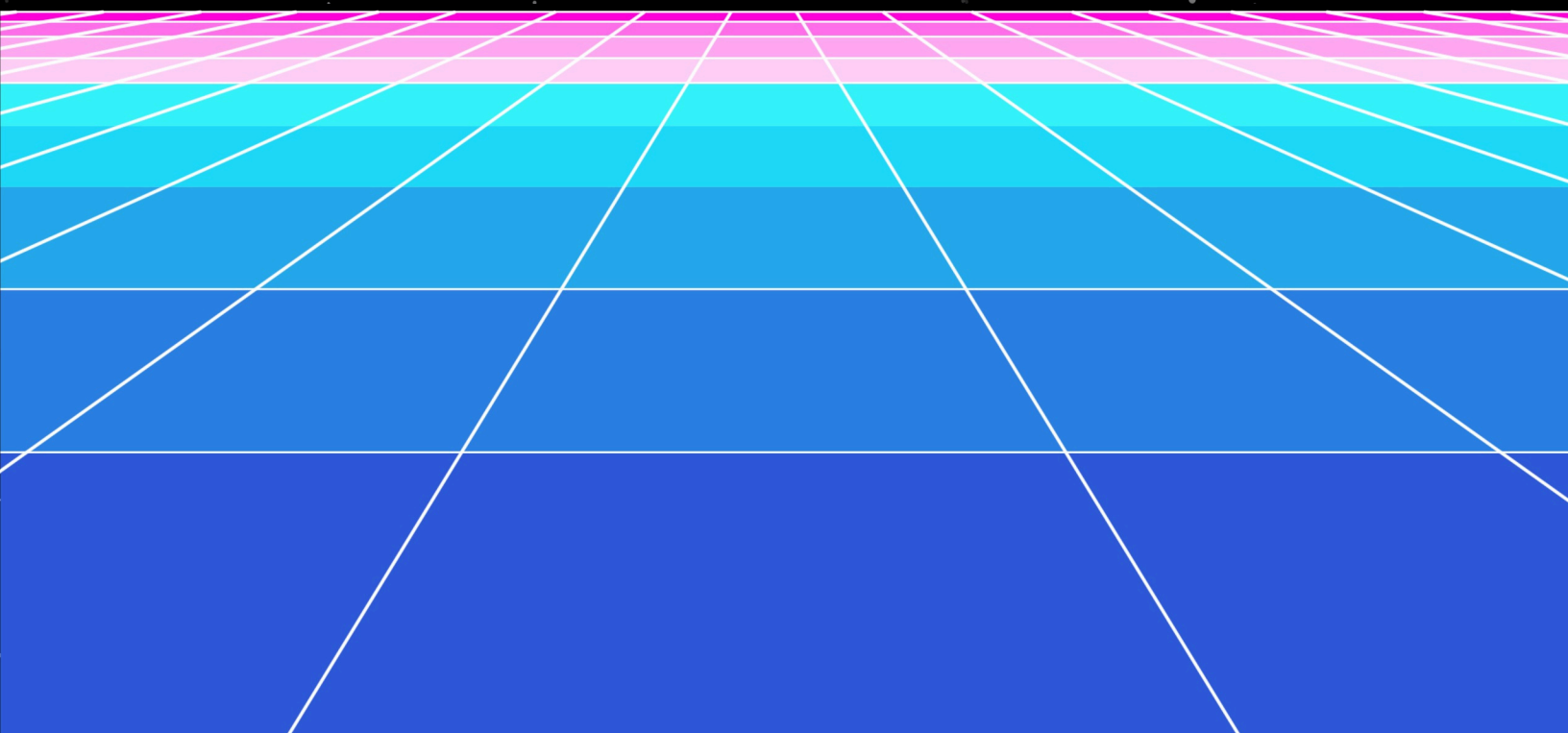
FIMS USF Undergraduate Student Fund

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level 2025 up

MACS CAREER CONFERENCE



WELCOME TO CAREER CONFERENCE

Level Up?

