University of Calgary
Department of Communication, Media and Film

COMS 401.74 L01: Influencers and Creator Cultures
Winter 2023: January 10th to April 11th (excluding February 19th to 25th)
Lecture: TuTh 11:00 am to 12:15 pm

This is an in-person course.

Instructor:	Alora Paulsen Mulvey
Office:	SS250 and virtually via Zoom
Email:	alora.paulsen1@ucalgary.ca
Web Page:	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
Office Hours:	In-person: Tuesdays 9:30 am to 10:30 am Virtual: Wednesdays 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm via Zoom

Course Description
In this course, we explore the phenomena of social media influencers and content creators. The readings aim to contextualize the emergence of "the influencer" as a mainstream identity and the thriving, multi-billion-dollar influencer industry by considering the relationship between creative labour, social media platform governance, and celebrity culture. The semester includes three units, with each unit addressing a broad question. Unit one asks: Who counts as an influencer? Unit two explores the relationship between influencers and identity by questioning how creators' intersecting identities shape their creative practices. And finally, unit three turns the focus to influencers' interactions with social media platforms, asking: What role do platform politics play in influencer cultures and economies? We take an intersectional approach paying particular attention to how race, gender, sexuality, class, geographic location and ability shape influencer cultures and economies. The goal is to identify the cultural, historical, economic, and political contexts from which influencers emerge and apply this critical knowledge to the digital media we engage with every day.

Additional Information
The weekly schedule of topics and readings can be found on D2L. This class meets in person, on campus Tuesdays and Thursdays. I offer both in-person and virtual office hours.

Students are responsible for reading and following all course and university policies discussed in this outline.

Objectives of the Course
By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Critically evaluate and discuss a range of theoretical and empirical approaches to influencer culture and industry
- Understand the development of major conceptual frameworks and theoretical debates regarding influencer and creator culture
- Articulate the relevance of power, agency, identity, and representation to influencer culture
- Identify theses, arguments, methods, sources, and analyses in academic readings, further synthesize them and critically utilize primary and secondary sources for research
- Apply key critical theories to primary research examples and case studies
- Develop both verbal and written analytic skills needed for undergraduate study

Textbooks and Readings
This course does not require you to purchase a textbook. Instead, the readings will be uploaded to D2L using the Reading List (Leganto) feature and will include book chapters, scholarly articles, and popular press publications. All readings (and multimedia clips) are either open access or available digitally via the UCalgary library.

Please note that required readings should be read before the lecture for which they are assigned.

Learning Technologies and Requirements

To complete courses, University of Calgary students are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security and malware updates, with current antivirus software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection, and a current and updated web browser;
- A webcam (built-in or external), and a microphone and speaker (built-in or external) or headset with microphone (for online synchronous courses only).

If you need access to other software programs to complete assignments, your instructor will provide relevant information and links.

If you have technical difficulties, contact IT support services. See https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/student-campus-services-information-technologies-it.html

Email Policy
When sending me an email, please be sure to include "COMS 401" as well as a clear statement of purpose in the subject line. I respond to student emails Monday to Friday, during regular office hours (9:00 am-5:00 pm). I do not respond to emails over the weekends.

Email is best for specific inquiries. Students are encouraged to make use of my office hours for any in-depth questions about major course assignments such as the final project. Assignment results will not be discussed over email, but I am happy to meet during office hours to talk further.

Policy on the Use of Electronic Communication Devices
Please respect other students in your use of electronic communication devices and computers. Laptops are permitted for note-taking and participation in group activities only. Cell phones should be on silent and not be used during lectures or lab time.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's policy on the recording of lectures, which is outlined at https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-6.html, and carefully review the section on Instructor Copyright at the end of this outline.

Respect and Diversity in the Classroom
Student participation is an important aspect of this course. Our classes are centred around student contributions and collaborative activities. During discussion periods, I ask students to be respectful of diverse viewpoints; however, racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, and other types of discriminatory comments are not permitted in the classroom. Comments of this nature will be dealt with at the instructor's discretion on an individual basis.

