

*In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, affected 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.*

**MIT 3211g**

**The Culture of Celebrity**

**Winter 2023**

Dr. Keir Keightley  
Email: kkeightl@uwo.ca

Wednesdays, 2:30-5:30, FNB-2240  
Office Hours: by Zoom appointment

An unprecedented culture of celebrity arose in the early twentieth century and it seems only to have gained momentum in our time. Permeating everyday life in unprecedented fashion, now more than ever we require critical tools to understand the full significance of stardom. Why do we celebrate stars? What can the analysis of celebrities tell us about ideas of self and individual identity in the new millennium? The growth of celebrity culture was driven by the expansion of mass media and consumer culture in the 20th century. The course will thus investigate those institutional and industrial processes which have been crucial in establishing stars who appear to articulate our most intimate thoughts and desires. In particular, the course will focus on the emergence and development of the Hollywood star system and on the role of celebrity within popular music cultures. The course will introduce a range of critical and theoretical approaches within celebrity studies and will present case studies of selected stars. There are complex issues underlying our apparently endless fascination with fame, and the study of celebrity as a cultural phenomenon can reveal a great deal about both society and self.

### **Course Objectives**

- 1) To survey key historical developments and cultural texts (e.g., particular stars, writings and films) relating to the culture of celebrity in the twentieth century.
- 2) To understand the industrial and institutional processes that create, maintain and disseminate stars and celebrities.
- 3) To familiarize students with some of the critical literature on celebrity and develop tools for investigating the social and cultural significance of stars and stardom.
- 4) To develop critical and analytical abilities and improve writing and argumentation skills.

### **Evaluation**

**1) A Face in the Crowd Response Paper: 25% of final grade **due in-class & OWL January 25<sup>th</sup> @2:30****

For this assignment, you first need to read Horton & Wohl's (1956) article on para-social interaction and then stream A Face in the Crowd (1957). In your paper you will address two things: 1) your own, first-person, response to the film—any aspect or aspects that made an impression on you, that struck you as interesting/inspiring/irritating, explaining your position with evidence/examples from the film, etc.—your job here is to contemplate what the film made you think and feel, and write about it; and then 2) discuss how Horton & Wohl's concept of para-social interaction might have played a role in the rise of Lonesome Rhodes, illustrating your explanation with at least one example from the film, describing what Rhodes does and how it relates to para-social interaction (#2 should occupy roughly one double-spaced page).

**Submit your paper in OWL "Assignments" as a Word file (.docx), NOT a .pdf, with your first and last name as a HEADER inside the document, plus a HARD COPY to me in class**

**Length: ~4 pages double-spaced; no notes or bibliography required.**

Streaming URL:

<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=https://stream.mcintyre.ca/westernu2020/title/21714>

**2) Studio System & Star Response Paper: 25% of final due in class & OWL March 1<sup>st</sup> @2:30**

Read de Cordova on “Star System”; watch the two American Cinema documentary episodes about the Hollywood studio system and the star. Describe the parts that you found most unusual or interesting to you, explaining what made them stand out for you. Spend equal time in your paper on the studio and the star; then think about how the system and the star relate—how each needs the other, yet how their relative power shifts over time—and discuss using relevant ideas from de Cordova (the ratio is really up to you; as a rough guide, ~1.5 pages on star, ~1.5. on studio, ~1 on de Cordova). **Submit your paper in OWL “Assignments” as a Word file (.docx), NOT a .pdf, with your name as a HEADER inside the document, as well as a HARD COPY to me in class**

**Length: ~4 pages double-spaced; no notes or bibliography required.**

Studio System streaming URL:

[uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL\\_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068705163](http://uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068705163)

Star: [uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL\\_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068605163](http://uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068605163)

**3) Final Essay: 35% of final grade Hard copy due at start of last class April 5th (please also upload your essay to OWL)**

The essay will draw on all relevant material presented, read, and streamed/screened during the course. It will ask you to integrate concepts, ideas and/or debates from multiple lectures in discussing a specific aspect of the culture of celebrity in approximately 6-7 double-spaced pages. I strongly encourage you to set up a Zoom with me to discuss possible topics and approaches in advance. The two main avenues for finding a topic involve either: a particular star image analysis (modelled on Dyer’s discussion of Fonda, or Mercer on Michael Jackson, or our in-class work on DiCaprio, etc.; metacritic.com is a good source of reviews of films), **OR** a more traditional, secondary-source research paper exploring a debate or issue in celebrity studies (one of many examples is the voluminous literature on para-sociality – scholar.google.ca allows you to “search within citing articles” to narrow down a topic that is both interesting and “do-able”, i.e., reasonably focussed in scope). **Length: 6-7 double-spaced pages, plus bibliography and any illustrations.** (Note: if you do a star image analysis, it must not duplicate one from class readings or lectures, i.e., no papers on Jane Fonda or Leonardo DiCaprio).

**4) Attendance/Participation: 15% of final grade.**

I will take attendance at the start of each class, and will make note of individual student’s contributions to in-class discussions.

