

MIT 3216F

The Culture of Consumption

2015

Wednesdays 9:30am – 12:20pm in NCB 114

Professor Edward Comor

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Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-1:30pm, Wednesdays 12:30-1:30pm, *or by appointment*

This course examines the development and social significance of our culture of consumption. Through the use of history, concepts, and theories, the contemporary role of consumption (as an institution) is assessed in relation to various subjects, including advertising and marketing, socialization, identity, meaning, alienation, and power. The course aims to develop student awareness of, and the ability to apply, historicist analyses to questions concerning our culture of consumption, involving the use of political economy, sociology, and social psychology.

Course Prerequisite:

MIT 2100F/G

Grading:

- **First test (Week V): 20%**

This 65-minute test consisting of 4 (of 6) short answer identification questions will evaluate student comprehension of early semester readings and lectures.

- **Second test (Week IX): 25%**

This 75-minute test, consisting of an essay question (choice of 1 of 3), is designed to evaluate the student's ability to apply both readings and concepts.

- **Group presentation** (see details below): **20%**

- **End of semester assignment** (distributed in class during Class XII; due Class XIII): **35%**

This assignment consists of answering one 2500-word essay (from a choice of questions provided one). It is designed to assess critical comprehension of course lectures, concepts, and readings addressed throughout the semester. *Late assignments must be accompanied by appropriate documentation – such as a medical certificate – or they will not be accepted.*

Required Texts:

MIT 3216F Custom Course Book (Book No. M11236)

Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness** (any edition)

Suggested Text:

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life** (any edition)

* Available at the Weldon Library Reserves and the FIMS Graduate Resource Centre (2nd floor NCB)

IMPORTANT NOTICE: THIS COURSE PROHIBITS THE USE OF LAPTOPS AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING LECTURES. THESE WILL BE PERMITTED ONLY UPON THE SUBMISSION OF APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION. HOWEVER, THESE DEVICES MAY BE USED WHEN MAKING PRESENTATIONS.

SCHEDULE and READINGS

With the exception of Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness*, Bauman's *Consuming Life*, and resources available through the Internet (see URLs provided), all readings are contained in the *Custom Course Book* (pages for each of these readings refer to pages in this *Course Book*).

I. September 16 – Introduction

No readings

II. September 23 – Definitions and Dynamics

Raymond Williams, 'Consumer' in *Keywords* (1999), pp. 1-2

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life** (2007), pp. 42-51

Submit Group Presentation Preferences Today

III. September 30 – Core Concepts and History of Consumer Culture (Part I)

James G. Carrier, 'The Emergence of Impersonal Trade' in *Gifts and Commodities* (1995), pp. 3-7

Grant McCracken, 'Three Moments in the History of Consumption' in *Culture and Consumption* (1988), pp. 9-19

James G. Carrier, 'Christmas and the Ceremony of the Gift' in *Gifts and Commodities* (1995), pp. 21-31

IV. October 7 – History of Consumer Culture (Part II)

Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness** (2001), pp. 23-184

Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (1955), pp. 33-70

Oct. 12 - Thanksgiving

V. October 14 – question & answer session and first test (65-minutes)

VI. October 21 – Socialization and Consumer Culture

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life** (2007), pp. 68-75 and 98-116

Group presentations:

- *Childrearing*

- *Gender*

VII. October 28 – Digital Technologies and Alienation

Mark Davis, “Hurried Lives: Dialectics of Time and Technology in Liquid Modernity” in *Thesis 11* (2013), pp. 71-82

CBC “A Brand New World” (2013) radio documentary at
<<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/The+Sunday+Edition/ID/2406139657/>>

Group presentations:

- *Education*

- *Relationships and Sexuality*

October 29-30 – Fall Study Break

VIII. November 4 – Social-Psychological Implications

Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (1976), pp. 83-98

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life** (2007), pp. 122-139

Group presentation:

- *Mental Health*

- *Religion*

IX. November 11 – question & answer session and second test (75-minutes)

X. November 18 – Acquiescence, Resistance, Alternatives (Part I)

Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, 'The Rebel Sell' in *This Magazine* (2006) at
<<http://www.thismagazine.ca/issues/2002/11/rebelsell.php>>

Slavoj Zizek, 'Fat-free chocolate and absolutely no smoking' in *The Guardian* (2014) at
<<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/21/prix-pictet-photography-prize-consumption-slavoj-zizek#comments>>???

