

MIT 3436G – Environment, Animals, Culture and Communication

Winter 2023

Mondays 1:30 pm – 4:20 pm in SEB-1056

Professor Edward Comor – FNB-4138 – ecomor@uwo.ca

Office Hours: Mondays 4:45-5:45pm *and by appointment*

Throughout history, how human beings have interacted with and conceptualized life on earth (including our own lives) has been the outcome of their material conditions, political-economic relations, and cultural orientations. Indeed, this complexity constitutes a significant barrier in efforts to adequately comprehend contemporary threats such as climate change, the destruction of essential resources, unprecedented rates of extinction, and other existential issues. In this course, tools garnered from media and communications studies and other fields will be applied to assess the dynamics shaping humanity's ability (or *inability*) to adequately conceptualize the crisis we are facing. In this effort, we will address much more than mass media representations of the environment and animals but also *our very capacity to understand life itself*.

The class will meet most weeks for three-hour lectures and students are expected to complete the assigned weekly readings *prior* to each class (otherwise, it is unlikely that these lectures will be fully understood).

Warning: students who are not disciplined readers and capable writers likely will find this course to be very challenging!

In accordance with university policy and public health directives, students must wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom. Those who are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons should seek accommodation through Accessible Education.

In the event of a COVID resurgence or related factors that necessitates course delivery be moved away from face-to-face interaction, this class may be delivered entirely online (either synchronously or asynchronously).

Important: THIS COURSE DISCOURAGES THE USE OF ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES DURING LECTURES. If using such devices, this should be for note-taking purposes ONLY and the instructor reserves the right to withdraw his permission to use them.

Assessments

Participation. Although weekly attendance will be recorded, students will be assessed based on their *qualitative* contributions throughout the semester. These may include asking thoughtful questions, making observations that clarify matters, or bringing useful insights from readings to everyone's attention. This component will constitute 20% of final grades.

Take-home test. Distributed February 6th and due February 13th by 11:55 pm *via* the OWL Assignments folder. It will constitute five short answer questions (each answer no longer than 100 words) and a short essay question (maximum 750 words). In the absence of filing appropriate documentation through FIMS Undergraduate Student Services, late submissions will be penalized 3% per day. This component will constitute 20% of final grades.

Short paper. Distributed February 28th and due March 7th by 11:55 pm *via* the OWL Assignments folder. This will constitute one essay answer (maximum 1500 words). It will assess the ability to apply course readings and concepts in an accurate and coherent response. In the absence of filing appropriate documentation through FIMS Undergraduate Student Services, late submissions will be penalized 3% per day. This component will constitute 25% of final grades.

End of semester assignment. Distributed March 27th and due April 3rd by 11:55 pm *via* the OWL Assignments folder. This will constitute one essay answer of approximately 2500 words in length. It will assess the ability to apply course readings and concepts in an accurate, coherent, and thoughtful response to a question concerning the entire semester. *Late submissions will not be accepted in the absence of a formal recommendation issued by FIMS Student Services.* This component will constitute 35% of final grades.

Weekly Topics and Readings (unless otherwise indicated, all readings are available via the OWL *Course Reading* tab)

I. January 9 - Introduction

No readings.

II. January 16 - Comprehending the crisis: understanding or alienation?

David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (Duggan Books, 2019), pp. 3-36.

Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be* (Continuum, 1997), pp. 1-10.

III. January 23 - Alienation from ourselves and the natural world

Robert Franke, “The Biologist, the Psychologist, and the Environmental Crisis” in *BioScience* Vol.21 No.5 (1971), pp. 221-223.

Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (Routledge, 2008), pp. 81-92, 97-100, 106-120, 127-131, 137-139.

IV. January 30 - Institutionalized relations and conceptualizations

Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien* (University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 10-29 and 46-54. (also available in OWL Resources folder).

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Penguin, 1991), pp. 65-85.

V. February 6 – Objectification, vision, and medium theory

Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien* (University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 83-94 and 103-111 (also available in OWL Resources folder).

Documentary presentation – *Dolphin Man* (2017).

Take-home test distributed (due in one week).

VI. February 13 – No class

Take-home test due.

VII. February 20 – Reading Week

VIII. February 27 - Law as a medium: rights and “the public interest”

Christine Oravec, “Conservationism vs. Preservationism” in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* Vol. 70 Iss. 4 (1984), pp. 444-458.

Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-48.

IX. March 6 - News media, film, and visual representations of animals

Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (Reaktion, 2002), pp. 165-197.

Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast* (Manchester University, 1993), pp. 195-217 (optional: pp. 217-232).

Short paper assignment distributed (due in one week).

X. March 13 - No class

Short paper assignment due.

XI. March 20 - Values and alienation, part 1

David Harvey, *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* (Blackwell, 1996), pp. 150-158 and 172-175.

Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien* (University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 29-34 (*also available in OWL Resources folder*).

XII. March 27 - Values and alienation, part 2

George Monbiot, “Capitalism is Killing the Planet” in *The Guardian* (30 October 2021). (*available in OWL Resources folder*).

James Serpell, “Creatures of the Unconscious” in Anthony Podberscek *et al.* (eds.), *Companion Animals and Us* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 108-121.

Documentary presentation – *Tyke Elephant Outlaw*.

End of semester assignment distributed (due in one week).

XIII. April 3 - No class

End of semester assignment due.

FYI, please read **Notes from the Dean's Office** PDF available in OWL Resources folder.

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.