While the phrase "level up" is most closely connected with gaming, where levelling up means that a player is able to earn points to move to or unlock another level of the game, in the last decade this phrase has become an increasingly common way to capture aspirational improvement in everything from consumer goods to romantic relationships to career advancement. People routinely speak about levelling up to talk about personal or professional goals, and the ways in which they are planning to achieve them. I believe the ease with which "level up" has permeated our language and our culture derives from the degree to which the phrase provides a useful shorthand for describing a pattern of incremental and hierarchical growth and development with which we are very familiar (through schooling, sports, activities, etc). While secondary school might have felt like endless grinding through lower levels of the game play of our lives, the "levelling up" analogy is much more applicable over the course of your time here at university: required courses (still gotta grind) enable you to level up and access a wider range of electives, and experience points (curricular and extracurricular) to unlock future opportunities.

But because you're MACS students, you know we aren't going to leave it there, right?

Because we can see how at the same time as the phrase describes these familiar hierarchies, it also recognizes the agency of the individual (or player) in navigating their way through them, and explicitly identifies specific tasks or activities that enable recognition or progression, whether through the game or through life. The structure of these elements (user agency and clearly identified tasks tied to a reward) can be very motivating. Just think of the ways in which gamification has been touted as a way to enhance everything from learning languages (I see you Duolingo owl) to saving money. Levelling up normalizes not just linear ideas of development or progression (rather than cyclical or spiral), but ties this to a neoliberal understanding of the individual as having both agency (in terms of exercising choices – in particular through the market place) and the responsibility for continuous personal and professional improvement (stop looking at me like that DUO). "Levelling up" slips easily into "taking it to the next level", a cognate phrase which becomes a shorthand for personal and professional goals, but leaves vague and undefined what "it" is, and what the "next level" means. More worrying, both of these catch phases ignore very real differences individuals and groups face in trying to "level up," instead promising the illusion of equal opportunities to advance.

In gaming, the promise of levelling up is that not only will you progress in the story and gain new opportunities through completing tasks, acquiring items and building experience points, it is also that players who reach this new level are themselves enhanced by the transition. While the precision of "levelling up," in gaming at least, is that there are concrete elements that contribute to this journey, it encourages us to be instrumental about all aspects of our life (everything we do becomes "experience points"). Many of us have internalized the traces of these elements, the logic of "levelling up," when we draw on the phrase to describe our aspirations and expectations. If Taylorism described how the logic of the assembly line and mechanical efficiency could be brought to bear on human labour, it is worth thinking about ways in which "levelling up" captures the logic of this particular technological and political moment, that of digital capitalism.

But don't worry, MACS has given you the necessary tools to enable you to both unlock the next level (your degree, this career conference, internship opportunities, research opportunities, extracurriculars), and recognize (and resist) the ways in which the language of "levelling up" positions us within the logic of digital capitalism.



