**The University of Western Ontario**
**Faculty of Information and Media Studies**

**DIGICOMM 2310A – Social Media + Networked Life**
**Course Outline, Fall 2020**

## Instructor Information
Name: Prof. Luke Stark (pronouns: he/him/his)
Office: FNB 4035
Student Meetings: By appointment via Zoom (https://calendly.com/lukestark)
Office Phone: 519-661-2111 ext 88511
E-Mail: cstark23@uwo.ca *please note I will work to answer your email within 24 hours, excluding weekends*

## Course Information
Course content and discussions will be conducted online asynchronously— that is, they will take place via OWL

Synchronous scheduled course time for Q&A, open consultation hours with me, and group project discussion:
Wednesdays 2:30pm-4:00pm via Zoom

Other student meetings: By appointment via Zoom (https://calendly.com/lukestark)
OWL site information: https://owl.uwo.ca/x/YiKulF
Technology requirements: Students will require regular or at least consistent access to a computer and internet connection capable of handling, in particular, streaming video. If this is an issue, please contact me as soon as possible.

## Prerequisites or Antirequisites

Antirequisites: MIT 2155A/B.

## Course Description

It's hard to deny—especially this year—how central social media platforms, digital communications technologies, and social and political communities birthed online are to our everyday lives as citizens and social beings. In this course, you'll be introduced to a variety of scholarly perspectives on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok; digital games and game streaming; Influencer culture; and tracking devices like FitBits and other wearables. We'll explore the ways in which scholars from different disciplines—computer science, history, sociology, philosophy, media studies, and anthropology, for example—have approached these topics, and tried to gauge the impacts of digital media.

*Course Objectives*
In these challenging times, the first objective of the course is to support each other throughout the semester.
Additionally, by the conclusion of the course I hope you'll also feel confident to do the following:
- Think expansively about the mutual relationships between social media platforms and digital networks and the people who make and use them.
- Analyze and describe how these relationships have influenced and continue to shape our everyday lives, and those of diverse communities around the world.
- Learn to trace how political, cultural, and social power circulates via digital media in different contexts.
- Become adept in applying your knowledge to the changing digital media landscape.
- Develop a mix of critical research skills, and learn to use these skills synthetically, creatively, and thoughtfully to your own analyses and arguments.
- Apply both your knowledge and research skills to a particular context as part of a broader group collaboration.

## Methods of Evaluation

In this course, you have access to 100 possible points; collecting 100 points means you will receive 100% in the course. Question prompt and assignment point values are variable and commensurate with time commitment/difficulty.

Regardless of point values, all pre-assessments and activities will be evaluated on a binary scale (credit/no credit) and all group project components will be evaluated on a simple three tier scale (full credit, half credit, or no credit). Your cumulative point total will be available to view in OWL Gradebook.

These points are divided up among various forms of evaluation as follows:

*Module Objectives and Activities: up to 40 points*

The bulk of your evaluation for this course will consist of a series of short question prompts, discussion tasks and brief assignments throughout the semester tied to each week's content module. As you move through each week's module, you'll have the opportunity to complete these short activities, including answering question prompts, providing brief reflections, and filling out short surveys. You will also receive points for completing all aspects of the module each week. Please see the detailed course schedule for a list of activities worth points.

These activities are not meant to be onerous, nor are they intended as busy work. They are designed to help you reflect on how key concepts in the course relate to your own experience of social media, and to apply your knowledge to real-world examples. Each of these activities will be assigned some number of points graded on a simple binary scale (full credit/no credit) based on whether or not you completed them satisfactorily.

All in-module activities and objectives will be open for two weeks, starting the day their corresponding module is opened to the class. (For example: in-module activities and objectives for Module 3 will be open for two weeks from the time Module 3 is released, while in-module activities and objectives for Module 4 will be open for two weeks from the time Module 4 is released, etc…).

