The University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Information and Media Studies
Digital Communications
Winter 2020

VIRTUAL WORLDS

Instructor: Dr. Andie Shabbar

Time: M 7:00-10:00 PM
Location: FNB1220

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Office hours: TBA
Location: FNB 4120

Course Description
How do virtual worlds mediate our experiences and expressions in the world? What is the socio-political relationship between society and virtual world technology, and how is this relationship being harnessed by institutions, artists, businesses, markets, and activists? Addressing these questions, we will examine the role of virtual worlds, virtual games, virtual reality, and other related technologies in a variety of contexts ranging from entrepreneurship and education to social justice issues and gender identity expression. As a study of principles and production, students will gain an understanding of theoretical and practical applications of virtual worlds and simulation spaces. Students will learn the techniques and critical skills required for creating and managing communities, identities and interactivity in virtual and online worlds.
No previous experience with virtual worlds required. 3 lecture hours, 0.5 credits.

Course Materials
Available on OWL.
This course does not have a lab component. However, you will be asked to visit virtual worlds on your own time. Instructions and links to online tutorials will be provided. Please speak with me if you would like to arrange for one-on-one help with accessing a virtual world (if scheduling permits, we can meet in a lab).

Methods of Evaluation
Participation	ongoing	10%
Virtual futures group project outline	Mar.2	5%
Mid-term Exam	Feb. 10	20%
Virtual futures group project	March 23	35%
Final Exam	TBA	30%

Course and Learning Objectives

This course aims to:
- Introduce students to the basic vocabulary, terminology, theories, and issues surrounding virtual worlds;
- Identify and analyze social justice issues as they relate to the production and experience of virtual worlds;
- Consider the relationship between embodiment, technology, and ideology;
- Deepen critical thinking about the self and one's relationship to the (virtual) world.

Students who take this course will:
- Learn how to critically assess applications of virtual worlds and their political implications on social life and identity;
- Develop a critical awareness of interdisciplinary approaches to virtual worlds;
- Work collaboratively to develop a focused group project proposal;
- Articulate, both orally and in writing, theories and concepts relating to virtual worlds.

Description of Assignments

1. Virtual Futures group project outline: 5%
    This assignment is part of the larger group project outlined below. Each group will hand in a 1-2 page outline of their project ideas (single-spaced). The outline must include **1)** a tentative title for the project, **2)** names of group members, **3)** a short description of the proposed project, and **4)** a timeline detailing who is responsible for what aspect of the project. You will be given time in-class to work on your project and project outline.

2. Mid-term exam 20%
    There will be a 2-hour test followed by the scheduled lecture. More details as well as a test-review will be made available in class.

    *Any makeup exams will be held on the following dates: February 14, 28; March 6, 13, 20, 27

3. Virtual futures group project 35%
    - Final Concept media 10%
    - Written proposal 15%
    - Presentation 10%

    Working in groups of 4-5 students will develop a *proposed* intervention or invention related to virtual worlds. More details including possible topics and approaches will be made available in class.

4. Participation 10%
    Teaching methods used in this course incorporate a significant amount of student activity and class contribution. Students may be asked to complete various in-class activities such as creating an avatar, writing two-minute responses, playing virtual games in class, and submitting critical questions that are relevant to the week's lecture/readings. While these activities will not be graded, to receive participation marks their completion is required. In addition to these activities, students are expected to make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. You will be evaluated based on the quality (not quantity) of your contributions.

5.   Final Exam 30%

Course Policies

Submitting Assignments
All assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class unless instructed otherwise. Any writing assignments must also be submitted to OWL> Turnitin.
Assignments will NOT be accepted by email.

You cannot submit assignments in DC 2002B that have been submitted in other courses. Late assignments may be penalized at the rate of 5% per day, including weekends. If an assignment is late due to illness or other legitimate reasons, students must contact the professor as soon as possible and provide supporting documentation to the Office of the Dean of the appropriate faculty.

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices
Given the focus of this class and some of the learning activities we will be doing, you are encouraged to bring your laptops (or the equivalent). There are a number of course components where these technologies may be integrated into classroom activities to explore ideas in a more hands-on way. However, given that these technologies can be distracting to the user and to others around them, they should be used only for class activities and note taking. The instructor therefore reserves the right to ask that technologies be put away if they are becoming a disruption during a class, or to ban them altogether if they are not being used in a constructive way. Please do not use cellular phones during lecture (unless used for class) – if you must take a call or return a text message, please leave the room to do so OR wait until class is over!

