



MIT 3216G The Culture of Consumption

Faculty of Information and Media Studies – Winter 2021

Instructor: Dr. Atle Mikkola Kjösen

Email: akjosen2@uwo.ca

Asynchronous content: OWL

Synchronous session: Thursday, 3.30 pm – 4.30 pm (Zoom)

Office hours: Thursday, 4.30 – 5.30 pm or by appointment (Zoom)

Prerequisites

The prerequisite for MIT 3216F is completion of second year and all second year required courses (MIT 2000F/G and 2100 F/G, MIT 2200 F/F, and MIT 2500) Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you will be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

This course examines the emergence, development and social significance of our culture of consumption. Through the use of history, concepts, and theories, the contemporary role of consumption is assessed in relation to various topics, including agency, identity-formation, activism, space, and meaning, as well as touching on various consumption phenomena such as fast fashion and the demise of shopping malls. The course aims to develop student awareness of, and the ability to apply, historical and theoretical analyses to questions concerning our culture of consumption.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this class students will be able to

- Define and apply key concepts used in the academic field of consumption studies and material culture in order to analyse and discuss the culture of consumption as such and the implications of a culture predicated on consumption.
- Explain how the culture of consumption emerged in the transition to, and developed in tandem with, the capitalist mode of production.
- Position consumerism within the structure-agency debate in order to discuss how the consumer is sovereign even as their behaviour is determined by the capitalist mode of production, phenomena like advertising and retail store design, and subject position.
- Explain how cultures of consumption are historically and geographically specific, as well as how acts of consumption are conditioned by time and space.

- Explain how our culture and social world is made meaningful through consumption and our material culture.

Assignments

A detailed description of these assignments has been uploaded to the course's OWL site in the **RESOURCES=>assignment** folder.

To mark papers, I make use of the "track changes" function in MS Word to make suggested edits and provide comments. This means that all papers must be submitted in a *word doc format*.

All assignments must be uploaded to the corresponding **ASSIGNMENT** tab on OWL, which will automatically also upload your paper to Turnitin.

Participation (10%)

Based on two conversations with the course instructor during private office hours, once prior to the reading week and one after.

The topics for these meetings are selected by the student and can concern any aspect of the course. For example, students may ask informed questions based on the weekly lessons, assigned texts, and case studies, or how to solve a particular assignment. These conversations will be graded as either pass (50%), very good (75%), or excellent (100%).

Short assignment 1 – Semiotic analysis of a material cultural artefact: (15%)

Due: Feb 12, 11:55pm.

Drawing inspiration from Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of material objects (cheese, wine, wrestling, toys etc.) in *Mythologies*, students must do a similar analysis of a bought object. You will get the option to re-write and thus improve the grade of this paper after receiving comments and suggestions. You have the option to write individually or in a pair.

Midterm essay (25%)

Due: March 12, 11:55 pm.

For the take-home midterm you will be asked to write a 750-1000-words long essay (1.5 or double line-spacing; 12pt Times New Roman; consistent citation system) that incorporates key concepts from the course. The essay question options will be circulated at least one week prior to the due date. While this assignment is technically your midterm, I expect you to write an essay that has the quality of a short-paper assignment (what this means in detail is clarified in the detailed description of assignments).

Short assignment 2 - Introduction and one paragraph for final essay (15%)

Due: March 26th, 11:55pm.

The second short assignment asks you to write your introduction to your final paper that includes a thesis statement and a proposed “roadmap” of your argument, a paragraph of your essay in which you define one of the core concepts you will be using, and provide a bibliography that identifies at minimum three academic texts that you will engage with in your final paper.

Final research paper (35%)

Due: April 19, 11:55pm.

For this assignment you are asked to research and write a paper on a phenomenon related to the culture of consumption and/or material culture.

Extra credit (up to 3%)

Students who regularly attend and actively participate during the Thursday Zoom sessions will be eligible for an extra credit of up to 3% added to your final grade. For students living in time zones that make it difficult to impossible to attend the Zoom sessions will have the opportunity to do another extra credit assignment.

Grading

All assignments will be graded per the MIT grading guidelines (see last page of this course outline). All grades will be posted to OWL’s **GRADEBOOK**.

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 **March 12, 2021**. Students can find details about this academic policy here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/evaluation_undergrad.pdf

Please note, students who receive academic accommodation for the assignments on which these grades are based may not receive feedback in time to meet this deadline.