*Virtual Discussions: up to 35 points*

At the beginning of the semester, you will be assigned a discussion pod (of between 5-6 students). Each week, I will post discussion prompts for your pod to complete. These discussions will take place alternately in OWL Forums or via Voice Thread – each pod will have its own dedicated chat space

Within your discussion pod, you can earn points in the following ways:
- Contributor (up to 2 points per module, e.g. 2 or more **substantive** comments)
- Discussion Leader (6 points, maximum of four times in the course)
    o Preparing a 200-300-word reflection on the week's discussion topic, posting it in your pod, and engaging with the conversation throughout the week
- Discussion Respondent (3 points, maximum of five times in the course)
    o Responding to the Discussion Leader(s) promptly, and engaging with the conversation throughout the week

Each pod can have a maximum of 3 Discussion Leaders per week; sign-up lists for Discussion Leader/Respondent will be available the first week of class. You are responsible for making sure you have participated in discussion forums in any combination up to the maximum of 40 points (so for instance, serving as Discussion Leader twice, Respondent three times, and contributing 14 comments across the semester)

*Collaborative Group Project: up to 25 points*

Early in the semester, you will be assigned a project group (of between 3-4 students). As a group, you will prepare a multimedia research portfolio on a social media platform or network of your group's choice. The finished portfolio will include:
- A 2500-word research brief on the history, business model, and public impact of the platform (5 points for initial draft/5 points for finished version)
- A 5-8-minute video exploring how **up to three** themes from the course modules (such as the circulation of power, gender and misogyny, racism and antiblackness, surveillance) are expressed on the platform (5 points)

- An annotated bibliography of up to 10 scholarly articles supporting the research brief and video (5 points)
- A self-assessment **from each student** detailing their contribution to the portfolio (5 points)

At the end of the term, point totals will be converted to letter grades according to the following scale, which corresponds to the Western marking scale (https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/general/grades_undergrad.pdf):

A+     90 – 100 points

A     80 – 89 points

B     70 – 79 points

C     60 – 69 points

D     50 – 59 points

F     below 50 points or assigned when course is dropped with academic penalty

*What do these grading tiers mean for you, the student?*
You have to work in the class—that's unavoidable. However, I'm interested in giving you some control over your class experience. Using this grade scale, you should be able to modulate the amount of work that corresponds with your course goals and bandwidth for this semester.

If you want an A+, then make sure you put together a minimum of 90 points by the end of the term. If all you want or need is a C, then make sure you get at least 60 points; it's entirely up to you. Moreover, you never have to wonder where you stand in the class—you can look at your points, look at the grade scale, and plan accordingly.

*What do these grading tiers mean for me, the professor?*
By simplifying evaluation scales and assigning point tiers, I'm able to focus on the important things, like designing engaging content and interacting with your ideas. It also helps me limit the most subjective dimensions of grading—dimensions that often implicitly reproduce Western gendered, racial, ethnic, class, ability or other biases. I want an A grade to be reasonably attainable by all who want to do the appropriate work; it shouldn't only be something "natural" talents or stereotypically "good" students can get, since "natural" and "good" are often just codes for certain kinds of privilege.

**Detailed Weekly Description**

*Weekly Module Tempo*:

Each week's module will be available as of **Monday 9am EST.** However, note that **online discussion tools and prompts for each week will not be available until Wednesday at 9am EST** (this gives all students 48 hours to focus solely on completing the module, though the module is of course available all week). **Discussion tools for each weekly module will close Sunday at 5pm.**

**Wednesdays 2:30pm-4:00pm EST will be optional synchronous Q&A/group project time in Zoom breakout rooms. The first 45 minutes will be Q&A, while the second 45 minutes will be for group work and individual meetings with me.** Attending these sessions is encouraged but not required, and all course points can be collected without attending synchronous sessions. To access these meetings, look for the scheduled Zoom links and one-on-one meeting sign up info on OWL.

