

The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
MIT 3652F - Communication Through Meme
Fall 2019

Instructor Information

Yimin Chen

ychen582@uwo.ca

Office hours: TBA, FNB 4013

Course Information

Location: FNB 1220

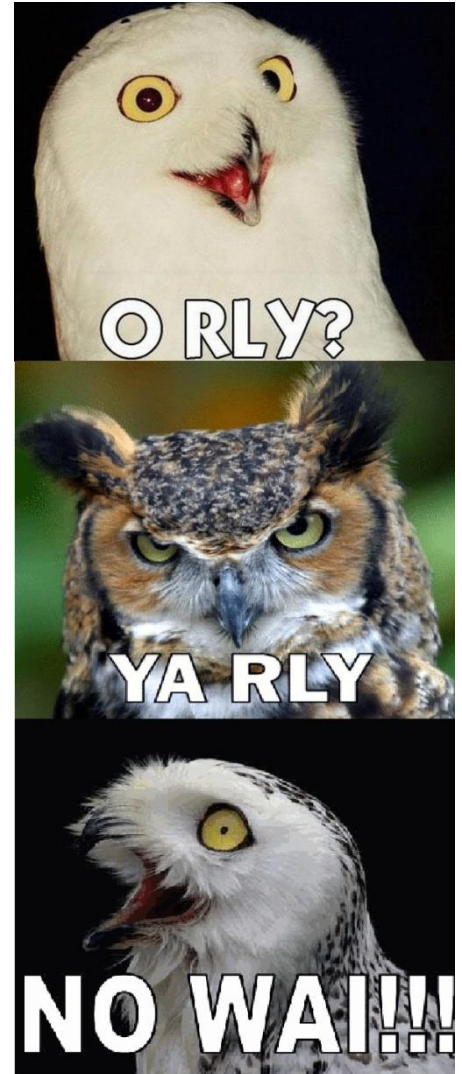
Time: Wednesdays 11:30 - 2:30

Meme - noun

1. An element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means.
2. An image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations.

Oxford English Dictionary

Whether referring to someone as the "salt of the earth" or placing black and white text over an image of a cat, Western society has long used "memes" as a cultural shorthand; a means of expressing emotions and wit in as few words or images as possible. Half historical analysis, half critical media theory, this course charts the evolution of how common stories, stories that form the backbone of our culture, are employed, deployed and remixed to become part of our common discourse. As its core, this class explores the memes, especially those online, that both enrich the communicative process while at the same time setting boundaries on what and how we think about the world around us.



!!!WARNING!!!

This course deals with sensitive, provocative, and mature subjects. At times, course content may be upsetting and/or vulgar. If you are not comfortable hearing, viewing, and discussing such material, this may not be the class for you.

Course Evaluation

10% - Participation

Memes are more fun when they are shared. A significant portion of this class is structured around the discussion of memes and what they mean, as well as theoretical concepts and ideas from the course readings.

10% - Presentation/Podcast

You will each be responsible for creating one 5-10 minute "show-and-tell" style presentation explaining a meme of your choice. This can take the form of either a traditional presentation in front of the class or a podcast-style recording. To avoid repetition, you will be required to sign up with a topic and presentation time during the second week of class.

30% - Meme Analysis Essays

You will be required to submit two (1000 words, worth 15% each) essays on a single meme of your choice. Explain the background and context of your chosen meme and apply concepts and ideas from class to discuss how the meme is used and its cultural implications. You must choose a different meme to write on for each of these essays.

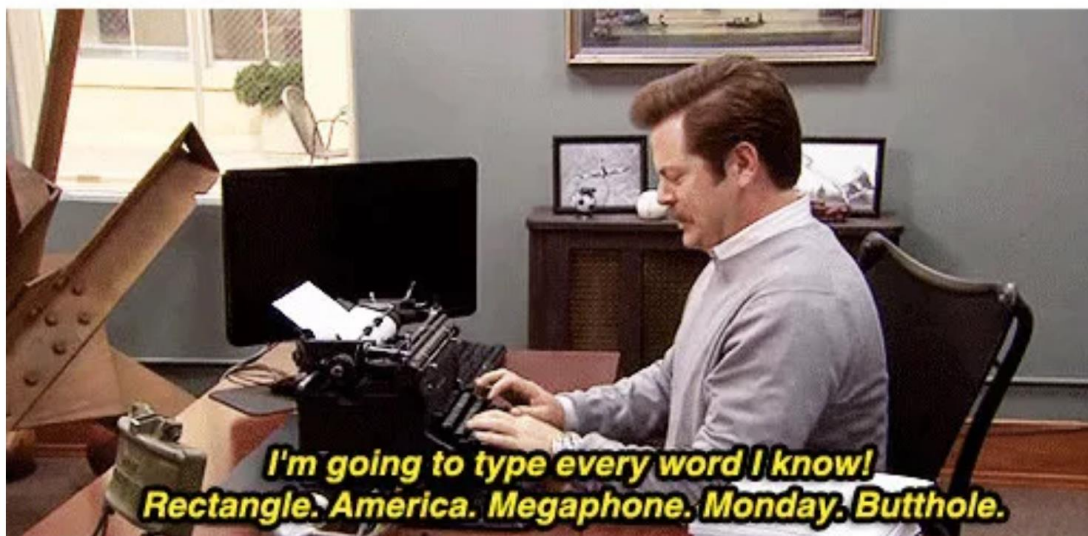
20% - In-class Midterm

This open-book midterm will consist of both short answer and long form questions. Notes and course readings are allowed.