Michael Schudson, 'Delectable Materialism' in L.B. Glickman (ed.), *Consumer Society in American History* (1999), pp. 99-108

Group presentations:

- *Architecture & Urban Spaces*

- *Art*

XI. November 25 – Acquiescence, Resistance, Alternatives (Part II)

Russell Belk, 'Why Not Share Rather Than Own?' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 611 (2007), pp. 117-122

Eric Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (1976), pp. 123-127

- *Environment*

- *Politics*

XII. December 2 – Conclusions, question & answer review session and end of semester assignment distributed (due in one week)

XIII. December 9 – End of semester assignment due (see submission instructions on assignment sheet)

Group Presentations:

This semester, up to ten group presentations will take place. Following student selections of their three preferred presentation subjects from the list and dates shown below, Prof. Comor will organize groups normally made up of four students. Each group will be responsible for one 25-minute presentation, *plus* approximately 15-minutes for class discussion, *assessing a particular subject in the context and through the application of concepts and readings addressed in class*. An annotated bibliography indicating the sources used and who in the group utilized them is required on the day of each presentation. Grades will be based on the group's ability to i) conduct a coherent presentation, ii) demonstrate its comprehension of the subject matter, iii) utilize course concepts effectively, and iv) engage fellow students during the presentation. Groups may use audio-visual aids and should include sources not addressed in class. Lastly, groups are encouraged to rehearse their presentations to ensure that they do not exceed mandated timeframes. Students failing to contribute to or taking part in a presentation will be given a make-up assignment *only* upon presentation of a medical or equivalent certificate (otherwise, the student will receive 0 (zero) for this assignment). **

Presentation Subjects and Dates:

Childrearing – Class VI

Gender – Class VI

Education – Class VII

Relationships & Sexuality – Class VII

Mental Health – Class VIII

Religion – Class VIII

Art – Class X

Architecture & Urban Spaces – Class X

Environment – Class XI

Politics – Class XI

** Along with the submission of your three presentation preferences, please provide your **email address** and **telephone number**. If your presentation requires any special needs, please notify Prof. Comor at least one week in advance. Also, *if your presentation involves materials or activities that may offend or significantly disturb, these should be cleared by Prof. Comor.*

NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following

Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Academic Accommodation

Medical Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or **assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade** must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation in the form of a Student Medical Certificate. It will be the Dean's Office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

For **work worth less than 10% of the final grade**, the instructor will consider requests for academic accommodation on medical grounds made in a timely manner in writing or by appointment in office

hours. Such requests need not be accompanied by documentation. The instructor may, however, decide to require documentation be submitted to the appropriate Academic Counselling office.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.

For Western University policy on accommodation for medical illness, see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Student Medical Certificate (SMC):

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

Compassionate Accommodation

Academic accommodation (extensions, makeup tests and exams, additional assignments etc.) may be given to students on compassionate grounds. The situations for which compassionate accommodation can be given must be serious, including significant events such as death in the immediate family, trauma (fire, robbery, harassment, muggings, car accidents, etc.) or emergency situations. Documentation is required.

If a member of your immediate family is seriously ill, obtain a medical certificate from the family member's physician and submit the documentation to your Academic Counsellor. If you have been involved in a severe accident, fire or some other exceptional crises, obtain a copy of the police report or be prepared to provide the necessary documentation upon request.

Generally, for deaths within a student's immediate family (parents, guardians, caregivers, siblings, spouses), bereavement leave is granted, upon provision of documentation. For deaths within a student's extended family, academic accommodation is given for one to three days, upon provision of documentation.

Students seeking additional bereavement leave for religious or other reasons should contact their Academic Counsellors, and provide valid documentation.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. <http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>. Additional information is given in the Western Academic Calendar.

FIMS Grading Policy

The MIT program now has the following class average policy:

- All 1000-level MIT **required** courses (i.e., 1020E; 1025F/G; 1050A/B) will have a class average of between 67 and 72%.
- All 2000-level MIT **required** courses (i.e. 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) will have a class average of between 70 and 75%.
- All 3000-level MIT **required** courses (i.e. 3000, 3100) will have a class average of between 72 and 77%.

Elective courses and 4th year seminar courses have no class average requirement.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

SUPPORT SERVICES -- LINKS

Office of the Registrar:

www.registrar.uwo.ca

Student Development Centre:

www.sdc.uwo.ca

Psychological Services:

www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych

Services for Students with Disabilities:

www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd

Accessibility Information:

www.accessibility.uwo.ca/

Writing Support Centre:

www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing

Learning Skills Services:

www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning

Indigenous Services:

indigenous.uwo.ca/

International and Exchange Student

Centre: www.sdc.uwo.ca/int

Career Centre at Western:

www.success.uwo.ca/careers/

Appendix A: Grade Ranges in MIT, MPI and MTP

Guidelines to the MIT Grade Range

These guidelines are benchmarks, and are not to be followed as rigid regulations. They will be adjusted as appropriate to take into account the level of the course and any specific instructions given by a professor. As well, competency in English language usage (including spelling and grammar) may be taken into account in the assignment of grades by individual instructors. Note that the 70-79 grade range is broken into two divisions, as this is the grade range into which a large number of students fall.

90-100 (Outstanding, A+)

The report shows sparkling originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic. Sophisticated synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the topic are demonstrated. Mastery of complex material and ideas is immediately evident. The topic is treated with sensitivity and subtlety of thought. The quality of the writing and background research is exemplary.