Susan

Susan Knabe, Associate Dean, Undergraduate

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

2:00 - 2:20	**Arrival and Registration**			**Outside of The Wave**
2:20 - 2:40	**Welcome**			**The McKellar Room**
2:40 - 3:10	**Keynote Speaker: Alessia Grosso** Senior Vice-President, Communications Strategy, Havas Media Network			**The McKellar Room**
3:20 - 3:40	**Breakout Session One**			
	The McKellar Room	**UCC 147A**	**UCC 147B**	**UCC 269**
	Meghan Houlihan Manager, Marketing Intelligence and Strategy, Nestle	**Mark Ollivierre** Sr. Game Producer, Blizzard Entertainment	**Sarranya Surendran** Account Manager, Snap Inc. (Snapchat)	**Shaun Ferguson** Associate Director, EssenceMediacom Canada
3:50 - 4:30	**Level Up Your Job Search** **Mastering AI Tools and Networking for Career Success** with Michelle Zuber Career Coach, Career Education, Student Experience			**The McKellar Room**
4:40 - 5:00	**Breakout Session Two**			
	The McKellar Room	**UCC 147A**	**UCC 147B**	**UCC 269**
	Varsha Kumar Director of Digital Marketing Partnerships, Live Nation Entertainment	**Chris Pandza** Design, Incite at Columbia University	**Henry Standage** Creative Manager, Bonus Track	**Skylar Gomes** Senior Account Executive, MacIntyre Communications
5:00 - 5:10	**Snack Break**			**The McKellar Room**
5:10 - 5:30	**Breakout Session Three**			
	The McKellar Room	**UCC 147A**	**UCC 147B**	**UCC 269**
	Natalie Diezyn Publicist and Partnerships Specialist, Disney	**Chris Pandza** Design, Incite at Columbia University	**Samir Kashyap** Associate Producer, Cineflix	**Cindy Pham** Project Lead, AI Ethics Office, Sony
5:40 - 6:00	**Breakout Session Four**			
	The McKellar Room	**UCC 147A**	**UCC 147B**	**UCC 269**
	Meghan Houlihan Manager, Marketing Intelligence and Strategy, Nestle	**Brent Barron** Director, Strategy & Transformation, CIFAR	**Kate Wallace** Marketing Professional, formerly at Apple Music and Apple News	**Shaun Ferguson** Associate Director, EssenceMediacom Canada
6:10 - 6:30	**Breakout Session Five**			
	The McKellar Room	**UCC 147A**	**UCC 147B**	**UCC 269**
	Mark Ollivierre Sr. Game Producer, Blizzard Entertainment	**Sarranya Surendran** Account Manager, Snapchat	**Henry Standage** Creative Manager, Bonus Track	**Varsha Kumar** Director of Digital Marketing Partnerships, Live Nation Entertainment
6:30 - 8:00	**Dinner, Prizes, Networking Bingo, and Closing Remarks**			**The Wave**
8:00 - 10:00	**Social Hour**			**The Wave**

CAREER CONFERENCE COMMITTEE



KATHIE HESS
Manager,
FIMS UGSS



CLAIRE JORDAN
Career Services
Officer



SUSAN KNABE
Associate Dean,
Undergraduate



TOM WROBEL
Academic
Advisor



MEG THORNE
Academic
Advisor



HEATHER MACCRONE
Academic
Advisor



BECKY BLUE
Communications
Specialist



SUZANNE ELSHORAFA
Digital Engagement
Coordinator



KATHLEEN BROPHY
Student
Representative



LEA O'FLAHERTY
Student
Representative



LEO BENOLIEL
Student
Representative

FIMS USF
Undergraduate Student Fund

This event was made possible through the generous support of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies Undergraduate Student Fund (USF). The USF provides funding for exciting initiatives, services, and events for FIMS undergraduate students, thanks to donations from students like you.

MEET YOUR CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



ALESSIA GROSSO

BA'14
SVP, Communications Strategy,
Havas Media Network

Alessia Grosso is an award-winning strategist and marketing leader at Havas Media, where she spearheads the Strategy, Intelligence, and Growth Department. With a keen eye for innovation, Alessia is dedicated to crafting strategies that not only drive business results but also inspire her teams to create meaningful and engaging experiences. Her passion for media fuels her commitment to pushing creative boundaries and delivering exceptional value to clients.

Before joining Havas Media, Alessia made her mark in the gaming industry, where she was recognized as one of Business Insider's Top Women in Gaming and Esports. She embraces her creative side as an amateur DIY-crafter, self-proclaimed gamer girl and an explorer of dystopian literature, often drawing inspiration from these narratives to fuel her innovative thinking.

