



**Political Science 2142A (570)**  
**POLITICS AND POP CULTURE**  
**Fall/ Winter 2025-2026**

**Instructor:** G. Dempsey  
**Email:** gdempse2@uwo.ca

---

**Course Information**

**Calendar Description:**

This course explores politics and popular culture through (and in) film, television, as well as digital and print media (advertisements, blogs etc.). The course will acquaint students with some major political theories, as well as examine selected issues such as capitalism, urbanism, consumerism, war, terrorism, transhumanism, technology and science.

**Extra Information:** 2 hours.

**Course Weight:** 0.50

**Breadth:** Category A

**Subject Code:** POLISCI

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

**POLITICS AND POP CULTURE  
(POLITICAL SCIENCE 2142A)**

**King's University College**

**Fall 2025**

**Instructor:** Grant Dempsey

**Email:** [gdempse2@uwo.ca](mailto:gdempse2@uwo.ca)

**Office Hours:** On Zoom - by appointment, with a regular weekly hour to be announced

**Mode of instruction:** In-person

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to the political study of popular culture. We will practice politically-oriented analysis of the content, form, and reception of a variety of popular-cultural material (including films, TV shows, music, sports, video games, and social media). We will also explore the influences of popular culture on political public consciousness and consider the impacts of political systems on popular culture.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- Students will be familiar with several major intersections of politics and popular culture.
- Students will learn how critical theory is applied and adapted to different social and political contexts.
- Students will develop their capacities to engage with complex scholarship in oral discussion and essay writing, and to integrate political theory and analysis in their own lives and in their perspectives on the world around them.
- Students will improve their skills in oral and written academic communication, including not only reading, writing, and speaking, but also listening, and understand more fully how to contribute to the creation of safe and thoughtful intellectual environments.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

All course readings will be provided via OWL at no additional cost.

This course also requires students to watch four films in total. All of the films are available to rent online. Each of the following links provides a list of the platforms on which each film is available and at what prices:

<https://www.justwatch.com/ca/movie/they-live>

<https://www.justwatch.com/ca/movie/black-panther>

<https://www.justwatch.com/ca/movie/joker-2019>

<https://www.justwatch.com/ca/movie/the-peoples-joker>

## GRADING

<b>Short Paper: 15%</b>
<b>Research Paper: 30%</b>
<b>Creative Project: 20%</b>
<b>Final Exam: 35%</b>

### SHORT PAPER (15% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE)

A short response paper. Additional guidelines and evaluation criteria will be discussed in class and posted on OWL.

**Due Date: Oct. 10, 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

## **RESEARCH PAPER (30% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE)**

An argumentative research paper centered on a topic of your choice that is relevant to the course theme and material. must have a substantial thesis and gather evidence from research sources to support that thesis. Additional guidelines and evaluation criteria will be discussed in class and posted on OWL.

**Due Date: Nov. 28, 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

## **CREATIVE PROJECT (20% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE)**

A creative project that engages thoughtfully with one or more issues relevant to the course. You are free to choose any medium for your project: it could be a piece of reflective or creative writing, a video, an audio recording, a computer game, an organized event, etc. Whatever form you choose, your project must be **your own creation**. Along with the project itself, you must submit **a short explanation of your choice of medium and the meaning of your project**, at least half a page and no greater than one full page in length. There will be an option for a collaborative approach to this assignment. Additional guidelines and evaluative criteria will be discussed in class and posted on OWL.

**Due Date: Dec. 4, by the start time of our final class meeting**

## **FINAL EXAM (35% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE)**

The final exam will be cumulative. Additional guidelines and evaluative criteria will be discussed in class and posted on OWL.

## **LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINE EXTENSIONS**

If you require an extension for any assignment, you must contact the instructor with your extension request **for that particular assignment, at least 72 hours prior to the date and time that the assignment is due.**

Any assignment submitted after its due date, without arranged accommodations or an extension agreed upon by the instructor, will receive a grade penalty of **-3%** per the start of each day that passed before the assignment was submitted.

### **AI POLICY**

Within this course, use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT, translation tools, and grammar-checking tools) is not permitted for written work submitted for evaluation. Unauthorized use of AI will be subject to academic discipline.

## TERM OUTLINE

### WEEK 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION (SEP. 4)

No Readings

### WEEK 2: THE POLITICS OF POP CULTURE (SEP. 11)

#### **Readings**

Jutta Weldes and Christina Rowley

- "So, How *Does* Pop Culture Relate to World Politics?"