Please complete module components in order. Further module details are available on the course OWL site.

*Module 1: Hello, World!* (1 point)
Week of September 7th (Week 1)

Pre-Activity: How are you holding up? (1 point)

Video Introduction/Course Nuts and Bolts

Assessment: Syllabus scavenger hunt (1 point)

Discussion (VoiceThread): Introduce yourself!

*Module 2: Power, Online and Offline* (1 point)
Week of September 14th (Week 2)

Pre-Activity: What does "power" mean to you? (1 point)

Read: Couldry, Nick. "Power." *Keywords for Media Studies*. Ed. Laurie Ouellette and Jonathan Gray. New York: NYU Press 2017. 145–148.

Lecture: Some different views on power

Watch: Michel Foucault on Power (1981)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYoub1mfk5k

Read: "The Power Thinker" by Colin Koopman, *Aeon (*15 March 2017)
https://aeon.co/essays/why-foucaults-work-on-power-is-more-important-than-ever

Lecture: How does power circulate online?

Read: "Preface" and "Introduction" (pp. ix-48) in Benjamin, Ruha, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2019.

Activity:  How does power circulate in your own digital life? (1 point)

*Module 3: The Political Economy of Platforms* (1 point)
Week of September 21st (Week 3)

Pre-Activity: Social Media Survey (1 point)

Lecture: A very brief history of "social" media

Read: Gillespie, Tarleton. "Platforms Intervene." *Social Media + Society* 1.1 (2015): 1–2.

Lecture: The political economy of platforms

Read: Wu, Angela Xiao, Harsh Taneja, and James G Webster. "Going with the Flow: Nudging Attention Online." *New Media & Society* 20.2 (2020): 146144482094118–20. Web

Activity: Social Media Self-Audit, Part 1: Your Media Ecosystem (2 points)

Discussion (VoiceThread): What's your attention worth?

*Module 4: Platform Racism & Anti-Blackness* (1 point)
Week of September 28th (Week 4)

Lecture: Race and/as technology

Read: Nakamura, Lisa, and Peter A. Chow-White. "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology: Code, the Color Line, and the Information Society." *Race After the Interne*t. Ed. Lisa Nakamura and Peter A. Chow-White. New York and London: Routledge, 2011.

Activity: Unpack Your Own Menu-Driven Identity (1 point)

Lecture: Race and Cultural Expression

Read: "We Need to Talk About Digital Blackface in Reaction GIFs" by Lauren Michele Jackson, *Teen Vogue* (2 August 2017)
https://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs

Read: Brock, André. "From the Blackhand Side: Twitter as a Cultural Conversation." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56.4 (2012): 529–549.

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 14: Emoji Design, White Accountability, and the Ethical Future of Chatbots with Miriam Sweeney
https://www.radicalai.org/e14-miriam-sweeney

Activity: Emoji Design Challenge (2 points)

Discussion (OWL Forums): We live in a racist society, online and off: What can we all do to change that?

*Module 5: Digital Colonialism* (1 point)
Week of October 5th (Week 5)

Lecture: Situating colonialism

Read: 'Digital colonialism': why some countries want to take control of their people's data from Big Tech by Jacqueline Hicks, *The Conversation* (26 September 2019)
https://theconversation.com/digital-colonialism-why-some-countries-want-to-take-control-of-their-peoples-data-from-big-tech-123048

Lecture: Digital colonialism

Watch: Kimberly TallBear on Decolonizing Science and Technology
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlK1QoM_qAo

Read: Mohamed, Shakir, Marie-Therese Png, and William Isaac. "Decolonial AI: Decolonial Theory as Sociotechnical Foresight in Artificial Intelligence." Philosophy & Technology 22.4 (2020): 16–28.

Activity: Social Media Self-Audit, Part 2: Global Media Flows and You (2 points)

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 11: Robot Rights? Exploring Algorithmic Colonization with Abeba Birhane
https://www.radicalai.org/e11-abeba-birhane

Discussion (VoiceThread): What are the pros and cons of a fragmented Net?

