

**FAN CULTURES**  
MIT 3404F  
The University of Western Ontario  
Faculty of Information and Media Studies  
Lectures: Thursdays 12:30–3:30pm (HSB-236)

**COURSE INSTRUCTOR:**

Zak Bronson

Email: zbronson@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Mondays 3:00-4:00pm in FNB 4018 (shared office) and by appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In recent years, fans have evolved from a small, fringe subculture to an integral part of the media industries. This course provides an in-depth study of fan cultures, with a focus on the practices, behaviours, and activities of contemporary fandom. In particular, this course examines the ways that fans struggle over the meanings of texts, by actively resisting, rewriting, and remixing media products in their own desired ways. At the same time, it explores how the contemporary media industries have responded to fan cultures by integrating and commodifying media fandom into its practices. Providing an overview of fan studies, this course will explore the social, cultural, and economic significance of media fandom through various fan texts and concerns, including fanfiction and slash, cosplay, hatewatching, fan activism, and fan consumption.

By taking this course, students will:

- Develop a thorough understanding of media fandom and grasp the role that fans play within the media industries
- Critically engage with the social, cultural, and political aspects of media fandom and fan cultures
- Apply critical and cultural theory to the study of media fandom

**REQUIRED COURSE READINGS:**

All course readings and additional materials will be available through the course OWL page.

**COURSE EVALUATION:**

1. Group Discussion Facilitation = 15% (sign up for date in week 2)
2. Midterm exam = 25% (in class Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>)
3. Paper proposal = 10% (due Oct. 31 in class)
4. Final paper (2500 words) = 35% (due December 5<sup>th</sup> in class)
5. In-class Participation = 15% (ongoing)

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS:**

1. **Group Discussion Facilitation – 15% (ongoing):** During the second week of class, students will sign up for discussion facilitation groups. Each group will take be required to prepare and lead the class in a 40-minute discussion of that week’s topic. Since all students will have read the readings prior to class, your group is not responsible for summarizing the articles. Rather, the purpose of your discussion facilitation is to ensure that students critically engage with the main issues and concepts in the readings by raising question and concerns, sharing thoughts, and providing examples that help to critical reflect on the issues. You are welcome to engage with these concerns in any way you wish, such as through activities, exercises, case studies, etc. As well, you are encouraged to bring in some materials to help encourage this discussion, such as video clips, images, or have the class take part in an activity together. Your grade for this facilitation will be based on your ability to critical engage with the course materials and generate class discussion.
2. **Midterm Exam – 25% (October 24<sup>th</sup>):** During Week 8, students will write an in-class midterm on the course readings and lecture materials. More information on the exam format will be provided in class prior to the midterm date.
3. **Paper proposal – 10% (Due October 31<sup>st</sup>):** Students are required to submit a 500-700 word essay proposal that outlines your final paper topic. You do not need to have a precise thesis at this time, but your proposal should clearly outline a topic or issue central to fan studies and discuss its relevance, highlight some potential questions you will address, and a list of at least 5 academic sources you will use to support your ideas (at least 3 from outside the course). A more detailed description of the expectations for this assignment will be provided in class prior to the due date.
4. **Final Paper – 30% (Due December 5<sup>th</sup>):** Students are required to write a final 2500-word research paper that builds on the issues addressed in the course. Students must use at least 5 academic sources (at least 3 from outside of the course) to support their arguments. More information on the written assignment will be provided in class prior to the due date and will be posted on OWL.
5. **In-Class Participation – 15%:** Participation and discussion are an essential element of the learning process, and students will be provided with many opportunities to contribute their thoughts and opinions in lecture, group activities, and class discussion facilitations. Students will be graded on the strength and quality of their in-class contributions.

## **Course Policies:**

**Email:** Before you email me, please check the course syllabus for the answer to your questions. In general, I will attempt to check my email at least once a day, however, please note that responses often take 24-36 hours for a response. I also ask that students who have more in-depth questions come to visit me during my office hours.

**Late Policy:** All assignments are due at the start of class on the assigned date. Late assignments will be deducted 5% per day, unless the student has documented medical or family emergency. Late

essays must be submitted via the FIMS dropbox outside the FIMS Dean's Office (FNB 2050). Essays will be date stamped; if they are received after 4:30 pm on Friday they will be stamped with Monday's date.

**Use of Electronic Devices:** Laptops are allowed for note-taking and in-class research. If a student is found using laptops for non-course work or is being generally disruptive to the class, I reserve the right to have their use banned. All cell phones must be put away during class time. Students may be asked to put away their laptops at certain times in the class, such as seminar discussions.

**Attendance:** Since much of your participation grade is dedicated to your seminar discussions, group activities, and in-class contributions, it is necessary to attend course lectures and to regularly contribute to receive a strong participation grade.

**Readings:** Make sure that you have the readings completed before class. Keep in mind that your seminar groups depend on your participation and contribution, so closely read the assigned articles and be prepared to discuss them in your group.

**Grading:** Students will receive graded work worth no less than 15% at least 3 days prior to the deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty. This year, the date by which students are to have received at least 15% of their grade in a first semester course is November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Students can find details about this academic policy here: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/exam/evaluation\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/evaluation_undergrad.pdf). Please note, students are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of the grades they have received in their courses.

**Land Acknowledgement:** Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

**WEEK 1—Sept. 5—INTRODUCTION TO FAN CULTURES: WHAT ARE FANS & FAN COMMUNITIES?**

Recommended: *Comic-Con IV: A Fan's Hope* (Spurlock, 2011) [OWL]

**WEEK 2—Sept. 12—HISTORIES: MASS CULTURE & ADORING AUDIENCES**

Readings: Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered.”

& Joli Jensen, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization” in Lisa A. Lewis (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*.