Assignments and Evaluation

The grades for this course are distributed as follows:

Weight	Assignment	Due Dates
10%	**Participation**	Assessed on an ongoing basis; self-assessment opens April 6th and closes April 11th at 11:59 pm
20%	**Discussion Board Leadership** (8%) **and Participation** (12%)	Select Mondays (leaders) and Wednesdays (participants) by 11:59 pm (see D2L for detailed schedule); sign-up takes place on the first day of classes
10%	**Influencer Case Study**	11:00 am before the lecture to which the response corresponds; the final date to submit is March 14th
20%	**Collaborative In-Class Activity: Unit Mind Maps**	February 2nd, March 16th, April 4[th,] and April 6th by 11:59pm
5%	**Final Paper/Project Proposal**	March 9th by 11:59 pm
35%	**Final Paper/Project**	April 11th by 11:59 pm
2% (extra credit)	**Final Paper/Project Presentation**	Sign-up to present by March 30th at 11:59 pm; presentations are to take place April 6th during regular class time

Below you will find a brief description of the course assignments. Detailed assignment sheets and rubrics will be posted to D2L no later than two weeks before the assignment's due date. All written assignments submitted to me should be in a 12-pt serif font, double-spaced, saved as either .docx or PDF, and use a consistent citation style throughout. All assignments are submitted via D2L Dropbox. Feedback and grades will typically be posted to D2L within a week of your submission.

Participation

Your participation grade in this course will be assessed in two ways:

(1) *Instructor evaluation of your in-class participation (7%):* The participation grade I assign is based on the frequency and quality of your contributions to class discussions and your participation in various in-class activities that will take place throughout the term. Given the importance of participation, regular attendance is essential. You should come to class with the readings completed and in hand, ready to discuss them. Attendance will be taken in this class, and you are expected to arrive on time, avoid distractions while in class, and stay for the duration. Chronic absences or lateness will negatively affect your grade.

(2) *A self-assessment (3%):* At the end of the term, you will complete a self-assessment evaluating your preparation for class, participation in discussions, and your contributions to our collaborative learning environment. Failure to complete to assessment will result in a participation grade in the course no higher than 7%.

Discussion Board Leadership and Participation

This graded component consists of two parts:

(1) *Discussion Board Leadership (8%):* Students take turns starting off the class discussion board for the following week. Leaders will pose two to three open-ended discussion questions (based on

the readings) for their peers to respond to. A summary of the author's main argument **and** your key takeaways from the reading are also required (150 words minimum). The discussion questions should reflect careful engagement with the week's reading and be open-ended. These are not simply graded on completion but on the quality of the discussion questions. **Sign-up for this activity is during the first week of class. If you miss the first class, you will be assigned a date to post.** Posts are due Mondays by 11:59 pm*. *See Policy for Late Assignments*

(2) *Discussion Board Responses (12%):* Students will respond to **one** of the discussion prompts posted by their peers. Students are required to submit six responses over the term, meaning you can skip one week without penalty. These responses should be between 125-200 words, show thoughtful engagement with the content, *and* answer the discussion prompt. These responses are due Wednesdays by 11:59 pm. Each is worth 2% of your final grade.

Influencer Case Study

This assignment requires you to submit a short reflection on **a single influencer case study** to **one** weekly reading. This reflection is due **before** the lecture to which they correspond. For example, if you resonate with the reading for week two's Thursday content, you are required to submit your case study by Thursday at 11:00 am via D2L Dropbox. The purpose of this exercise is to practice applying theory to influencer case studies to prep for the course's final assignment and to demonstrate your understanding of course readings. These reflections can be conversational, no more than 500 words, and can include your personal experience with the influencer or the reading. Outside research is not required but you must reference the reading that inspires your reflection.