80-89 (Excellent, A)

The report shows originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic; it gets to the heart of the matter with comments and/or questions. It is clearly focused and logically organized. The quality of writing makes the report immediately understandable. Mastery of complex material and ideas is demonstrated. The report is of appropriate length, while preserving the priorities and emphasis of the material, so that the result is meaningful, not simplistic.

75-79 (Very Good, B+)

The report shows above average analysis, critical thinking and independent thought. Claims are supported by ample evidence and the components of the topic are well-researched and presented. The topic is addressed in reasonable depth and/or breadth and covers material appropriate to the course. The analysis is organized around focal points and the argument is easily followed. The report demonstrates an above average ability to write in an intelligible style and to condense material meaningfully and with a concern for priorities of that material.

70-74 (Good, B)

The report shows an attempt at analysis and critical thinking. Claims are supported by reasonable evidence. The topic is addressed in some depth and/or breadth, with references to the appropriate literature and course material. The analysis is organized around focal points. The report is generally well written and well argued.

60-69 (Competent, C)

The report demonstrates adequate comprehension of the topic. The report is on topic and is a reasonable summary of material covered in the course, but goes no further. Facts are stated accurately; the quality of writing is sufficiently intelligible with enough elaboration and enough connections made between ideas to permit a reader to understand the point of the report.

50-59 (Marginal, D)

The report shows less than adequate comprehension of the topic and of the material covered by the course. The report is a less than adequate summary of sources and/or is considerably off-topic. Facts are stated inaccurately or ambiguously; the writing style is difficult to follow; there is insufficient elaboration to permit reader's comprehension of relations among ideas; little judgment is shown in selecting detail for inclusion in the report.

Below 50 (Unacceptable, F)

The report demonstrates a failure to comprehend the topic. The material is disorganized and unintelligible. The report clearly does not meet the minimal requirements of the assignment.

Appendix B: Guidelines of Academic Appeals for FIMS Students

(<http://www.fims.uwo.ca/current/counselling/undergrad-counselling/appeals.htm>)

Grounds for Appeal:

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies does not view the appeals process as an opportunity for students to solicit a second opinion on a grade assigned to a particular piece of work. Appeals must pertain to the final grade in a course, and will only be entertained if sufficient grounds for appeal can be met, including: medical or compassionate circumstances, a defect in the evaluation process, bias, inaccuracy or unfairness.

Stages in the Appeals Process:

The first stage of the process is a discussion of the disputed grade with the appropriate Teaching Assistant (if applicable), and subsequently, the course Instructor. For grades assigned to individual assignments, essays, lab reports, projects and tests completed throughout the term, the student first must appeal to the Teaching Assistant or Instructor of the course, within three weeks of the date on which the Instructor or Teaching Assistant returned the assignments to the class. The Appeals Committee will not hear any further appeals about the final grade in any course unless this first step has been taken.

If completion of the first stage has not resolved the matter, the student may appeal the final grade in the course to the FIMS Appeals Committee. Appeals of final grades must be within the time frame indicated in the Undergraduate Calendars. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the appeal is submitted within the deadline. The student shall submit a formal letter to the FIMS Appeals Committee outlining the grounds for the appeal, the remedy sought and relevant materials including the information about when and with whom (Teaching Assistant and/or Instructor) the student met, as described in Stage 1. If the appeal involves a request for work to be regraded, the original marked work and a clean copy (if possible) must be included. If the appeal is commenced once the deadline has passed, it will not be considered either by the Appeals Committee or by the Associate Dean.

The FIMS Appeals Committee has the discretion to determine whether the grounds for appeal have been met.

If the Committee deems that the reasons for the appeal are not legitimate, the Associate Dean will be informed. The appeal will be terminated and the student will be informed.

If the Committee decides that the grounds for appeal have been met, the following steps will be taken:

1. the course Instructor will be shown the appeal letter and offered an opportunity to make a written response;
2. if work is to be regraded, a reader will be appointed who is competent in the area in question and was not involved in the assignment of the original mark. The reader will consider the work in question and will arrive at an independent evaluation. If there is a large discrepancy between the original mark and the regraded mark, a second reader may be appointed by the Committee. **If the appointed reader(s) arrive at a grade within five marks of the original, the original grade will stand.**

The FIMS Appeals Committee will review the evidence and will make a recommendation on the case to the Associate Dean Undergraduate.

The Associate Dean Undergraduate will consider the recommendation from the Appeals Committee, and will make a decision. The student and the instructor will be notified promptly and in writing by the Associate Dean of the decision and of the change in grade, if any. Within the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the Associate Dean's decision on the matter is final.

Further appeals are possible under certain circumstances to the Senate Review Board Academic (for Undergraduate students) or to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (for Graduate students) but the student should carefully consult the guidelines regarding such Appeals.