KEYNOTE



MEGHAN HOULIHAN

BA'03
Manager, Marketing Intelligence and Strategy
Nestle

Data Analysis and Media Research

Meghan Houlihan has accumulated over 17 years of experience in market research and understanding Canadian consumers, and currently works with Nestle beverage brands like Nescafe, Starbucks, Coffee Mate, Carnation, Nesquik and Nestea. Meghan started her professional career doing market research for a small boutique firm, and has also worked across sectors like finance, consumer packaged goods, pharma and retail. She has a passion for creating equitable working environments and is a lead on the DE&I committee at Nestle Canada. Meghan lives in Toronto with her husband, two kids, and rescue dog named Farley.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT SESSION

LEVEL UP YOUR JOB SEARCH WITH MICHELLE ZUBER

Mastering AI Tools and Networking for Career Success

Ready to take your job search to the next level?
This workshop is designed to give you the edge in today's competitive job market. Learn how to seamlessly integrate AI tools and smart networking techniques to supercharge your job search and land the right opportunities.

In this session, you'll discover how to:

- Use AI to optimize your resume and beat applicant tracking systems (ATS).
- Identify and connect with key professionals and organizations on LinkedIn.
- Navigate coffee chats and networking conversations like a pro.



Western

MICHELLE ZUBER

Career Coach,
Undergraduate Students
Career Education, Student Experience

CAREER CONFERENCE CO-HOSTS



LEO BENOLIEL

Year 4
MIT Honours Specialization
FIMS Internship Module



SOPHIA RATANSHI

Year 4
MIT Honours Specialization
Digital Communication Certificate

MEET YOUR CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



HENRY STANDAGE

BA'21
Creative Manager
Bonus Track

Media Production and Journalism

Henry Standage made use of an "unglamorous" internship at Hockey Night in Canada to network and make connections with industry professionals. This ground work led to him becoming one of CTV Sportsnet's youngest ever showrunners and hosts when he produced Painting the Pitch Red, a well-received narrative audio series chronicling the history of Canadian soccer, released in time for the 2022 World Cup. Now with Bonus Track, Henry leads content strategy for FanDuel in Canada as well as using his writing, directing, producing and even acting skills in work with Air Miles and other major brand campaigns.



KATE WALLACE

BA'20
Marketing Professional
Apple Music and Apple News (former)

Marketing and Advertising

Kate Wallace has led marketing campaigns for Apple Music and Apple News, collaborating with global teams to adapt strategies for the Canadian market and driving retention and growth for Apple TV+, Apple Sports, and other services. Kate has also worked for OMD on digital marketing strategies for Mercedes-Benz and SickKids Foundation. She is now working with recruiters to find her next adventure. At every step, Kate has leveraged her professional network, remained curious, and embraced every opportunity, encouraging others to do the same.



SARRANYA SURENDRAN

BA'19
Account Manager
Snap Inc. (Snapchat)

Social Media and Community Engagement

Sarranya Surendran joined Snapchat in late 2024 where she partners with leading Canadian retail brands to help them develop advertising strategies tailored to Snapchat's dynamic platform. Previously she spent over five years honing her skills at top digital marketing agencies like Starcom, KINESSO, and Monks, collaborating with brands such as TD, TJX, Hershey's, and Tim Hortons. Outside of her professional roles, Surranya further nurtures her creative side through photography, dance, and fashion.

MEET YOUR CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



BRENT BARRON

BA'09
Director, Strategy & Transformation
CIFAR

Data Analysis and Media Research

Brent Barron guides transformational change at CIFAR – the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research – with recent focus on the adoption of Canada's national AI strategy, the first of its kind in the world. Brent has been with CIFAR for 10 years working in a variety of roles including government relations, international partnerships and program management. Previously Brent worked on research policy and IT strategy for the Government of Ontario. He currently lives in Toronto with his Corgi, Miss Dolly Pawton.



VARSHA KUMAR

BA'12
Director of Digital Marketing Partnership
Live Nation Entertainment

Marketing and Advertising

Varsha Kumar is a passionate leader in the world of live music, digital innovation, and brand storytelling. She specializes in crafting unforgettable brand experiences and building vibrant digital communities that bring people closer to the magic of live events. Varsha has over a decade of experience spanning sponsorship, influencer marketing, social media and events and loves connecting brands with audiences in a meaningful way. For Varsha, the ultimate reward lies in creating moments that resonate onstage and online, and that inspire the next wave of marketing leaders to dream big and think boldly.



