This theme of this year’s capstone seminar is how gossip and rumour shape cultural, social, and political engagement. We think of gossip and rumour as being simultaneously innocuous or harmful, essential or inconsequential. One thing is certain: gossip has always been one of society's dirty secrets, the bastard child of apparently ‘official’ or ‘truthful’ forms of knowledge exchange. More fundamentally, however, gossip is an inevitable part of our human nature. For many years now, researchers have been studying the origins of gossip, tracing gossip back to primitive times as an early form of communication. Recent studies have shown that gossip is an intrinsic part of group dynamics, influencing behaviours from early development to the highest levels of executive power. And while celebrity gossip has by and large been dismissed as trash and irrelevant, a celebrity now occupies the Oval Office. Low culture is the culture. So, with the advent of celebrity culture, the digital revolution, the Internet, iPhones, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or whatever mode of social mediation happens to float your boat -- gossip and rumour, more than we might care to acknowledge, have become the common parlance of how society communicates with itself about itself than we might care to acknowledge. Lainey Lui will steer us into the glamorous, contentious, hilarious, vicious, and never inconsequential waters of how gossip reflects public opinion, how gossip is the lens through which we view ourselves, and how gossip predicted the era of “fake news” and “alternative facts”. Now, more than ever, we need to acknowledge the power of gossip and rumour to affect our cultural, social, and political modes of engagement.

The course will familiarize us with the topical, seductive, provocative and volatile nature of our 24/7 news and media-saturated world, in which fact and fiction, politics and celebrity, the meaningful and the profane have become inextricably linked. The course has three goals. **Goal One** is to discuss the history, meaning, and social and political impact of gossip. **Goal Two** is to address how celebrity and satire (e.g. Stephen Colbert) have emerged as key forms of political critique of and resistance to gossip’s ubiquitous and not-so-clandestine presence. **Goal Three** is to articulate our own gossipy critiques through two forms of assignments. The first is a series of time-sensitive blog entries that ask you to respond immediately, rapidly, and persuasively to the day’s hot topic. These entries are designed to simulate the pressured environment and ceaseless feedback loop in which earnest media response and intentional media hype battle for control of the public message and popular opinion. The second
assignment will be the execution of a group project leading to a standup production and performance held during the final class. We will discuss and evolve this project as the class unfolds.

The class will meet with Lainey on campus 8 out of 12 weeks (see Class Schedule below).

About our Guest Fellow: Television personality, reporter, and infotainer Lainey Lui – a graduate of Western! -- is a reporter for CTV’s etalk and co-host on CTV’s daily talk series The Social. She’s the author of Listen to the Squawking Chicken: When Mother Knows Best, What’s A Daughter to Do? A Memoir (Sort Of) (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2014). She has contributed to several not-for-profit ventures, including working at Covenant House. She is also a self-proclaimed gossip maven. Check out Lainey at the following:

- **Website:** [http://www.laineygossip.com/](http://www.laineygossip.com/)
- **Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/LaineyGossip](https://twitter.com/LaineyGossip)
- **Instagram:** [https://www.instagram.com/laineygossip/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/laineygossip/?hl=en)

**Lainey’s Guests:**

**JANN ARDEN**
- **Website:** [http://www.jannarden.com/](http://www.jannarden.com/)
- **Bio:** [http://www.jannarden.com/biography/](http://www.jannarden.com/biography/)
- **Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/jannarden](https://twitter.com/jannarden)
- **Instagram:** [https://www.instagram.com/jannarden/](https://www.instagram.com/jannarden/)

**NICO LANG**
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- **Buzzfeed:** [https://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen](https://www.buzzfeed.com/annehelenpetersen)

**REQUIRED TEXTS**


You’re also welcome to purchase these texts as Kindle editions through Amazon. All other course material will be posted as .pdfs or accessible links for viewing/reading on the course OWL website.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

- Blog reports (8 x 7.5%; 500 words each) 60%
- Participation 10%
- Final Performance Project 30%
Blog Reports:
Throughout the course students will write a series of blog reports, all of which will form part of weekly class discussion. Some of these you’ll have time to think about and write ahead of time; others will be time sensitive. All of which will be time sensitive. The purpose of these second entries especially is to get us in the habit of producing arresting and accessible copy under the pressure of a short deadline. Each Blog entry must be as close to 500 words as possible, but cannot go over 500 words.