Watch: *A Hard Day's Night*

**WEEK 3—Sept. 19—FANS AS ACTIVE AUDIENCES: FROM PATHOLOGY TO POACHING**

Readings: Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding”

& Henry Jenkins, “‘Get a Life’: Fans, Poachers, Nomads” in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

***\*seminar facilitation 1: active audiences: how much power do fans have?***

**WEEK 4—Sept. 26—(SUB)CULTURAL CAPITAL, TASTE, & HATEWATCHING**

Readings: John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*.

& Mark Jancovich, “Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions.” *Cultural Studies* 16.2 (2002): 306-322.

& Anne Gilbert, “Hatewatch with Me,” in *Anti-Fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age*

***\*seminar 2: subcultural capital and taste in fan cultures: how do fans create distinctions within popular culture?***

**WEEK 5—Oct. 3—*SLASHING* THE NARRATIVE: GENDER IN FANDOM**

Readings: Kristina Busse, “I’m Jealous of the Fake Me”: Postmodern Subjectivity and Identity Construction in Boy Band Fan Fiction” in *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*.

& Suzanne Scott, “The Hawkeye Initiative: Pinning Down Transformative Feminisms in Comic-Book Culture through Superhero Crossplay Fan Art.”

**\*seminar 3: gender and resistance in fandom: how and why do fans remix mainstream culture?**

**WEEK 6—Oct. 10—IDENTITY, COSPLAY & FAN FASHION**

Readings: Nicole Lamerichs, “Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay.” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0246>.

& Elizabeth Affuso, “Everyday Costume: Feminized Fandom, Retail, and Beauty Culture,” in *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*.

**\*seminar 4: identity in fandom: how does fan performance and dress factor into identity construction?**

**WEEK 7—Oct. 17—SQUEE!: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF FAN CONSUMPTION**

Readings: Henry Jenkins, “Buying into *American Idol*,” in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

& Mel Stanfill, “Consumption and the Management of Desire,” in *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans*.

**\*seminar facilitation 5: consumerism and consumption in fandom: are fans simply ideal consumers? What is the relationship between consumption and fan expressions of love?**

**WEEK 8—Oct. 24—\*\*\*IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM\*\*\***

**WEEK 9—Oct. 31—FANDOM & LABOUR**

**Guest Lecture:** Charlotte Panneton, PhD Student

Readings: Mel Stanfill, “Fandom and/as Labor,” in *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans*.

& Additional Reading TBA

**\*seminar facilitation 6: fandom and/as labour: are fans free labour for the industry? Where is the line between exploitation and fan expression?**

**Due: Paper proposal (in class)**

**WEEK 10—Nov. 7—READING WEEK (NO CLASS)**

**WEEK 11—Nov. 14—FANDOM, POLITICS, & ACTIVISM**

Readings: Lori Kido Lopez, “Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in *The Last Airbender*.”

& Annemarie Navar-Gill and Mel Stanfill, “We Shouldn't Have to Trend to Make You Listen”: Queer Fan Hashtag Campaigns as Production Interventions.” *Journal of Film and Video* 74.3/4 (2018). 85-100.

**\*seminar facilitation 7: politics and fandom: can fandom contribute to social change? How much potential does fan activism have?**

**WEEK 12—Nov. 21—RACE IN FAN CULTURES: ARE THEY ALL WHITE MALE NERDS?**

Readings: Suzanne Scott, “Interrogating the Fake Geek Girl” in *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender and the Convergence Culture Industry*

& Rukmini Pande, “Recalibration Necessary, Mr. Spock: Race and the Dynamics of Media Fandom,” in *Squee from the Margins*.

**\*seminar facilitation 8: toxic masculinity, gender, and the marginalization of non-white male fans**

**WEEK 13—Nov. 28—WHO OWNS FAN CULTURE? COPYRIGHT IN FAN CULTURES**

Reading: Erika Doss, “Who Owns Elvis?” in *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith, and Image*.

**WEEK 14—Dec. 5—WHERE TO FROM HERE? LOVE & HATE IN FANDOM**

Reading: Jonathan Gray, “How Do I Dislike Thee? Let me Count the Ways,” in *Anti-Fandom: Dislike and Hate in the Digital Age*

**\*\*\*Due: Final Written Assignment (in class)**

# NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Fall 2019

## Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic\\_policies/rights\\_responsibilities.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html)

## 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](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 Turnitin 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.

## Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

## Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the

semester, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- during exam periods,
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are NOT met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate, if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact the FIMS Undergraduate Student Services Office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration For Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf)

## 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. Additional information is given in the [Western Academic Calendar](#).

## Grading at FIMS

- Normally, first year courses required for entry into an MIT or MPI module (MIT 1020E and MIT 1025F/G) are expected to have a course average between 68-72%.
- Normally, second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%.
- Normally, third year required courses (MIT 3000, 3100) are expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

**Elective courses and 4<sup>th</sup> year seminars have no recommended course averages.**

## Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

## SUPPORT SERVICES – LINKS

Office of the Registrar:

[www.registrar.uwo.ca](http://www.registrar.uwo.ca)

Student Development Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca)

Psychological Services:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/psych)

Services for Students with

Disabilities:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd)

Accessibility

Information:

[www.accessibility.uwo.ca](http://www.accessibility.uwo.ca)

∟ Writing Support

Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing)

Learning Skills Services:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning)

Indigenous Services:

<http://indigenous.uwo.ca/>

∟

International and Exchange Student

Centre:

[www.sdc.uwo.ca/int](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/int)

Career Centre at Western:

[www.success.uwo.ca/careers/](http://www.success.uwo.ca/careers/)

## Appendix A: Suggested 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

### 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 Calendar.** 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.