Students are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of the grades they have received in their courses.

For your own protection, always keep a copy of your assignments. In case of loss, theft, destruction, dispute over authorship, or any other eventuality, it will be your responsibility to provide a copy of the assignment.

Extensions and Late Penalty

I give out extensions like candy on Halloween, irrespective of reason. Please ask for one at least 48 hours prior to the due date.

Papers handed in late without an extension or accompanying documentation of illness or emergency will receive a penalty of 5% a day for up to four days; on the fifth day, the paper will receive an automatic FAIL.

You cannot receive an extension for the midterm essay. Not handing it in on the due date will count as having missed the midterm. Travel schedules, employment, etc. will NOT count as legitimate reasons for missing or rescheduling an exam.

If you have a medical illness or compassionate grounds (i.e., death in family, house fire), please contact the FIMS front office for accommodation. You may also use a self-reported absence (SRA) in the case of unexpected eventualities that force you to miss the midterm essay deadline.

Submission of Work Following a Self-Reported Absence (SRA)

Students have two (2) opportunities during the academic year to submit a self-reported absence (SRA). See the “dean’s notes” on the second to last page of this course outline for an explanation of how, when, and in what cases you can use an SRA.

If you have used an SRA for the two short-paper assignments, you are expected to submit them within 48 hours after the end of the self-reported absence (i.e. four days after the initial deadline).

If you have used an SRA for the midterm essay, you must contact the course instructor within 24 hours of the end of the self-reported absence to agree on a make-up date.

Communication Policy

The best way to contact me is via email (akjosen2@uwo.ca). When you send me an email, please put the course code (MIT 3216) in the subject line. I respond to most email inquiries within 48hrs, but typically much sooner. Please send inquiries that can be answered with a sentence or two. For inquiries that require more thorough responses, please request an online office hour.

To keep in touch and give you updates about the course, tips and suggestions for assignments and more, I send announcements via OWL. These announcements will be pushed to your email. You are therefore required to periodically check your Western email account. Students are responsible for ensuring that their email account is working properly, including making sure it is not full.

Statement on the Use of Zoom Recording

The Thursday Zoom sessions will not be recorded by the instructor. Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

Weekly Course Lessons

Due to the pandemic forcing courses to adopt a remote learning model, this course will primarily be delivered in an asynchronous manner on OWL. This means that you will access course material according to your own weekly schedule. For this reason, it is *vital* that you become *intimately familiar* with the course's *OWL site*.

Each week, course content can be accessed through the **LESSON** page on OWL and by clicking on the appropriate numbered lesson (e.g. "1. Introduction", "2. The history of consumption", "3. Key concepts and the 'problem' of consumption" etc.). Each lesson consists of a combination of video lectures, course assigned texts, PowerPoint slides, and other content that you should engage with in an order suggested by the course instructor (e.g. first read an assigned text, then watch a video lecture, then do an activity etc.). You proceed through element of the lesson using a checklist.

All course content is either embedded in or can be accessed through the lesson pages, be this assigned readings, externally hosted content, forums, activities and so on. In other words, the course lives in and through these weekly lessons. While all course content will be uploaded to the resources tool on OWL, it is strongly recommended that you follow the weekly lessons.

Despite being delivered asynchronously, the course has a **weekly "rhythm"** you should be aware of and around which you should organize your learning. Each week, the instructor will make video or podcast lectures available on **Fridays**. Every **Thursday 3.30 pm – 4.30 pm** serves as a tutorial/ open office hour where the instructor clarifies weekly content by answering questions posed by students. Right after this session, an additional office hour will be held from **4.30 – 5.30 pm** for students to meet with the course instructor privately.

Course Materials

All assigned texts, weekly lesson slides, and external course content are accessible through the weekly **LESSONS** on OWL. All course readings and the weekly slides can also be found in the **RESOURCES** tool on OWL but will not have all the material used in the weekly lessons (e.g.

YouTube videos and other external content the instructor uses as examples). It is therefore strongly recommended that you engage with the course's materials using the lessons tool on OWL.

Course Schedule

Jan 11-15 – Lesson 1: Introduction

Complete “Lesson 1” which simulates a weekly lesson by introducing you to the course’s learning outcomes, assignments, policies, and schedule using a mix of video lectures, texts, and tasks, while using checkboxes to keep track of where you are in the lesson.

