Bloggers, YouTubers, & Instagrammers: Internet Celebrities & Digital Work
First-Year Seminar (JMC:1000:0004)
Tuesday 3 – 4:15 p.m. W332 AJB

Instructor: Dr. Brian Ekdale, E324 Adler Journalism Building, brian-ekdale@uiowa.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. & Thursday 2 – 4 p.m. or by appointment

DEO: Dr. David Ryfe, david-ryfe@uiowa.edu, E305B Adler Journalism Building

Course Overview: In 2017, Daniel Middleton (DanTDM) earned $16.5 million from his YouTube channel, putting his salary on par with some of Hollywood’s top actors and actresses. Middleton is not alone. Other Internet celebrities like Michelle Phan, Lilly Singh, and Logan Paul have used turned their popularity on social media into millions of dollars in annual earnings. These and other success stories have become the inspiration for a number of alluring headlines, such as “How to Become an Instagram Millionaire” (Entrepreneur, 2016) and “How to Make Millions as a YouTube Star” (Business Insider, 2016). But for every Internet millionaire, there are many, many others trying, and often failing, to earn a living and become famous using social media.

This first-year seminar explores the world of Internet celebrities and digital work. We will look at some of the top bloggers, YouTubers, Instagrammers, and other social media stars to consider the strategies they use to become and stay successful. We also will discuss aspiring Internet celebrities to examine their struggles to achieve celebrity status and to support themselves financially using social media. We will use concepts like authenticity, aspirational labor, sponsored content, and exploitation to help us understand what it means to become (or to fail at becoming) an Internet celebrity. Students will be assessed based on attendance, participation, weekly reading reflection papers, and a final presentation about an Internet celebrity.


Academic Misconduct: Academic misconduct occurs when you (intentionally or unintentionally) present someone else’s work as your own. According to the University of Iowa Academic Policies, academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Using direct quotations without quotation marks and/or without crediting the source
- Paraphrasing information and ideas from sources without crediting the source
- Submitting material created by someone else as your own

Students are responsible for understanding this policy. If you have questions, please ask me for clarification. Clear evidence of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade for the assignment and possibly the course. Per college policy, we are required to report academic misconduct the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences.

Electronic Communication: As per university policy, you are responsible for all official correspondences sent to your University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). I make every effort to respond to student emails within 24 hours, but I do have other commitments (e.g., meetings, research, family, sleep, etc.) that may keep me from immediately responding to your emails. If your email would take me more than 5 minutes to answer, I will advise you to visit my office hours or schedule an appointment.
ASSIGNMENTS / GRADING
You will be graded on your attendance, participation, weekly reading reflections, and one final presentation. There are 100 points possible.

Attendance and Participation (50 points): Your Attendance and Participation grade will reflect your preparedness, cooperation, and contribution. While attendance means being present by the start of class and staying until the end of class, preparedness means completing the assigned readings and tasks on time, cooperation means working well with others during class discussion and activities, and contribution means adding value to class discussions and activities. In short, I expect you to do more than “show up.” I expect you to be an active participant in the course.

Excused absences will be granted only if (a) you have a legitimate reason for missing class (e.g. documented illness, family emergency, religious holiday, etc.) and (b) you let Brian know via email about your absence prior to the start of the class period you are missing. Failure to give prior notification or a less-than-legitimate reason will result in an unexcused absence. Every student receives one “grace” absence. Each additional unexcused absence will result in an automatic 5-point deduction from your Attendance and Participation grade. For example, 3 unexcused absences from class will result in a maximum Attendance and Participation grade of 40 points.

Weekly Reading Reflections (25 points): For weeks 2-8, you should bring to class a printed document with the following:

- One quote from the assigned readings that you find particularly illuminating. Include a short (~1 paragraph) discussion of why you think it is important and how it relates to course topics.
- One quote from the assigned readings that you either disagree with or don’t understand. Include a short (~1 paragraph) discussion of why you disagree or what you find confusing about the passage.