30% - Final Essay

The final essay (2500 words) is an opportunity to take a deep-dive into the history, evolution, and influence of a category or genre of internet memes. Trace the origins of your chosen meme-cluster and then, drawing from relevant course concepts and ideas, provide a comprehensive analysis of its impact on the ways in which we think and behave.

writing an essay the night before it's due:



Late Policy

Late assignments will be subject to a 5% penalty per day unless accommodation is approved or an extension is negotiated with the instructor beforehand.

Course Readings

Baudrillard, J. 1988. *The Precession of Simulacra* in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. Stanford Press: Stanford.

https://web.stanford.edu/class/history34q/readings/Baudrillard/Baudrillard_Simulacra.html

Bernays, E. 1928. *Propaganda*. Liveright: New York.

Carney, S.J.P. 2012. "The Precession of Simulacra" by Jean Baudrillard, Translated from English into American. *Continent* 2.2.

<http://www.continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/viewArticle/91>

Hall, S. 1973. Encoding and Decoding in *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Routledge: London.

<https://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/SH-Encoding-Decoding.pdf>

Heiskanen, B. 2017. Meme-ing Electoral Participation. *European Journal of American Studies*, 12(12-2).

Jones, E. 2018. Why are Memes of Black People Reacting so Popular Online? *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2018/jul/08/why-are-memes-of-black-people-reacting-so-popular-online>

King, D. 2015. Ermahgerddon: The Untold Story of the Ermahgerd Girl. *Vanity Fair*.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/10/ermahgerd-girl-true-story>

Knobel, M. & Lankshear, C. 2007. Online Memes, Affinities, and Cultural Production in *A New Literacies Sampler*. Peter Lang: New York.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283968435_Online_memes_affinities_and_cultural_production

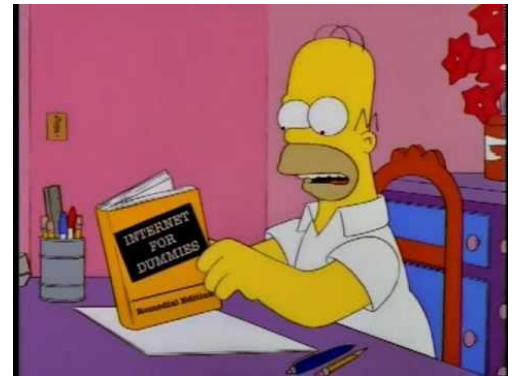
Lorenz, T. 2017. Why Does Everyone on the Internet Want to Die? How Suicide Memes Took Over the Web. *Mic*. <https://www.mic.com/articles/181752/why-does-everyone-on-the-internet-want-to-die-how-death-memes-took-over-the-web>

Massanari, A.L., & Chess, S. 2018. Attack of the 50-foot Social Justice Warrior: The Discursive Construction of SJW Memes as the Monstrous Feminine. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), pp 525-542.

McLuhan, M. 1964. *The Medium is the Message* in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. MIT Press: Cambridge. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf>

Nagle, A. 2017. *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right*. Zero Books: Washington.

Shifman, L. 2013. *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press: Cambridge.



	LECTURE	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Class 1 Sept 11	Introduction: A brief history of internet memes	Shifman – CH 1-3	
Class 2 Sept 18	Analyzing internet memes	Knobel & Lankshear – Online memes, affinities, and cultural production Shifman – CH 4-7	Sign up of presentations
Class 3 Sept 25	The meme is the message	Mcluhan – The medium is the message Hall – Encoding and decoding	Presentations 1-5
Class 4 Oct 2	Hyperreality	Baudrillard – Simulacra and Simulation Carney – “The Precession of Simulacra”	Essay #1 due Presentations 5-10
Class 5 Oct 9	Propaganda and profit	Bernays – CH 2-4, 11	Presentations 11-15
Class 6 Oct 16	Politics	Heiskanen – Meme-ing Electoral Participation Shifman – CH 8	Presentations 16-20
Class 7 Oct 23	MIDTERM! YAY!		
Class 8 Oct 30	Conspiracies and culture wars	Nagle – Introduction: From Hope to Harambe	Presentations 21-25
Nov 6	READING WEEK! YAY!		
Class 9 Nov 13	LOLing at tragedy	Lorenz – Why Does Everyone on the Internet Want to Die?	Essay #2 due Presentations 26-30
Class 10 Nov 20	Race, gender, and resistance	Jones – Why are memes of black people reacting so popular online? Massanari – Attack of the 50-foot Social Justice Warrior	Presentations 31-35
Class 11 Nov 27	Me_irl	King – Ermahgerddon: The Untold Story of the Ermahgerd Girl	Presentations 36-40
Class 12 Dec 4	Course Wrap-up		Final Essay due



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

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 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

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 4th 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/uwo.com/mentalhealth/>

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/learnin

g Indigenous Services:

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

a/

International and Exchange Student Centre:

Centre:

www.sdc.uwo.ca/int Career

Centre at Western:

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.