Jan 18-22 – Lesson 2: The history and rise of the culture of consumption

Strasser, Susan (2009). “The Alien Past: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective.” In Turow, Joseph and McAllister, Matthew P. (Eds.) (2009). *The Advertising and Consumer Culture Reader*. Routledge: New York, NY. 26-37.

Corrigan, Peter (1997). “Introduction: Advents of the Consumer Society.” *The Sociology of Consumption: An Introduction*. SAGE Publications: London. 1-16.

Jan 25-29 – Lesson 3: Why study consumption? Key concepts and a case study (fast fashion)

Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (Eds.) (1991). “Consumption.” *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*. London: Taylor and Francis. 62-65.

Marshall, Gordon (Ed.) (1998). “Leisure, sociological studies of” and “Leisure class”. *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 364-365.

Cline, Elizabeth L. (2012). “Fast Fashion”. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. London: Penguin. 95-118.

Material culture text TBD.

Feb 1-5 – Lesson 4: the meaning of consumption

Barthes, Roland (1972). *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang: New York, NY. 36-38 (Soap), 53-55 (Toys), 58-61 (Wine and Milk), 62-64 (Steak and Chips). 88-90 (the New Citroen), 111-117 (Myth as a Semiological System)

Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (Eds.) (1991). "Myth." *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*. London: Taylor and Francis. 62-65.

Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (Eds.) (1991). "Sign" and "Signifier/Signified". *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*. London: Taylor and Francis. 238-239.

McCracken, Grant (1986) "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods." *Journal of Consumer Research* 13(1):71-84.

Feb 8-12 – Lesson 5: Assignment 1/catch-up week

This lesson includes an optional short writing workshop on how to write papers in MIT. Otherwise, you should work on your first assignment and catch up with course material if you've fallen behind. Dr. Kjoson will hold additional office hours this week.

Feb 15-19 – Reading week (no lesson)

Feb 22-26 – Lesson 6: agency and consumption

Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (Eds.) (1991). "Agency and Structure." *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*. London: Taylor and Francis. 10-11.

Underhill, Paco (n.d.). A-Z Retail Tricks to Make you Shop.

Death drive and consumer sovereignty texts TBD.

Mar 1-5 – Lesson 7: Spaces of consumption

Malls, department stores, the rise of the store in the first place (Braudel); the arcades

Corrigan, Peter (1997). "The Home". *The Sociology of Consumption: An Introduction*. SAGE Publications: London. 96-114.

Moss, Mark Howard (2007). "The Department Store." *Shopping as an Entertainment Experience*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 31-41.

Uberti, David (2014). "The Death of the American Mall." *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/jun/19/-sp-death-of-the-american-shopping-mall>

Mar 8-12 – Lesson 8: Midterm

Mar 15-19 – Lesson 9: Ethical consumption/consumer activism

Heath, Joseph and Potter, Andrew (2005). *The Rebel Sell: How the Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*. Selections TBD.

Carrier, James D. (2008). "Think Locally, Act Globally: The Political Economy of Ethical Consumption." *Research in Economic Anthropology*, vol. 28: 31-51.

Wettergren, Åsa. (2013). "Culture Jamming." *Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*.

Mar 22-26 – Lesson 10: Assignment 2 week

This week you should work on your second assignment and catch up with course material if you've fallen behind. Dr. Kjoson will hold additional office hours this week.

Mar 29-Apr 2 – Lesson 11: Identity and consumption: age and gender OR consuming culture and media

Adorno, Theodore (1941). "On Popular Music." *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9:17.

OR

Shaw, Jenny (2010). "Signposts and Shopping Milestones: Too Old for Topshop" and "Shopping: A Rough Guide to Gender". *Shopping: Social and Cultural Perspectives*. Malden, MA: Polity Press. 68-108.

Apr 5-9 – Lesson 12: Final paper working week

Final paper due April 19.

NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Winter 2021

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, including take-home exams, 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 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 two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, 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 or equivalent documentation, 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

In the event of a Covid-19 resurgence, it is possible that different procedures may need to be put in place on short notice.

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

Mental Health Support:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Accessible Education:

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Accessibility Information:

www.accessibility.uwo.ca/

Writing Support Centre:

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

Learning Skills Services:

<https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>

Academic Learning and Support for Online Learning:

<https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/types/academic-and-learning-support.html>

Indigenous Services:

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

Western International:

<https://international.uwo.ca/>

Career Centre:

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

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.