## **Outline of Lectures and Required Readings**

### **Jan. 11 Introduction**

Suggested Readings:

Horkheimer and Adorno (1944). Excerpt from Dialectic of Enlightenment (OWL)

George Monbiot “Celebrity isn’t just harmless fun – it’s the smiling face of the corporate machine.” The Guardian 20 December 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/20/celebrity-corporate-machine-fame-big-business-donald-trump-kim-kardashian>

**Jan. 18** No Lecture: **Required Streamed Film: A Face in the Crowd** (1957)  
<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=https://stream.mcintyre.ca/westernu2020/title/21502>

Required Reading: Donald Horton & Richard Wohl (1956) "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction" Psychiatry 19.3. Available as a .pdf in OWL

**Jan. 25** **Demagogue in Denim** **"Face" responses due in class**

Suggested Readings:

Noam Cohen (2009) "When Stars Twitter, a Ghost May Be Lurking" New York Times March 27 (OWL)

Kellen Browning and Kashmir Hill (2022) "How Streaming Stars Pay the Price of Online Fame" New York Times July 29 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/29/technology/twitch-stalking.html>

**Feb. 1** **Celebrity/Democracy**

Required Reading:

Joshua Gamson (1994) "Introduction" **and** Chapter 1, "The Great and the Gifted" Claims to Fame (Berkeley: University of California Press) [**2 separate** .pdfs in OWL]

Daniel Boorstin (1961) "From Hero to Celebrity" from The Image (OWL)  
*(required readings are found in the OWL Resources "Readings Listed Alphabetically" folder)*

**Feb. 8** **Authenticity**

Required Readings:

Richard Dyer (1991) "A Star Is Born and the Construction of Authenticity" from Stardom ed. C. Gledhill.

Simon Frith (1988) "The Real Thing: Bruce Springsteen" in Music For Pleasure

Suggested Reading: Gamson (1994) Chap. 7 "Can't Beat the Real Thing".

**Feb. 15** No lecture: **Required Streamed documentaries: The Studio System and The Star**

Studio: [uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL\\_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068705163](https://www.lib.uwo.ca/ocul/ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068705163)

Star: [https://www.lib.uwo.ca/ocul/ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL\\_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068605163](https://www.lib.uwo.ca/ocul/ocul-uwo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_UWO/1hdoga6/alma991044592068605163)

Required Reading:

Richard DeCordova (1991) "The Emergence of the Star System In America" from Stardom.

**Feb. 22** No class—Reading Week

**March 1** **The Star System in Classical Hollywood** **Studio/Star responses due in class**

Suggested Reading: Pamela Hutchinson (2016) "Mary Pickford: America's First Screen Megastar" The Guardian 25 April <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/apr/25/mary-pickford-silent-film-megastar-gladys-smith-actor-producer-mogul>

**March 8**      **Conceptualizing Stardom**

Required Reading:

John Ellis (1982) "Stars As A Cinematic Phenomenon" from Visible Fictions.

David Buxton (1983) "Rock Music, the Star System, and the Rise of Consumerism" from S. Frith & A. Goodwin, Eds. On Record (OWL)

**March 15**      **Star Image, part 1**

Required Reading:

Richard Dyer (1979) "Stars as Stars," "Stars as Types," "Stars as Images" from Stars (London: BFI);

Ligaya Mishan (2021) "The March of the Karens" New York Times August 12<sup>th</sup>

**March 22**      **Star Image, part 2**

Required Reading:

Brooks Barnes (2011) "A Star Who Isn't Afraid to Take Risks" New York Times November 2

Brent Lang (2016) "Why 'The Revenant' Proves Leonardo DiCaprio May Be Hollywood's Biggest Star" Variety January 10

Tom Shone (2022) "Twilight of the A-list: has the 21st century killed off the movie star?" (2022) The Guardian August 12.

Nicole Sperling (2022) "Tom Cruise Is Our Last Movie Star" New York Times May 20.

Suggested Reading: Gamson (1994) Chap. 4, "The Negotiated Celebration"

**March 29**      **Rock Stars, Pop Divas, part 1**

Required Reading:

David Shumway (2014) "Rock Stars as Icons" from Sage Handbook of Popular Music Eds. Bennett & Waksman

Andrew Goodwin (1992) "Metanarratives of Stardom and Identity" from Dancing in the Distraction Factory

**April 5**      **Rock Stars, Pop Divas, part 2**

Required Reading:

Caroline A. Streeter (2005) "Faking the Funk?" from Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture. Eds. Harry J. Elam, Kennell Jackson, Kennell A. Jackson. Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan P.

Suggested Readings:

Kobena Mercer (1986) "Monster Metaphors" from Screen [about Michael Jackson and Thriller]

Amanda Palmer (2010) "The lady gaga show. and freedom." Blog entry posted on July 5<sup>th</sup>; in OWL

Nancy Bauer (2010) "Lady Power." New York Times June 20<sup>th</sup>; in OWL.

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinabeg, 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).

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](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

## NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

### Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic\\_policies/rights\\_responsibilities.html](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html)

### Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

### Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software Turnitin under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system.

### Accommodation Policies

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 provide 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](mailto: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: [http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible\\_education/index.html](http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html)

[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.