Final Performance Project:
The general form of the final class performance project will be a spoken word/standup performance on the general topic of gossip, inspired by content and discussion as the course unfolds. The form and content of this project is to be entirely determined by the class and part of the November 3 and 17 classes will be devoted to workshopping these projects with me. Earlier in the term we will have a discussion about whether or not the class wants to work together on the final project or split into smaller groups. Either way, the final class presentations will take place on November 24. Along with the final presentations, each student will write their final Blog (#8) detailing their response to the project. So, 22.5% of the Final Performance Project will be for the group effort; 7.5% will be for the blog assignment.

CLASS SCHEDULE

FALL TERM ***note change of time for October 6 class

September 8
Introduction / Celebrity Culture
What makes a good blog entry?
Blog Assignment #1, written in class: What is the value of gossip in today’s society?
Blog Assignment #2, assigned: relating The New York Times vs. The National Enquirer
Assigned reading: The National Enquirer vs. The New York Times

September 15
A Handmaid’s Tale
Also read: Swift, “A Modest Proposal” (posted to OWL site)
Blog Assignment #2 due in class
Blog Assignment #3, assigned: You are a television critic. You’ve watched the first 3 episodes of The Handmaid’s Tale: Your entertainment editor has assigned you to write a TV critic’s review of from any point of view (blog post, essay, YouTube critique).

September 22
Guest: Anne Helen Petersen
Too Fat, Too Slutty, Too Loud
A Handmaid’s Tale (cont.): How have unruly women been punished in 2017?
Blog assignment #3 due in class
Blog Assignment #4, assigned: write a blog post on an unruly woman

September 29
Road trip to CTV Studios Toronto
Blog Assignment #4 due in class.

October 6
Guest: Jann Arden
Thirty years as a celebrity: What’s it like?
Guest: Nico Lang
LGBT: something to gossip about
Blog Assignment #5 due in class (assigned 2-3 days prior to class)
NOTE: this week’s class will start at 1PM, not 1:30, to accommodate Jann Arden’s touring schedule
October 13  READING WEEK

October 20  Hamilton: How has gossip constructed history? How can history be re-written?
Satire and entertainment as political resistance (re-visit Swift)
Blog Assignment #6 due in class (assigned 2-3 days prior to class)

October 27  INDEPENDENT STUDY

November 3  News Satire: Does it make a difference in world of alternative facts and fake news?
Blog Assignment #7 due in class (assigned 2-3 days prior to class)
In-class preparation for final group performance.

November 10  INDEPENDENT STUDY

November 17  Want vs. need: How much more gossip can the world take?
Are alternative facts here to stay
In-class preparation for final group performance

November 24  Final Class Presentation
Including final Blog Assignment #8

December 1  NO CLASS

December 8  NO CLASS

WINTER TERM (TBA)

NOTE FROM THE DEAN OF ARTS and HUMANITIES:
You are responsible for ensuring that you have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that you have not taken an antirequisite course. Lack of prerequisites may not be used as basis of appeal. If you are not eligible for a course, you may be removed from it at any time, and you will receive no adjustment to your fees. These decisions cannot be appealed.

PLAGIARISM: Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text 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 (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

POLICY ON ACCOMMODATION FOR MEDICAL ILLNESS:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf [downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): https://studentservices.uwo.ca [under the Medical Documentation heading]. Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Office of the Dean of their home faculty and provide documentation.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION CANNOT BE GRANTED BY THE INSTRUCTOR OR DEPARTMENT.

UWO ACCESSIBILITY POLICY: Western has many services and programs that support the personal, physical, social and academic needs of students.