SHAUN FERGUSON

BA'18
Account Executive, Brand Partnerships
EssenceMediacom Canada

PR and Corporate Communication

Shaun Ferguson is a seasoned sports marketing professional with experience driving impactful campaigns and managing blue-chip brands. Bringing strategic expertise to the intersection of sports, media, and lifestyle, Shaun has led award-winning projects and brought success to clients such as KFC, Ford, Molson, DoorDash, and many others. Shaun began his career with OMD, another large media agency, where he first honed his skills. But he still credits his time as an MIT student and being on the FIMSSC Street Team as big factors in his success.

MEET YOUR CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



CINDY PHAM

BA'07
Project Lead, AI Ethics Office
Sony

Emerging Technology in Media

Cindy Pham is an AI ethicist with over 15 years of professional experience. Based in Toronto, Cindy works with global corporations on the responsible development and adoption of AI, collaborating across the private sector, academic institutions, and NGOs that form Canada's AI ecosystem. Dedicated to harnessing AI's potential while upholding ethical standards and advocating for AI literacy across generations, Cindy strives to ensure that AI's transformational power is both accessible and responsibly integrated into society.



SAMIR KASHYAP

BA'16
Associate Producer
Cineflix Media Inc.

Media Production and Journalism

Samir Kashyap begin his professional career with an internship at the television show Daily Planet, and he quickly found his footing working with factual content. After the internship, he had a short stint working at Toronto City Hall until he was hired back to Daily Planet as a researcher. Sadly, Daily Planet was cancelled in 2018, leaving Samir working freelancing gigs for CTV News Channel and Cineflix. Near the end of 2019, Cineflix hired him as an associate producer for Air Crash Investigation, and he has since been working steadily on that program as well as on a show about sharks.



NATALIE DIEZYN

BA'21
Jr. Publicist and Partnerships Representative
Disney

Media and Entertainment Technology

Working out of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts in Toronto, Natalie Diezyn has led impactful national campaigns, increased public relations reach, and fostered collaborations with prominent brands like Air Canada and Rogers. Natalie has also supported major publicity campaigns for TIFF, Paramount Pictures, and Warner Bros. Separately, Natalie co-founded Marlow, a first-of-its-kind startup delivering innovative health care solutions. Her entrepreneurial spirit is matched by her dedication to sustainability. Natalie gives shout-outs to Tim Blackmore and John Reed, remembering them as two of the more influential professors during her time at university.

OTHER WAYS TO LEVEL UP

CAREERS & EXPERIENCE WORKSHOPS

Register for the following upcoming workshops:

January 28	Using AI in Your Career Plan
January 29	LinkedIn Basics: Setting Up Your Profile
January 30	Networking: It's Easier Than You Think!
February 4	Interviewing Excellence
March 4	Personal Branding: Marketing the Brand "You"
March 5	Resumes: Creating a Strategic, Branded Document
March 6	Cover Letters: Crafting Compelling Correspondance

For more dates, information and registration, please visit **career.uwo.ca**

TAKE PART IN THE UPCOMING CAREER FAIR



GRAND PRIZE GIVEAWAYS!

1

LEVEL UP YOUR WARDROBE

with a $250 Cadillac Fairview Gift Card

2

LEVEL UP YOUR WARDROBE

with a $150 Cadillac Fairview Gift Card

3

LEVEL UP YOUR WELLNESS

with a $50 Artistic Spa Gift Card

4

LEVEL UP YOUR WELLNESS

with a $50 Artistic Spa Gift Card



SHARE YOUR CONFERENCE MOMENTS WITH US!

Share a photo during the conference and tag
@westernumacs for a chance to win a $25 e-giftcard!