*Module 6: Gender, Sexuality & Misogyny Online* (1 point)
Week of October 13th (Week 6)

Pre-Activity: Where have you seen/experienced misogyny online? (1 point)

Lecture: The history of gender and technology

Read: Hicks, Marie. "De-Brogramming the History of Computing." *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 35.1 (2013): 88–88.

Watch: *#Tropes vs Women in Video Games,* Damsels in Distress Part 1 by Anita Sarkeesian
https://feministfrequency.com/video/damsel-in-distress-part-1/

Watch: *#Tropes vs Women in Video Games,* Jade- Beyond Good and Evil by Anita Sarkeesian
https://feministfrequency.com/video/jade-beyond-good-evil/

Lecture: Queer cultures online

Read: Shaw, Adrienne, and Christopher J Persaud. "Beyond Texts: Using Queer Readings to Document LGBTQ Game Content." *First Monday* 25.8 (2020).
https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/10439/9586

Activity: Reflection on misogyny (1 point)

Discussion (OWL Forums): Improving gender representation across digital media

*Module 7: We're All Influencers Now* (1 point)
Week of October 19th (Week 7)

Pre-Activity:  Your "online brand" (1 point)

Lecture: Famous for fifteen seconds

Read: Cotter, Kelley. "Playing the Visibility Game: How Digital Influencers and Algorithms Negotiate Influence on Instagram." *New Media & Society* 21.4 (2018): 895–913.

Lecture: Intersectionality and influence

Read: Abidin, Crystal. "'Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online?': Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity." *Social Media + Society* 2.2 (2016): 205630511664134–17.

Activity: TikTok Recap (2 points)

Discussion (VoiceThread): Do we all need digital detox?

*Module 8: Trolls, Bots & Disinformation* (1 point)
Week of October 26th (Week 8)

Pre-Activity: Where do you get your political news? (1 point)

Lecture: Propaganda goes digital

Read: Nadler, Anthony, Matthew Crain, and Joan Donovan. *Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine: The Political Perils of Online Ad Tech.* Data & Society Research Institute, 17 October 2018
https://datasociety.net/library/weaponizing-the-digital-influence-machine/

Lecture: Trolling as emotive politics

Read: "All of YouTube, Not Just the Algorithm, is a Far-Right Propaganda Machine" by Becca Lewis, *FWWD* (8 January 2020)
https://ffwd.medium.com/all-of-youtube-not-just-the-algorithm-is-a-far-right-propaganda-machine-29b07b12430

Activity: Reflection on course thus far (1 point)

*Fall Reading Week*
Week of November 2nd (Week 9)

*Module 9: Disability & Social Media* (1 point)
Week of November 9th (Week 10)

Lecture: Disability Studies/Media Studies

Read: Ellcessor, Elizabeth. "Captions on, Off, on TV, Online." *Television & New Media* 13.4 (2011): 329–352.

Read: "A Message To TikTok Parents Who Use My Face To Make Their Kids Cry" by Melissa Blake, *refinery29* (26 August 2020)
https://www.refinery29.com/en-ca/2020/08/9989497/new-teacher-challenge

Lecture: Reimagining Universal Design

Read: Hamraie, Aimi, and Kelly Fritsch. "Crip Technoscience Manifesto." *Catalyst: feminism, theory, technoscience* 5.1 (2019): 1–34. Print.

Discussion (VoiceThread): How can Western's digital presence be more accessible?

**\*Research Portfolio Research Brief Draft Due Friday, November 13 at 5pm EST\***

*Module 10: Surveillance* (1 point)
Week of November 16th (Week 11)

Pre-Activity: Who's watching you? (1 point)

Lecture: A short history of surveillance

Read: Arora, Payal. "Decolonizing Privacy Studies." *Television & New Media* 20.4 (2019): 366–378.

