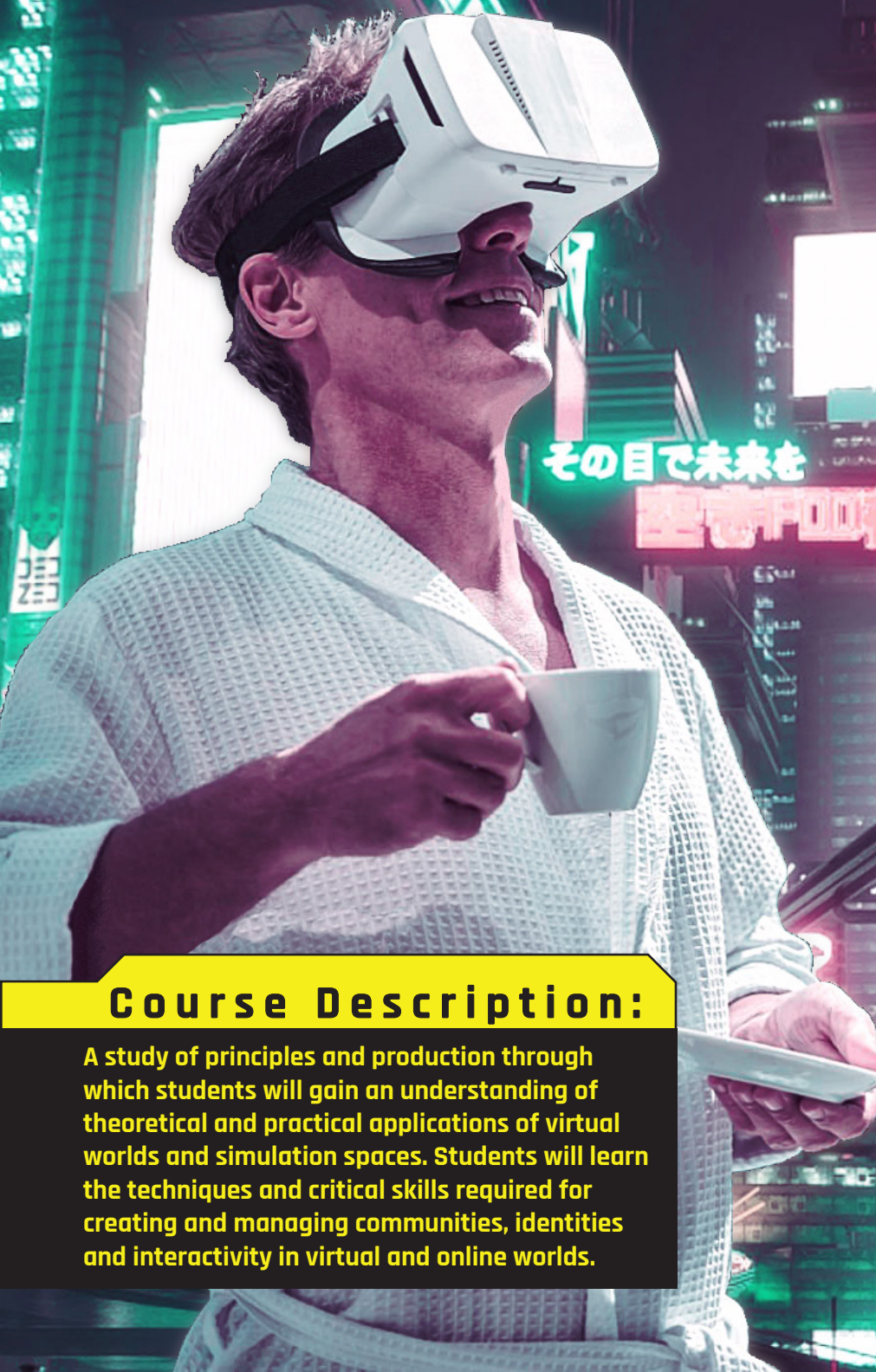


VIRTUAL WORLDS

DIGICOMM 2002



Co-ordinates

Instructor:
Dr. Luke Arnott

Lecture:
Mondays, 3:30-6:30
FNB 1270

Office Hours:
Mondays, 2:30-3:30
FNB 4134

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WINTER 2023

The University of
Western Ontario

Faculty of Information
and Media Studies

Course Description:

A study of principles and production through which 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.

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Evaluation Breakdown

Virtual World Critique	15%
Midterm	20%
Group Presentation	20%
Pop Quizzes	10%
Final Exam	35%

1. Virtual World Critique **DUE: Jan. 30**
Students will write a 750-1000 word evaluation of a fictional virtual world, assessing how aspects of its real-world context inform its media construction.

2. Midterm **DATE: Feb. 13**
Students will write an in-class midterm based on all course readings and lectures up to that point. The format will consist of multiple choice, short answer questions and essay questions. (Midterms missed with valid academic consideration will be administered by FIMS UGSS.)