Bohdana Kurylo

- "Technologised consumer culture: The Adorno–Benjamin debate and the reverse side of politicisation"

### WEEK 3: THE CODES OF RECEPTION (SEP. 18)

#### **Reading**

Stuart Hall

- "Encoding, Decoding"

#### **Film**

*They Live* (1988), dir. John Carpenter

### WEEK 4: THE MESSAGES HIDDEN IN CONTENT AND FORM (SEP. 25)

#### **Readings**

Roland Barthes

- "Myth Today"

Nick Stevenson

- "Marshall McLuhan and Media and Cultural Studies"

## **WEEK 5: MUSIC (OCT. 2)**

### ***Videos***

A selection of songs and music videos available on YouTube

### ***Readings***

Simone Driessen

- "Campaign Problems: How Fans React to Taylor Swift's Controversial Political Awakening"

Lyn Mikel Brown and Dana Edell with Montgomery Jones, Georgia Luckhurst, and Joneka Percentie

- "'I Love Beyoncé, but I Struggle with Beyoncé': Girl Activists Talk Music and Feminism"

Aaron Tham and Harng Luh Sin

- "'You Belong With Me' - Taylor Swift Event Exclusivity and Geopolitical Tensions"

## **WEEK 6: MEGA-EVENTS AND SPORTS (OCT. 9)**

### ***Reading***

John Horne

- "The Contemporary Politics of Sports Mega-Events"

## **SHORT PAPER DUE OCT. 10**

## **WEEK 7: FILM, PART I (OCT. 16)**

### ***Film***

*Black Panther* (2018), dir. Ryan Coogler

**Readings**

Jasmine A. Moore

- "'But I'm Right Here': The Curious Case of Killmonger and the Failures of Utopian Desire in Marvel's *Black Panther*"

Charles Athanasopolous

- "Black Radical Thought as Pathology in *Black Panther*"

**WEEK 8: FILM, PART II (OCT. 23)**

**Films**

*Joker* (2019), dir. Todd Phillips

*The People's Joker* (2022), dir. Vera Drew

**Readings**

Brandon Bosch and Lisa Kort-Butler

- "The Joker Controversy: An Origin Story"

Jen Yamato

- "Warner Bros. quashed an unauthorized Joker movie. Inside the director's fight to save it"

**WEEK 9: POP CULTURE IN ACTION (OCT. 30)**

**Readings**

Harmeet Kaur

- "In protests around the world, one image stands out: The Joker"

Andy Lavender

- "Theatricalizing Protest: The chorus of the commons"

Frenchy Lunning

- selections from *Cosplay: The Fictional Mode of Existence*

## READING WEEK NOV. 3-9

### WEEK 10: TELEVISION (NOV. 13)

#### **Readings**

Todd Graham and Auli Hajru

- "Reality TV as a trigger of everyday political talk in the net-based public sphere"

Guy Redden

- "Is Reality TV Neoliberal?"

Tom Syverson

- selections from *Reality Squared: On Reality TV and Left Politics*

### WEEK 11: SOCIAL MEDIA (NOV. 20)

#### **Readings**

Rebecca Lewis

- "'This Is What the News Won't Show You': YouTube Creators and the Reactionary Politics of Micro-celebrity"

Yanni Brown, Barbara Pini, and Adele Pavlidis

- "Affective design and memetic qualities: Generating affect and political engagement through bushfire TikToks"

Adina Gitomer, Julia Atienza-Barthelemy, and Brooke Foucault Welles

- "Youth activism and (de)personalized remix on TikTok"

**WEEK 12: GAMING (NOV. 27)**

Readings TBD

**RESEARCH PAPER DUE NOV. 28**

**CREATIVE PROJECT DUE DEC. 4**

**WEEK 13: REVIEW AND CLOSING DISCUSSION (DEC. 4)**

**KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**  
**GENERAL COURSE POLICIES**  
**2025-2026**

**1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences**

**Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)**

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

**Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at [https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses\\_enrollment/exams\\_and\\_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf](https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf).

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

[https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/academic\\_consideration\\_Sep24.pdf](https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf)

**Absences from Final Examinations**

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under Special Examinations).

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

## **2. Support Services**

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University

College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-supportservices/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:  
[https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental\\_wellbeing/](https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/)

Academic Support Services at King's University College:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

### **GBSV Support:**

King's 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 (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:  
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing [Care@kings.uwo.ca](mailto:Care@kings.uwo.ca) or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safecampus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also [https://www.uwo.ca/health/student\\_support/survivor\\_support/get-help.html](https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html)

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

### **3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

### **4. Statement on Academic Offences**

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammarchecking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software 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; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### **5. Copyright of Course Material**

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

### **6. Use of Recordings**

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

### **7. Policy on Attendance**

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.