Lecture: Surveillance is going to get worse before it gets better

Read: "The Pandemic Is No Excuse to Surveil Students" by Zeynep Tufekci, *The Atlantic* (4 September 2020)
https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/09/pandemic-no-excuse-colleges-surveil-students/616015/

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 15: IBM, Microsoft, and Amazon Disavow Facial Recognition Technology: What Do You Need to Know? with Deb Raji
https://www.radicalai.org/e15-deb-raji

Activity: Social Media Self-Audit, Part 3: Where is your data going? (2 points)

Discussion (OWL Forums): *Dark Mirror* Writer's Room

*Module 11: Gig Work & Ghost Work* (1 point)
Week of November 23rd (Week 12)

Pre-Activity: The "gig economy" and you

Lecture: Gig work

Read: "Silicon Valley startups are obsessed with developing tech to replace their moms" by Biz Carson, *Business Insider* (10 May 2015)
https://www.businessinsider.com/san-francisco-tech-startups-replacing-mom-2015-5

Read: "Why Is an Advocacy Group Funded by Uber and Lyft Hounding a Law Professor on Twitter?" by Aaron Mak, *Slate* (11 August 2020)
https://slate.com/technology/2020/08/uber-lyft-prop-22-ab5-veena-dubal.html

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 22: Is Uber Moral? The Ethical Crisis of the Gig Economy with Veena Dubal
https://www.radicalai.org/e22-veena-dubal

Lecture: Ghost work

Read: "The hidden global workforce that is still fighting for an eight-hour workday" by Mary L. Gray, *The Washington Post* (1 May 2019)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/01/hidden-global-workforce-that-is-still-fighting-an-eight-hour-workday/

Read: "Justice for 'data janitors'" by Lilly Irani, *Public Books* (15 January 2015)
https://www.publicbooks.org/justice-for-data-janitors/

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 9: Labor and Innovation: Exploring the Power of Design and Storytelling with Lilly Irani
https://www.radicalai.org/e9-lilly-irani

Activity: *Technically Responsible Knowledge* (1 point)

Discussion (VoiceThread): How should labor laws protect gig/ghost workers?

*Module 12: Games & Gamification* (1 point)
Week of November 30th (Week 13)

Pre-Assessment: What have you been playing? (1 point)

Lecture: Life invades games

Read: Boellstorff, Tom, "Preface to the New Paperback Edition" in *Coming of Age in Second Life* (xi-xxvii), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

"Worldwide Digital Video Game Spending Hits Record-Breaking $10.5B in April" by Trilby Beresford, *Hollywood Reporter* (22 May 2020)
https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/worldwide-digital-video-game-spending-hits-record-breaking-105-billion-april-1295670?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social

"Sylvan Esso proves Animal Crossing is more medium than game now with new "Ferris Wheel" music video" by Reid McCarter, *The AV Club* (4 September 2020)
https://news.avclub.com/sylvan-esso-proves-animal-crossing-is-more-medium-than-1844956461

"The business of selling Animal Crossing's irresistible vibes" by Patricia Hernandez, *Polygon* (2 September 2020)

Lecture: Games invade life

Read: Bogost, Ian, "Why Gamification is Bullshit" in *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, ed. Steffen P. Walz, Sebastian Deterding, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014.

Activity: Social Media Self-Audit, Part 4: Dark patterns? (2 points)

Discussion (OWL Forums): Gamification in education: pros and cons

**\*Research Portfolio Final Materials Due by Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup> at 5pm EST\***

*Module 13: The Future* (1 point)
Week of December 7<sup>th</sup> (Week 14)

Pre-Assessment: Class feedback (1 point)

Lecture: The future of social media

Listen: *The Radical AI Podcast*, Episode 8: Love, Challenge, and Hope: Building a Movement to Dismantle the New Jim Code with Ruha Benjamin
https://www.radicalai.org/episode-8-ruha-benjamin

Discussion (OWL Forums): Speculative futurology & farewells

## Etiquette & Course Conduct

In this course, I'd like you to strive to embody Western's equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles. Western's institutional commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) supports the University's mandate as a research-intensive institution of higher learning, an employer of choice and a community leader. The University is enriched by the diversity of our campus community and strengthened by our shared commitment to equity and inclusion. Black Lives Matter, as do the lives and experiences of Indigenous peoples, other visible minorities, and all underrepresented and equity-seeking groups*. Your conduct in this course should be guided by the principles below:

*Equity* – We value equity of access and opportunity for members of underrepresented and equity-seeking groups*. We take action to identify and address barriers to the full participation of members of these groups at the University.

Diversity – We value and respect the diversity of our campus community. We recognize the important contributions that diverse perspectives and lived experiences bring to Western's learning, teaching, working and research environments.

Inclusion – We value inclusion and active engagement with and across diverse communities in all aspects of university life. We foster a welcoming campus community where everyone feels respected, valued and included.

*Members of underrepresented or equity-seeking groups includes, but may not be limited to, women, Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis), persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups and members of LGBTQ2+ communities. In recognition that all individuals have multiple aspects of identity, an intersectional lens will also be used when assessing barriers and/or developing policies/programs at the University.

Your goal is full attendance, attention, participation, listening and reading all of required texts.  That said, while I expect the very best you can give, this semester is unlike many others, and goals are always aspirational. Do your best, but don't beat yourself up when (as we all do) it feels to you as if you come up short.

Disagreements are expected, but while arguments are not contests, they often have high stakes (sometimes invisible to you, but highly compelling to others – see the EDI principles above). Personal attacks, bullying, or intimidation are not acceptable under any circumstance. Please keep nitpicking to a minimum; all questions, whether basic or advance, are valuable. Remember, you are free to change your mind at any time -- as are others.

Do not engage in "seek and destroy" criticism of others' ideas, or of ideas in the readings. Critique is a powerful tool and can do damage. If you have something critical to say about a reading, please be ready to explain how the piece could be improved; if you disagree with the premise of a piece, read to understand what motivates the argument -- without knowing your adversary, how can you defeat it?

The testimony of personal experience is a necessary and often valuable part of our intellectual grounding and trajectory. However, like critique, testimony is also a powerful tool that can cut both ways. Please be thoughtful about mobilizing personal experience in class. Ask yourself if the testimony is relevant, and safe for you to share; ask yourself too if you are prepared to seriously consider others' interpretations of your experience if they differ from your own? Anecdotes are a different kind of evidence that systematically collected scholarly data, and useful (or harmful) in different ways.

For more information on Western's policies around academic integrity, including plagiarism, please visit
https://teaching.uwo.ca/teaching/assessing/academic-integrity.html

## Course Materials
All course materials will be available via OWL, including short video lectures, accessible PDFs, links to external online content, discussion fora, and text-based assignment prompts.

There are no late penalties for this course, other than the polices regarding course modules and points already described.

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 November 9, 2020. Students can find details about this academic policy here:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/evaluation_undergrad.pdf.  Please note, students are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of the grades they have received in their courses.

## Statement on the Use of Zoom Recording
Participants in this course are not permitted to record sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

**Optional class zoom sessions for this course will be recorded for accessibility purposes**. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals under special circumstances. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings.

## Land Acknowledgment
We acknowledge that Western University's buildings are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and future, and acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (e.g. First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society, and we honor and respect the Indigenous communities still living on and connected to this land by striving for restorative justice for First Nations peoples, and for all.

## Course Credits
This syllabus is grounded in part on materials developed by Professor Gabriella Coleman of McGill University, Professor Jonathan Sterne of McGill University, and Professor Anna Lauren Hoffmann of the University of Washington.

## 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.