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).

LECTURE SCHEDULE

Jan. 6 – Introduction: What are virtual worlds and why do they matter?

Tom Boellstroff, "Three real futures for virtual worlds."

Paul R. Messinger, et al., "Virtual worlds – past, present, and future: New directions in social computing".

Recommended:
Joe Sanchez, "A social history of virtual worlds."

Maeva Veerapen, "Where do virtual worlds come from?: A genealogy of *Second Life.*"

Jan. 13 – User Motivations & The Business of Desire

Stefano Gualeni, "The experience machine: Existential reflections on virtual worlds"

Anastasia Salter, "Virtually yours: Desire and fulfillment in virtual worlds"

Jan. 20 – Consumption and Labour

Ian Bogost, "The rhetoric of video games".

Lisa Nakamura, "Don't hate the player, hate the game: The racialization of labor in *World of Warcraft*"

Recommended:
Dan Burk, "Copyright, culture, and community in virtual worlds."

Jan. 27 – Surveillance and Military

Tim Stevens, "Security and surveillance in virtual worlds: Who is watching the warlocks and why?"

Carrie Anderson, "Games of drones: The uneasy future of the soldier-hero in *Call of Duty: Black Ops II*"

Recommended:
Jennifer Martin, "*Second Life* surveillance: Power to the people or virtual surveillance society?"

Marcus Schulze, "The virtual war on terror: Counterterrorism narratives in video games"

Feb. 3 – Legal Issues, Community, and Governance

Julian Dibbell, "A rape in cyberspace".

Sal Humphreys, "Ruling the virtual world".

Recommended:
Brian Simpson, "What happens online stays online? Virtual punishment in the real world"

Feb. 10 – Virtual worlds and the Prison Industrial Complex   Mid-term Test

Helen Farley, "Using 3D worlds in prison: Driving, learning and escape."

Feb. 17 – Reading Week

Feb. 24 – From Activism to Hacktivism

Burcu S. Bakioglu, "Negotiating governance in virtual worlds: Grief play, hacktivism, and LeakOps in *Second Life.*"

Paul Taylor, "From hackers to hacktivists: Speed bumps on the global superhighway?"

Mar. 2 – Settler colonialism and Social Justice   Project outlines due

Joe Cloutier, "Marginalized urban Indigenous youth and the virtual world of Second Life: Understanding the past and building a hopeful future."

Sophie Oliver, "Simulating the ethical community: Interactive game media and engaging human rights claims".

Theresa Lynn Petray, "Protest 2.0: Online interactions and Aboriginal activists"

Mar. 9 – Avatars and Identities: Gender and Sexuality

Jay Bernard, "Virtually queer."

Lina Eklund, "Doing gender in cyberspace: The performance of gender by female World of Warcraft players."

Elizabeth Picarra, "Avatars and virtual worlds: Unsettling the rules of porn."

Recommended:
Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Shannon Schipper, "Sexing the avatar: Gender, sexualization, and cyber-harassment in a virtual world"

Bonnie Ruberg, "Permalife: Video games and the queerness of living."

Mar. 16 – Avatars and Identities: Disability and Race

Phylis Johnson and Jonathan P. Pluskota, "Constructing identities in Second Life: The challenge of representation in cyberspace."

Jennifer Cole, et al., "GimpGirl grows up: Women with disabilities rethinking, redefining, and reclaiming community".

Recommended reading:
John Scalzi, "Straight white male: The lowest difficulty setting there is".

Lisa Nakamura, "Queer female of color: The highest difficulty setting there is? Gaming rhetoric as gender capital".

Mar. 23 – Group Presentations

No readings

Mar. 30 - Virtual Futures: Creativity and Art   Exam Review

Cecilia H. Suhr, "The audience and artist interactivity in augmented reality art: The solo exhibition on the flame series."

Amanda Starling Gould, "Invisible visualities: Augmented reality art and the contemporary media ecology".

Christine Liao, "Art medium too: Avatar, art, and assemblages".

TBA - Final Exam

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 Accessible Education (formerly 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, unless noted on the syllabus. 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/uwocom/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/learning
Indigenous Services: http://indigenous.uwo.ca/
International and Exchange Student 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.