3. Group Presentation **DATE: Various**
At the start of the term, students will be divided into groups of four or five. Beginning the week of February 5, each group will be assigned a class in which they will report on a case study dealing with a reading or theme in the course. Presentations will run approximately 20 minutes, with 10 minutes set aside for class discussion, which will be facilitated and moderated by that week's group members.

4. Pop Quizzes **DATE: Various**
Throughout the semester, pop quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class. The five highest-scoring quizzes for each student will count toward the final grade.

5. Final Exam **DATE: TBA**
This will cover all course material and take place during the official final exam period in April. It will consist of multiple choice and essay questions.

Course Policies

Late policy: All assignments are due via OWL at the specified date and time; any submitted afterward will be considered at least one day late. Late assignments will have 5% deducted from the grade for every calendar day they are overdue (this includes weekends). Assignments more than a week late will receive a mark of zero. There will be no exceptions without proper academic consideration.

Email policy: Please e-mail me about any course-related questions you may have. Be advised, however, that I have other commitments and sometimes cannot respond right away. I regularly check and answer university emails on Mondays and Thursdays, so it might be 2 or 3 days before I can get back to you.

Please check your university email account regularly. Email/OWL will be the primary means of communication with the class, and during the term I may send you reminders and supplementary materials electronically.

Electronic devices policy: Laptops and mobile devices may only be used for note-taking in class, whose use (barring official accommodation) is a privilege. However, due to the nature of the course, monitored use of social media on personal devices may be allowed as part of class activities. No electronic devices are permitted in exams.





Lecture Schedule:

Week #1	January 9	
Introduction: Let's Get Virtual Readings: Bogost; Ball		
Week #2	January 16	
Pure Imagination: Virtuality and Media History Readings: Bitarello; Beaudrillard		
Week #3	January 23	
Virtual Worlds: Digital Predecessors Readings: Woolley; Bartle; Veerapen		
Week #4	January 30	Virtual World Critique Due
Oh Hi, Mark: VR and Metaverses Readings: Egliston & Carter; Deloitte		
Week #5	February 6	1-2 in-class group presentations
Virtual Boys: Gaming, VR, and Immersion Readings: Jungherr & Schlarb; Schultze		
Week #6	February 13	
Midterm Exam		
Week #7	February 20	
Winter Reading Week: No Class		
Week #8	February 27	1-2 in-class group presentations
Appiest Place on Earth: Theme Parks, Concerts, Augmented Reality Readings: Gould; Graham et al.		
Week #9	March 6	up to 5 in-class group presentations
Group Presentation Week		
Week #10	March 13	1-2 in-class group presentations
How Do You Do, Fellow Kids? Education and Virtual Worlds for Children Readings: Melchor-Couto; Grimes		
Week #11	March 20	1-2 in-class group presentations
Takin' Care of Business: Work and Love in Virtual Worlds Readings: Dibbel; Roquet		
Week #12	March 27	1-2 in-class group presentations
Attack of the Drones: The Virtual Warspace Readings: Andersen; Allen		
Week #13	April 3	
Be Seeing You: Conclusion and Review		

Course Readings:

(Available via the course OWL site):

- Allen, Robertson. 2017. 'The Full-Spectrum Soft Sell of the Army Experience'. In *America's Digital Army*, 89-114. University of Nebraska Press.
- Andersen, Carrie Elizabeth. 2014. 'Games of Drones: The Uneasy Future of the Soldier-Hero in Call of Duty: Black Ops II'. *Surveillance & Society* 12 (3): 360-76. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v12i3.4954>.
- Ball, Matthew. 2022. 'When Will the Metaverse Arrive?' In *The Metaverse: And How It Will Revolutionize Everything*. Liveright Publishing Corporation.
- Bartle, Richard. 2003. 'Introduction to Virtual Worlds'. In *Designing Virtual Worlds*, 1-43. Indianapolis, IN: New Riders. <https://mud.co.uk/richard/DesigningVirtualWorlds.pdf>.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. 'Simulacra and Science Fiction'. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, 121-27. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Bittarello, Maria Beatrice. 2013. 'Mythologies of Virtuality: "Other Space" and "Shared Dimension" from Ancient Myths to Cyberspace'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, edited by Mark Grimshaw-Aagaard, 86-110. Oxford UP. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199826162.013.008>.
- Bogost, Ian. 2021. 'The Metaverse Is Bad'. *The Atlantic*, 21 October 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2021/10/facebook-metaverse-name-change/620449/>.
- Deloitte. 2022. 'The Metaverse Overview: Vision, Technology, and Tactics'. <https://www2.deloitte.com/cn/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/metaverse-report.html>.
- Dibbell, Julien. 1993. 'A Rape in Cyberspace'. *The Village Voice*, 21 December 1993.
- Egliston, Ben, and Marcus Carter. 2022. 'Oculus Imaginaries: The Promises and Perils of Facebook's Virtual Reality'. *New Media & Society* 24 (1): 70-89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960411>.
- Gould, Amanda Starling. 2014. 'Invisible Visualities: Augmented Reality Art and the Contemporary Media Ecology'. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 20 (1): 25-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856513514332>.
- Graham, Mark, Matthew Zook, and Andrew Boulton. 2013. 'Augmented Reality in Urban Places: Contested Content and the Duplicity of Code'. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38 (3): 464-79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00539.x>.
- Grimes, Sara. 2021. 'Playing as Making and Creating'. In *Digital Playgrounds: The Hidden Politics of Children's Online Play Spaces, Virtual Worlds, and Connected Games*, 216-60. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442668195>.
- Jungherr, Andreas, and Damien B. Schlarb. 2022. 'The Extended Reach of Game Engine Companies: How Companies Like Epic Games and Unity Technologies Provide Platforms for Extended Reality Applications and the Metaverse'. *Social Media + Society* 8 (2): 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221107641>.
- Melchor-Couto, Sabela. 2019. 'Virtual Worlds and Language Learning'. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds* 11 (1): 29-43. https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.11.1.29_1.
- Roquet, Paul. 2021. 'VR Telerwork and the Privatization of Presence'. In *The Immersive Enclosure: Virtual Reality in Japan*, 81-104. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schultze, Ulrike. 2014. 'Performing Embodied Identity in Virtual Worlds'. *European Journal of Information Systems* 23 (1): 84-95. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2012.52>.
- Veerapen, Maeva. 2013. 'Where Do Virtual Worlds Come From?: A Genealogy of Second Life'. *Games and Culture* 8 (2): 98-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412013478683>.
- Woolley, Benjamin. 1993. 'Simulation'. In *Virtual Worlds: A Journey in Hype and Hyperreality*, 274. London, UK: Penguin.

NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Winter 2023

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

Academic Accommodation

Students with disabilities work with [Accessible Education \(AE\)](#) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing.

Medical Consideration

Students who have medical grounds for academic consideration for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth **10% or more of their final grade** must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty (for FIMS students this is [Undergraduate Student Services](#)).

Students are required to provided

documentation in the form of a [Student Medical Certificate](#). It will be the Dean's Office that will determine if consideration is warranted.

For work worth less than 10% of the final grade, the instructor will consider requests for academic consideration on medical grounds made in a timely manner in writing or during office hours. Such requests need not be accompanied by documentation. The instructor may decide to require documentation be submitted to the appropriate Academic Counselling office.

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

Compassionate Accommodation

Academic accommodation (extensions, makeup tests and exams, additional assignments etc.) may be given to students on compassionate grounds. The situations for which compassionate accommodation can be given must be serious, including significant events such as death in the immediate family, trauma (fire, robbery, harassment, muggings, car accidents, etc.) or emergency situations. Documentation is required.

If a member of your immediate family is seriously ill, obtain a medical certificate from the family member's physician and submit the documentation to your Academic Counsellor.

If you have been involved in a severe accident, fire, or some other exceptional crisis, obtain a copy of the police report or be prepared to provide the necessary documentation upon request.

Generally, for deaths within a student's immediate family (parents, guardians, caregivers, siblings, spouses), bereavement leave is granted, upon provision of documentation. For deaths within a student's extended family, academic accommodation is given for one to three days, upon provision of documentation. Students seeking additional bereavement leave should contact their Academic Counsellors with valid documentation.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Advisor. Additional information is given in the [Western Academic Calendar](#).

Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence, you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts, [here](#). The gender-based violence and survivor support case managers are located in Thames Hall (3114-3127 office suite.) To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Health and Wellness](#) for a complete list of supports.

SUPPORT SERVICES - LINKS

[FIMS UGSS](#): *academic advising; career services*

[Psychological Services](#): *Information about accessing mental health supports*

[Medical Services](#): *Student health related services*

[Office of the Registrar](#): *Financial Information, Timetable, Exam Schedules, Academic Calendar Information*

[Academic Support and Engagement](#): *Central Academic Supports, including Writing Centre, Learning Development, Transition and Leadership Supports, and Careers and Experience*

[Accessible Education](#): *Assessment and recommendations for students with disabilities*

[Accessibility Information](#): *Information to help support barrier free access, including floor plans, accessible washroom locations, service disruptions etc.*

[Indigenous Student Services](#): *Includes information about financial support, indigenous self-identification, orientation, and tutor support*

[Western International](#): *Information and support for international students and students seeking to go on exchange*

FIMS Grading Policy

FIMS Undergraduate programs now have the following class average policy:

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%.

Second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2025, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%. The third year required (MIT 3100) is expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

Elective courses and 4th year seminars have no recommended course averages.

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.

COVID-19 SUPPLEMENT

1. In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

2. Students will be expected to wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom as per university policy and public health directives. Students who are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons should seek accommodation through Accessible Education.

3. Students are expected not to eat or drink while in class to ensure masks stay in place. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks.