Collaborative In-Class Activity: Unit Mind Maps
In groups of 2-3, students will submit four mind maps over the semester (Units 1, 2, 3 and a final mind map drawing together the concepts from the entire term). These maps are designed to be completed within class time (providing you are up to date on the readings and taking notes during the lecture), though you will have until 11:59 pm on the due dates to submit. I will allow 10-15 minutes at the beginning of every lecture for you to add to this assignment. The groups will be established in class at the start of each new unit. I encourage you to use the free software Coggle to build the mind maps, but I am open to alternatives.

Each of these maps is worth 5% of your final grade. Because these are in-person, collaborative assignments, you are required to attend class to participate. Students who do not reach out to the instructor before missing will not be eligible for a makeup assignment. The maps will be submitted via D2L Dropbox as PDFs.

Group members will receive the same grade on assignments; however, the instructor reserves the right to award differential grades based on group peer reviews or information indicating significantly uneven contributions by group members.

Final Paper/Project Proposal
This course requires you to submit a final project that demonstrates your understanding of the material through critical engagement with influencer cultures. **All students** must complete a brief proposal outlining what they intend to submit for the final assignment. A form will be uploaded to D2L to guide you through the process. There are two ways to approach the final assignment:
(1) A *media analysis paper* (7-10 pages, double-spaced, 12-pt font) that explores a concise thesis statement through critical media analysis.
(2) You may also propose *a creative format* such as a podcast mini-sode (10-15 minutes), a video essay (10-15 minutes), a TikTok series, a dynamic website, or other multimedia form.

**IMPORTANT*: If you do not submit a proposal, you are required to write a media analysis paper for your final assignment.* A website, podcast, or any other creative submission requires a project proposal that is complete *and* submitted on time.

This assignment is approx. 300 words in length (+ references). I will provide feedback on the proposal, and we will work together on a rubric that makes sense for your creative submissions.

Final Paper/Project
The final project you submit in this course will demonstrate your understanding of the material through critical engagement with influencer cultures. There are two ways to approach the final assignment:
   (1) A *media analysis paper* (7-10 pages, double-spaced) that explores a concise thesis statement through critical media analysis. This paper should demonstrate both your knowledge of course theories and the ability to apply them to an original media example.
   (2) You may also propose a *creative format.* Some examples include a podcast mini-sode (10-15 minutes), a video essay (10-15 minutes), a dynamic website, or other multimedia forms. Creative submissions that are audio or video only must include a written preamble, summary or abstract (300 words) explaining the rationale behind the project and the argument it is making. For example, if you upload something to YouTube you could include this in the video description. For a podcast, think about it as the episode notes. The transcripts for your project should be uploaded to D2L at the time of submission.

Both approaches to the assignment require a reference list (min. 5 peer-reviewed sources), in whatever citation format you are most comfortable with. **To reiterate: To submit a creative format, you must submit a project proposal and have your proposal approved by the instructor.**

Final Paper Presentations (2% extra credit)
Students will present the findings from their final project in a 5-minute mini-conference presentation. Students must sign-up to present by March 30th at 11:59 pm using the Google Doc posted to D2L. Presentations will take place on April 6th during regular class time. **This is an *optional* presentation**, but it is the only opportunity for bonus grades in this course.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: There is no registrar-scheduled final exam in this course.

Note: You do not need to complete all the assignments and exams to receive a passing grade in this course, but creative assignments will not be accepted for the final project without prior, **written** approval.

Submission of Assignments
Please submit all assignments by uploading them to the designated D2L Dropbox. Include your name and ID number on all assignments. Be sure to keep a copy of each submitted assignment and submit the proper version.

Private information related to individual students is treated with the utmost regard by the University of Calgary faculty. Student assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty, and personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. Please note that instructors may use audio or video recording for lesson capture, assessment of student learning, and self-assessment of teaching practices.

