



Carleton
UNIVERSITY

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

Fall 2019

COMS 4800B: Special Topic in Communication & Media Studies (Media Fandom)

TB 431, Tuesdays, 8:35–11:25 a.m.



The land on which we gather to learn is the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin nation.

Course Description

This class is about the intense relationships that (some) audience members develop for (some) media. Originally objects of suspicion and derision (“fan” is short for “fanatic,” after all), media fans now enjoy a complex relationship with both media industries and the so-called mainstream audience. Over this semester, we will explore the social worlds of fandom, connecting foundational work in the field of fan studies to contemporary research on topics such as social media and digital fandom; identity and toxic fan cultures; and the labour of media fans.

NB. This course uses an alternative assessment approach called specifications grading. Please read the “Learning Objectives and Evaluation” section of this syllabus carefully and bring your questions to our first class.

Prerequisite(s)

Fourth year Honours standing in Communication and Media Studies or permission of the School of Journalism and Communication.

Instructor



Prof. Benjamin Woo, PhD
(artist's conception)

Welcome to COMS 4800B! I'm very excited to offer a class on Media Fandom this term. I've been working in and around fan studies for several years, culminating in my book on geek culture, *Getting a Life*. My current research is about comic cons and the intermediary work these events do to structure the relationships between cultural producers and their audiences.

Outside of class, the best way to get in touch is to **come see me during my office (RB 4219) during my scheduled office hours:** Mondays, 3:00–4:30 p.m., and Tuesdays, 1:00–2:30 p.m. When we meet, I can get to know you a little better, discuss your progress in the course, and provide additional feedback on your work and. **If you can't physically make it to office hours, you can also call (613) 520-2600 x 1770 during those times.** If I don't pick up, that means I'm with one of your classmates, so please leave a message so I can return your call.

If you need to communicate outside of class or office hours, please send me an **email via the cuLearn Mail block**. This ensures that the course code is always appended to the subject line, ensuring I can search and sort for messages related to COMS 4800B.

Course Materials

Textbooks

You are required to have access to the following texts, which are available for purchase at the Carleton University Bookstore:

Jenkins, Henry. 1992/2013. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge. (TP)

Scott, Suzanne. 2019. *Fake Geek Girls: Gender, Fandom, and the Convergence Culture Industry*. New York: NYU Press. (FGG)

Additional required readings will be made available via the ARES online reserves system.

Carleton Email Accounts and cuLearn

All email communication to students from the Communication and Media Studies Program will be via official Carleton university e-mail accounts and/or cuLearn. As important course and University information are distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton and cuLearn accounts.

Course Format

This course is being offered as a **seminar**. In this instructional mode, the professor's job is principally to provide context and facilitate in-depth discussion among students in order to support your own learning and in-depth engagement with the material.

Typically, I will provide some initial comments on the week's topic and/or prompts for discussion, but the majority of our class time will be given over to your pre-submitted discussion questions and issues arising from them. Thus, it is essential that you come to class fully prepared to discuss the readings with your peers. Although it's targeted to the shorter sessions that we call discussion groups and tutorials, this post has some helpful advice for preparing for a seminar class: studyinternational.com/news/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-seminars/.

Learning Objectives and Assessment

This course uses an approach to assessment called [specifications grading](#), or "specs grading" for short. Specs grading is designed to explicitly and clearly link grades to learning while giving students greater autonomy and responsibility for their own learning. Your final course grades will be determined by the specific course components you complete, which demonstrate that you have achieved specific learning objectives:

<i>Students who receive a grade in the range of...</i>	<i>...will have demonstrated that they can...</i>	<i>...by...</i>
D	contribute to class meetings and constructively engage with their peers	receiving a satisfactory on at least 6 discussion questions (out of a possible 10).
C	understand key concepts and debates in fan studies	satisfactorily completing three quizzes .
B	critically interrogate and reflect on scholarship in fan studies	receiving a satisfactory on at least 10 course journal entries .
A	formulate original research questions and synthesize evidence to support an argument about contemporary fan cultures	satisfactorily completing the term paper assignment.

NB. Each grade includes the requirements for all lower grades. That is, to earn a C you must complete the requirements for both a C and a D; to earn a B, you must complete the requirements for a B, C and D; and so on.

You are free to attempt as many or as few components as you wish in order to receive the grade you desire. Individual components are evaluated as either unsatisfactory or satisfactory in relation to the assignment specifications and **no credit will be awarded for unsatisfactory work.**

Tokens

The token system is designed to help you manage your work and achieve your goals for this course. You begin the term with **3 tokens** that may be spent to:

- extend an assignment deadline by 48 hours1 token;
- make up a discussion question1 token;
- substitute final exam results for a quiz1 token;
- revise and resubmit unsatisfactory written work2 tokens.