While I do not expect you to enjoy or agree with everything you read in this course, I think you will find the ideas interesting and arguments provocative.

Final Presentation (25 points): You will work with a partner to give a brief (~10 minutes) presentation that analyzes one social media celebrity using key course concepts. These presentations are scheduled for the final two weeks of the course. More details will be provided about this assignment in the coming weeks.

Grading Scale:

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SCHEDULE
For weeks 2-8, you are required to read a chapter of Brooke Erin Duffy’s (Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love as well as a contemporary news article about internet celebrities and digital work. Readings should be completed prior to the start of class time.

Week 1 (8/21): Course Introductions
• No readings

Week 2 (8/28): Aspirational Labor
• Duffy, Preface and Chapter 1

Week 3 (9/4): Romanticizing Digital Work
• Duffy, Chapter 2

Week 4 (9/11): Making It Work
• Duffy, Chapter 3

Week 5 (9/18): Just Be Yourself
• Duffy, Chapter 4
• Mike Murphy. (2018, August 8). “You Are Not Original or Creative on Instagram.” Quartz. https://qz.com/quartzy/1349585/you-are-not-original-or-creative-on-instagram/

Week 6 (9/26): Getting Paid, Getting Played
• Duffy, Chapter 5

Week 7 (10/2): The Work of Hiding Work
• Duffy, Chapter 6

Week 8 (10/7): Everyone for Themselves
• Duffy, Chapter 7
Week 9 (10/14): Final Presentations
  • No readings

Week 10 (10/21): Final Presentations
  • No readings
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Policies and Resources

Administrative Home
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is the administrative home of this course and governs matters such as the add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and other related issues. Different colleges may have different policies. Questions may be addressed to 120 Schaeffer Hall, or see the CLAS Academic Policies Handbook at https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook.

Electronic Communication
University policy specifies that students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their University of Iowa e-mail address (@uiowa.edu). Faculty and students should use this account for correspondences (Operations Manual, III.15.2).

Accommodations for Disabilities
The University of Iowa is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (which includes but is not limited to mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related conditions). A student seeking academic accommodations should first register with Student Disability Services and then meet with the course instructor privately in the instructor's office to make particular arrangements. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between the student, instructor, and SDS. See https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/ for information.

Nondiscrimination in the Classroom
The University of Iowa is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for all people irrespective of their gender, sexual, racial, religious or other identities. Toward this goal, students are invited to optionally share their preferred names and pronouns with their instructors and classmates. The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and other identity categories set forth in the University's Human Rights policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, diversity@uiowa.edu, or visit diversity.uiowa.edu.

Academic Honesty
All CLAS students or students taking classes offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's Code of Academic Honesty: "I pledge to do my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty." Any student committing academic misconduct is reported to the College and placed on disciplinary probation or may be suspended or expelled (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

CLAS Final Examination Policies
The final examination schedule for each class is announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes. Final exams are offered only during the official final examination period. No exams of any kind are allowed during the last week of classes. All students should plan on being at the UI through the final examination period. Once the Registrar has announced the date, time, and location of each final exam, the complete schedule will be published on the Registrar's web site and will be shared with instructors and students. It is the student's responsibility to know the date, time, and place of a final exam.
Making a Suggestion or a Complaint
Students with a suggestion or complaint should first visit with the instructor (and the course supervisor), and then with the departmental DEO. Complaints must be made within six months of the incident (CLAS Academic Policies Handbook).

Understanding Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community have a responsibility to uphold this mission and to contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment should be reported immediately. See the UI Office of the Sexual Misconduct Response Coordinator for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy.

Reacting Safely to Severe Weather
In severe weather, class members should seek appropriate shelter immediately, leaving the classroom if necessary. The class will continue if possible when the event is over. For more information on Hawk Alert and the siren warning system, visit the Department of Public Safety website.