Policy for Late Assignments
The pandemic has revealed how social inequalities shape care work and responsibilities, which can affect one's ability to complete assessments on time. As such, I approach late assignments

with flexibility when possible, however, you must communicate with me about your situation and needs. If you require extra time for an assignment, please book an office hours appointment and we can develop a plan for you to complete the assignment and receive full credit. This meeting should happen at least 72 hours before the deadline whenever possible.

If I do not hear from you, I assume that you will complete the assignment on time. As such, assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with a loss of 5% or a partial letter grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late. This includes weekends (e.g., if an assignment is due Thursday and you submit it on Monday you will be penalized four grades). Late work will not be accepted one week past the original deadline without appropriate documentation. Any late work will not receive written feedback unless there was an approved extension. ***Students who miss their discussion board leadership post will be awarded a zero as your classmates' success depend on your timely submission.**

Student Accommodations
Students seeking accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS); SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit www.ucalgary.ca/access/. Students who require an accommodation based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their Instructor. For the full policy on Student Accommodations, see https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/student-accommodation-policy

Students seeking accommodation for transient illnesses (e.g., the flu) or another legitimate reason should contact their instructors. Whenever possible, students should provide supporting documentation to support their request; however, instructors may not require a medical note. For information on the use of a statutory declaration, see the *University Calendar*: https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/m-1.html

Expectations for Writing
Department policy directs that all written assignments and, to a lesser extent, written exam responses be assessed at least partly on writing skills. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.) but also general clarity and organization and proper documentation of research sources. For further information, please refer to the *University of Calgary Calendar* section on writing across the curriculum: http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-2.html

Grading & Department of Communication, Media and Film Grade Scale
The following table outlines the grade scale percentage equivalents used in the Department. of Communication, Media and Film. Final grades are reported as letter grades. For components graded using percentages or numerical scores, those values will be used directly in calculating the final course grade, while for components graded using letter grades, the letter grades will be converted to the midpoint values listed in the final column of the table below in calculating the final course grade.

In this course, letter grades will be used for written assignments, while percentage or numerical grades will be used for participation.

Grade Point Value	Description	Grade	Dept of CMF grade scale equivalents*	Letter grade % equivalent for calculations*
4.00	Outstanding performance	A+	96 - 100%	98.0%
4.00	Excellent performance	A	90 - 95.99%	93.0%
3.70	Approaching excellent performance	A -	85 - 89.99%	87.5%
3.30	Exceeding good performance	B+	80 - 84.99%	82.5%
3.00	Good performance	B	75 - 79.99%	77.5%
2.70	Approaching good performance	B-	70 - 74.99%	72.5%
2.30	Exceeding satisfactory performance	C+	65 - 69.99%	67.5%
2.00	Satisfactory performance	C	60 - 64.99%	62.5%
1.70	Approaching satisfactory performance	C-	55 - 59.99%	57.5%
1.30	Marginal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D+	53 - 54.99%	54.0%
1.00	Minimal pass. Insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject	D	50 - 52.99%	51.5%
0.00	Failure. Did not meet course requirements.	F	0 - 49.99%	0%

* Column 4: If percentages are used to calculate final grades, then grades falling within these ranges will be translated to the corresponding letter grades. Column 5: These percentage equivalents will be used for calculating final grades unless an alternative method of final grade calculation is outlined above.

Plagiarism
Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offence. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. **In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end, and other people's words and ideas begin**. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there.

For information on citation and documentation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago, IEEE, etc.), visit the Student Success Centre resource links at https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support or the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) Research and Citation Resources at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

If you need help with your writing or have questions about citing sources, consult your instructor or visit the Student Success Centre, Taylor Family Digital Library. To book an appointment, go to https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support

Instructor Intellectual Property & Copyright Legislation
Course materials created by the instructor (including lectures, course outlines, presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams) remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed, or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third-party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the same course section and term may be allowed under fair dealing. Check with the instructor if you have any questions about sharing materials with classmates.