To ensure some flexibility in how and when you spend tokens, you may carry a negative balance, but you may not have fewer than -2 tokens at any given time. Additional tokens may be earned for superlative work that notably exceeds the assignment specifications in either effort or outcome.

When you wish to trade in some of your tokens, complete the short form on cuLearn.

Revise and Resubmit

Writing is an iterative process of receiving feedback and making changes in response. As outlined above, you may revise and resubmit a piece of *unsatisfactory* work at the cost of 2 tokens. Within one week of receiving your grade and feedback, submit a new draft along with a cover sheet outlining the changes that you have made in response to feedback.

Pluses and Minuses

The letter grade you receive at the end of the course will be based on which course components you satisfactorily complete. If you have 2 or more tokens remaining at the end of term, your final grade will be adjusted up (e.g., from a B to a B+); if you have a negative balance, it will be adjusted down (e.g., from an A to an A-). Grades will never be adjusted more than one step on the grading scale.

Course Components

The various assignments and components for the course are briefly described below. The **full specifications** for each component are available on cuLearn; these documents lay out what you must do to attain a *satisfactory* evaluation and receive credit towards your grade. Remember that **there's no partial credit in this class**, so ensure you fully understand all the requirements before submission.

Discussion Questions

Beginning in week 2, students pursuing a passing grade in the course will submit a discussion question to the cuLearn forum concerning one or more of the assigned readings before each class. In order to give me an opportunity to review these questions before class, they are due at 12:00 Noon the day before class. You may be called upon to explain and introduce your discussion questions in class, so bring a copy with you for your reference.

Because discussion questions are intended to be used as part of our weekly seminars, you may not purchase an extension or a revise and resubmit for them. However, if you find yourself short of the number of *satisfactory* discussion questions that you need, you may make up a missed or *unsatisfactory* one by replying to one of your classmates' questions on the cuLearn forum, at the cost of 1 token each.

Quizzes

Students pursuing a C or higher will write three quizzes will be offered in class to test their understanding of the assigned readings. An average score of 70% or higher is required to receive a *satisfactory*. If you miss a quiz or achieve a lower grade than you desire, you may write an online take-home final exam and substitute the exam results for one or more quizzes at a cost of 1 token each.

Course Journal

Students pursuing a B or higher will keep a journal to document their critical engagements with the course material. Many students find it helpful to keep a physical notebook/sketchbook, but digital options are fine, too. Your journal will be a repository for notes and reflections on the course material, as well as for occasional in-class writing prompts and exercises.

Journals will be collected twice during the semester for evaluation (Oct. 15 and Dec. 3), and you can decide which entries to submit for assessment so long as by the end of the semester you have received a satisfactory on at least:

- 2 class reflections;
- 2 double-entry reading responses;
- 1 creative reading response
- and a summative reflection on the course.

The remaining 4 entries (for a total of 10) are your choice. The journal entry formats (outlined in the assignment specifications on cuLearn) are designed to model different *habits of mind* associated with deep engagement and critical reflection. You are encouraged to journal frequently so you have lots of choice when selecting the 10 entries you will submit for assessment.

Term Paper

Students pursuing an A will research and write a paper that explores and develops an original topic related to contemporary fandom cultures. You will identify and analyze a case study in order to support an original argument with a clear, specific thesis statement.

In addition to the term paper of 10–12 pages / 2500–3000 words (due Dec. 6), satisfactory completion of the assignment requires:

- at least one meeting with the instructor by no later than Oct. 15 to discuss potential topics;
- an annotated bibliography of at least 3 scholarly sources AND 5 trade or journalistic sources of relevance to your paper topic submitted by no later than Oct. 29;
- a completed proposal worksheet submitted by no later than Nov. 12;
- and a short presentation of your case study in class on Dec. 3.

If you do not complete all components satisfactorily, you will not be permitted to submit the final paper for credit.

Schedule

The following schedule of topics, readings, and deadlines is provided for your information and is subject to reasonable changes with sufficient notice:

Date	Readings	Deadlines
Sept. 10	Why Study Media Fans? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booth, “Classroom of the Future” • TP, introduction • FGG, introduction 	
Sept. 17	Defining Fans and Fandom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TP, chap. 1 • Abercrombie and Longhurst, “Fans and Enthusiasts” • Hills, preface, <i>Fan Cultures</i> 	
Sept. 24	Reading Like a Fan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGG, chap. 1 • TP, chaps. 2–4 	
Oct. 1	Writing Like a Fan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coppa, “Fuck Yeah” • TP, chaps. 5–7 	
Oct. 8	Fan Communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TP, chap. 8 and conclusion • Hellekson, “Fannish Field of Value” • Woo, “Making Communities,” <i>Getting a Life</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class quiz
Oct. 15	Fans Go Online <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De Kosnik, “Print Fans versus Net Fans,” <i>Rogue Archives</i> • Polasek, “Traditional Transformations and Transmedial Affirmations” • Bury, “Technology, Fandom and Community” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course journal entries collected in class • Deadline for term paper meetings
Oct. 21–25: Fall Break, No Classes		
Oct. 29	Rehabilitating Fans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TP, “Twenty Years Later” • FGG, chap. 2 • Hills, “Returning to Hegemony Theory in Fan Studies” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term paper annotated bibliographies due in class
Nov. 5	Toxic Fandom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGG, chap. 3 • Hills, “From Fan Doxa to Toxic Fan Practices?” • Pande, “Race and the Dynamics of Media Fandom,” <i>Squee from the Margins</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class quiz

Nov. 12	Managing Fans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGG, chaps. 4 and 5 • Stanfill, “Enclosing Fandom,” <i>Exploiting Fandom</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term paper proposal worksheets due in class
Nov. 19	Gender, Sexuality and Online Affect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGG, chap. 6 • Stein, “Culture of Feels,” <i>Millennial Fandom</i> • Cho, “Queer Reverb” 	
Nov. 26	Fan (Studies) Futures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGG, conclusion • Jenkins, “The State of Fandom Studies 2018” • 2 randomly assigned State of Fandom Studies dialogues (see cuLearn) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class quiz
Dec. 3	Wrap-Up		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Term paper Speed Geeking presentations in class • Course journal entries collected in class • Completed term papers due to Resource Centre Dec. 6 • Online take-home exams may be completed any time until Dec. 21

Policies

Evaluative Study

This course’s use of the specs grading model is part of a pilot project. In order to evaluate its impact on your learning and experience in the class, you will be invited to complete two online surveys in addition to the regular course evaluation process. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and steps have been taken to ensure that it will have no impact on the assessment of your performance in the class.

Submission and Return of Term Work

With the exception of the final paper (due Dec. 6 to the Readers’ Digest Resource Centre [RB 4400]), assignments and term work are due at the beginning of class on the day indicated and must be submitted in hard copy. Feedback and results can be anticipated within 2 weeks of submission. If you are not present in class to pick up graded work, it will be left for you in the Readers’ Digest Resource Centre.

Late Policy

Deadlines are real and serious. **As a general rule, work will not be accepted late**, though you may “purchase” extensions through the use of the token system. Extensions may not be applied to discussion questions. If you are planning to use a token for an extension, you may wish to consult with me prior to the deadline to confirm that you have sufficient tokens available. Work for which you have purchased an extension may be submitted at the Reader’s

Digest Resource Centre (RB 4400); ensure that your name, student number, my name, and the course number are all easy to find on the first page of your document.

That being said, if you are experiencing significant disruptions to your ability to complete academic work due, for instance, to a chronic illness or life circumstances, please come see me as soon as possible so we can discuss your situation and ensure you have the opportunity to (see “Academic Accommodations,” below).

Grading

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades, as determined by the course components satisfactorily completed. For your reference, the system of grades used with corresponding grade points is:

Letter Grade	Percentage	12-point Scale	Letter Grade	Percentage	12-point Scale
A+	90–100	12	C+	67–69	6
A	85–89	11	C	63–66	5
A-	80–84	10	C-	60–62	4
B+	77–79	9	D+	57–59	3
B	73–76	8	D	53–56	2
B-	70–72	7	D-	50–52	1

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. **No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.**

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

The Carleton University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of others as one’s own”. This can include the following:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- or handing in “substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without the prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.”

You should familiarize yourself with Carleton University’s policy on Academic Integrity, which can be found by following the link below: www.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic_integrity/docs/Academic_Integrity_Policy.pdf.

Additional Student Support

The Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS) is a centralized collection of learning support services designed to help students achieve their goals and improve their learning both inside and outside the classroom. CSAS offers academic assistance with course content, academic writing and skills development. Visit CSAS on the 4th floor of MacOdrum Library or online at carleton.ca/csas.

Requests for Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

- **Pregnancy obligation.** Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.
- **Religious obligation.** Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details, visit the Equity Services website: carleton.ca/equity/wp-content/uploads/Student-Guide-to-Academic-Accommodation.pdf.
- **Academic accommodations for students with disabilities.** If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more information about academic accommodations for students with disabilities, visit: carleton.ca/pmc.
- **Survivors of sexual violence.** As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and its survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support.
- **Accommodation for student activities.** Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>.

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline.