Graeber Ch. 3]

What Is It Like to Have a Bullshit Job?

[Graeber Ch. 4]

~~Debt/time/money; student debt~~

~~[Graeber <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxJW7hl8oqM>~~

~~<https://ourfiniteworld.com/2016/05/02/debt-the-key-factor-connecting-energy-and-the-economy/>~~

**OCTOBER**

1 M FALL BREAK

3 W Development of the social sciences/place of political economy

[R/ Wolf Preface (2010, 1997, 1982); Ch. 1 “Introduction”; and pp. 265-266]

Theoretical positions relevant to political economy I

[Wilk & Cliggett Ch. 3 “Self-interest and Neoclassical Microeconomics”]

8 M Theoretical positions relevant to political economy II

[Wilk & Cliggett Ch. 4 “Social and Political Economy”]

10 W **Final term paper topic statement due**

Theoretical positions relevant to political economy III

[Wilk & Cliggett Ch. 5 “The Moral Human: Cultural Economics”]

15 M Why Are Bullshit Jobs Proliferating?

[Graeber Ch. 5]

[R/ Hayek “The Use of Knowledge in Society”]

17 W Theorizing the state

[Robbins Ch. 4: The Nation-State in the Culture of Capitalism]

- 22 M Dimensions of globalization and the growth system I  
 [Robbins Part II: The Global Impact of the Culture of Capitalism: Introduction  
 [Robbins Ch. 5: Population Growth, Migration, and Urbanization]
- 24 W Dimensions of globalization and the growth system II [2 people in charge of each chapter]  
 [Robbins Ch. 6: Hunger, Poverty, and Economic Development]  
 [Robbins Ch. 8: Health and Disease]  
 [Robbins Ch. 9: Indigenous Groups and Ethnic Conflict]
- 29 M Dimensions of globalization and the growth system III  
 [Robbins Part III: Resistance and Rebellion: Introduction]  
 [Robbins Ch. 10: Peasant Adaptation and Resistance in the Face of Uncertainty; Disaster Capitalism]
- 31 W Dimensions of globalization and the growth system IV [3 people in charge of each chapter]  
 [Robbins Ch. 11: Antisystemic Protest]  
 [Robbins Ch. 12: Religion and Antisystemic Protest]

### **NOVEMBER**

- 5 M “Modernization”  
~~[R/ Appadurai “The Spirit of Weber” IN *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. NY: Verso, pp. 217–231.]~~

### **III. FUTURES OF THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY**

- 7 W Bringing ethics and spirit back in  
 [R/ Appadurai “The Ghost in the Financial Machine”]
- 12 M **Annotated term paper bibliography due**  
 Energopolitics  
 [R/ Love & Isenhour Energy and economy: Recognizing high-energy modernity as a historical period]  
 [R/ Mitchell Introduction, Ch. 1 Machines of Democracy]
- 14 W Managing powerdown; DeGrowth  
 [Robbins Ch. 13: Solving Global Problems: Some Options and Courses of Action]  
~~[R/ degrowth article TBD]~~
- [19-23 THANKSGIVING BREAK]
- 26 M Why Do We as a Society Not Object to the Growth of Pointless Employment?  
 [Graeber Ch. 6]
- 28 W **Term paper complete first draft due start of class**  
**Analysis of a scholarly lecture due**  
 What Are the Political Effects of Bullshit Jobs, and Is There Anything That Can Be Done About This Situation? AI, robotization...  
 [Graeber Ch. 7]

## **DECEMBER**

- 3 M Post-fossil fuels consumerism:  
<http://peakoil.com/consumption/in-conversation-consumerism-after-fossil-fuels>
- 5 W Open
- 7 F Field trip to Portland (<http://www.portofportland.com/> and  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port\\_of\\_Portland\\_%28Oregon%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_of_Portland_%28Oregon%29))
- 10 M Reading Day
- 12 W 10:30-12:30 **Final Exam period**  
**Short final reflection essay**  
**Term papers due by 17:00** - be sure to include ALL drafts and all comments