To ensure they are aware of the consequences of unauthorized sharing of course materials (including instructor notes & electronic versions of textbooks), all students are required to read the *University of Calgary Policy on Acceptable Use of Material Protected by Copyright* at https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-material-protected-copyright-policy and the requirements of the *Copyright Act* (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-42/index.html). Students who use material protected by copyright in violation of this policy may be disciplined under the Non-Academic Misconduct Policy.

Academic Misconduct
For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the *University of Calgary Calendar* at http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html

Research Ethics
Whenever you perform research with human participants, including surveys, interviews, or observations as part of your university studies, you are responsible for obtaining research ethics approval and for following university research ethics guidelines. In some cases, your instructors may apply for course-based research ethics approval for certain assignments, and in those cases, they must review and approve your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, please see https://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/arts-researchers/resources-researchers-and-instructors/ethics

Deferrals of Course Work and Requests for Reappraisal

For university regulations and procedures related to the deferral of term work, see https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-7.html

For information about deferrals of final examinations, see https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/g-6.html

For information about requesting a reappraisal of coursework or of a final grade, see https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/i.html

Student Support Services and Resources

Please see https://www.ucalgary.ca/registrar/registration/course-outlines for information about student support services and resources, including Wellness and Mental Health Resources, Student Success programs and services, the Student Ombuds Office, the Student Union, and Safewalk. For resources on D2L, Zoom, Yuja, etc., see https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/resources-for-students/. (Find the topic menu under the icon to the left of the ELEARN banner.)

Schedule of Weekly Topics and Readings

Below is a brief overview of the semester as of December 2022. Detailed (and up-to-date) information regarding weekly topics and readings, as well as course assignments, can be found on D2L.

Unit 1 - Introduction to Social Media Influencers and Digital Content Creation		
Week 1 Jan 10, 12	**Topic:** Intro to COMS 401 and The Rise of the Influencer	
	Activities/Assignments: Sign-up for the D2L discussion board leadership	
Week 2 Jan 17, 19	**Topic:** Self-branding in the Digital Age	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 1	
Week 3 January 24, 26	**Topic:** Intimacy, Affect and Audiences	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 2	
Week 4 Jan 31, Feb 2	**Topic:** Spaces and Places: From the Bedroom to the Hype House	
		In-class activity: Unit 1 Mind Map due by 11:59 pm
Unit 2 – Influencers and Identity		
Week 5 Feb 7, 9	**Topic:** Living the (post)Feminist Dream?	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 3	
Week 6 Feb 14, 16	**Topic**: Labour and Legitimacy	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 4	
Week 7 Feb 21, 23	**TERM BREAK: NO CLASSES**	
Week 8 Feb 28, Mar 2	**Topic:** Methodological Approaches to Influencer Cultures and Industry	
Week 9 Mar 7, 9	**Topic:** Intersections of Race and Influencer Culture	
		Assignment due: Final Paper/Project Proposal
Unit 3 – Platformized Content Creation		
Week 10 Mar 14, 16	**Topic:** Failure, Deception and Accountability	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 5	**In-class activity:** Unit 2 Mind Map due by 11:59 pm
Week 11 Mar 21, 23	**Topic**: Corporate Ties	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 6	
Week 12 Mar 28, 30	**Topic:** Playing with the Algorithm	
	Discussion Board Leadership: Group 7	**Assignment Due:** Last day to submit the influencer case study
Week 13 Apr 4, 6	**Topic:** Resistance (and course wrap-up!)	
	In-class activity: Unit 3 Mind Map due by 11:59 pm	**In-class activity:** Final Mind Map due by 11:59 pm **Assignment due:** Participation self-assessment opens
Week 14 Apr 11	**NO CLASSES: FINAL PROJECT AND PARTICIPATION SELF-ASSESSMENT DUE APRIL 11th BY 11:59 PM**	