

**MIT 3216F**  
**The Culture of Consumption**  
**2016**

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

**Professor Edward Comor**

North Campus Building 212 / UWO ext. 81233 / ecomor@uwo.ca  
Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-1:30pm and 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 pp. 3-4 below): 20%**

**- End of semester assignment (distributed Week XII; due Week XIII): 35%**

This assignment consists of answering one 2500-word essay (from a choice of questions). 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

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

**Suggested Text:**

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

\* Available at the Weldon Library Reserves

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**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* (CB) and the pages for each refer to its contents.

**I. September 14 – Introduction**

No readings

**II. September 21 – Definitions and Dynamics**

Raymond Williams, 'Consumer' in *Keywords*, CB 1-2

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, 'Origins of Institutionalization' in *The Social Construction of Reality*, CB 3-9

Peter Berger and Brigitte Berger, 'Socialization' and 'Meeting Ourselves' in *Sociology*, CB 11-17

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*\*, pp. 42-51

Submit Group Presentation Preferences Today

**III. September 28 – Core Concepts and History of Consumer Culture I**

James G. Carrier, 'The Emergence of Impersonal Trade' in *Gifts and Commodities*, CB 19-23

Grant McCracken, 'Three Moments in the History of Consumption' in *Culture & Consumption*, CB 25-34

James G. Carrier, 'Christmas and the Ceremony of the Gift' in *Gifts and Commodities*, CB 37-47

**IV. October 5 – History of Consumer Culture, Part II**

Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*\*, pp. 23-67 and 77-184

**October 10 – Thanksgiving****V. October 12 – first test (65-minutes)**

## **VI. October 19 – Socialization and Consumer Culture**

Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, CB 49-86

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life\**, pp. 68-75 and 98-116

*Group presentations:*

- *Education*
- *Relationships & Sexuality*

## **VII. October 26 – Digital Technologies and Alienation**

Mark Davis, 'Hurried Lives: Dialectics of Time and Technology in Liquid Modernity' in *Thesis 11*, CB 87-98

Edward Comor, 'Digital Prosumption and Alienation' in *Ephemera* 10:3/4, CB 99-114

optional: CBC "A Brand New World" radio documentary at

<<http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/The+Sunday+Edition/ID/2406139657/>>

*Group presentation:*

- *Mental Health*

## **VIII. November 2 – Social-Psychological Implications**

Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* Chapters IV-V, CB 115-130

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life\**, pp. 122-139

*Group presentations:*

- *Religion*
- *Nationalism*

## **IX. November 9 – second test (75-minutes)**

## **X. November 16 – Acquiescence, Resistance, Alternatives, Part I**

Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter, 'The Rebel Sell' in *This Magazine* at

<<http://www.thismagazine.ca/issues/2002/11/rebelsell.php>>

Slavoj Zizek, 'Fat-free chocolate and absolutely no smoking' in *The Guardian* at

<<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/21/prix-pictet-photography-prize-consumption-slavoj-zizek#comments>>

*Group presentations:*

- *Environment*
- *Art*

## **XI. November 23 – Acquiescence, Resistance, Alternatives, Part II**

Russel Belk, 'Why Not Share Rather Than Own?' in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 611, CB 131-136

Eric Fromm, 'Introduction in *To Have or To Be?*', CB 137-141

*Group presentations:*

- *Terrorism*
- *Socialism*

**XII. November 30 – question & answer review session and end of semester assignment distributed** (due in one week)

**XIII. December 7 – End of semester assignment due** (see submission instructions on assignment sheet)

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**Group Presentations:**

This semester, up to nine 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 or five students. Each will be responsible for one 30 minute (for four person groups) or 35 minute presentation (for five-person groups), *plus* approx. 20 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 their 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:**

Education – Class VI  
Relationships & Sexuality – Class VI  
Mental Health – Class VII  
Religion – Class VIII  
Nationalism – Class VIII  
Environment – Class X  
Art – Class X  
Terrorism – Class XI  
Socialism – Class XI

**Please note:** 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, Prof. Comor should be consulted one week in advance.*

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**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.

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## NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

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### **SUPPORT SERVICES -- LINKS**

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[indigenous.uwo.ca/](http://indigenous.uwo.ca/)

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### **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:

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Student Medical Certificate (SMC): [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

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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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **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.

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**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).

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### **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.