

Bader College Undergraduate Student Summer Research Fellowship (USSRF) Project 3 Description

Supervisor: Robert Hyland

Position: Senior Lecturer, Film and Media Studies

Project Title: Spider Capital – assessing neoliberal economics in Marvel's *Spiderverse*

Project Abstract.

In August 2023, Bader College is hosting the Superhero Global Meeting, 7th annual conference.

<https://www.superheroproject.net/call-for-papers>

The superhero project is a research group that presents contemporary scholarship in superhero culture in academic conferences and research publications (books and journals published by Intellect) in which members who are researching recent trends in superhero narratives (comics, films and television serials) present their work in progress with the intention of publication.

At the 2023 conference I will be presenting my own research work into the Marvel Cinematic universe, with research that explores the economic and ideological structures of neoliberalism as it relates to *Spider-man* comic and film narratives. I am looking for an Undergraduate Student Summer Researcher to assist in the cataloguing and development of research materials for this particular project.

Abstract:

After the 2008 financial crisis, US and British banking systems feared a lack of confidence in their respective economies. In traditional Keynesian economics, banks can raise and lower interest rates in order to stimulate saving or spending and artificially regulate the economy. In the context of neoliberalism, banks have been reluctant to implement such Keynesian economic structures. Instead, the banks introduced *quantitative easing*. Quantitative easing is an economic tool that is seen as separate from economic regulation. In QE, the banks

release more currency into the economy in order to stimulate faith in the economy, and consequently stimulate growth. However, the fear of QE is that the release of more currency can spur inflation, that is the devaluing of the very property QE is attempting to rescue. QE proposes that a calculated quantity of product (money) will restore interest in the economy without alienating the market.

In 2022, the 9th Spider-man film in 20 years was being prepared for release. However, there was a recognition that with so many superhero films, audiences may be losing interest in the superhero narrative and that particular spider-product. The solution was what I am calling *Spider-quantitative easing*. To combat falling interest (the devaluing of Spiderman because of over production) the solution was to create *more* spider-man characters. The films *Spider-man*, *Into the Spiderverse* and *Spider-man No Way Home* both use the conceit of multiple iterations of spider-man in the same film. This can be understood as a form of quantitative easing – restore confidence in a property, not by restricting supply, but by flooding the market with a calculated amount of product in order to restore interest in that product.

Beginning with the concept of *Spider-Quantitative Easing*, this paper explores the concept of *Spider-economics*. This research project will explore neoliberalism and contemporary capitalism in the Spider-verse narratives.

Aims and Outcomes.

In 2014 and 2015, Marvel Comics launched an ambitious project that would see a series of storylines run across several Marvel comic properties. Since the 1970s, there had been several spider-man spin-off series, such as Spider-woman, Spider-girl, and even future-set spider-man storylines. The 2014/2015 Spider-verse project was an attempt to collate these disparate spin-off spider-man characters across several different comic book lines, and consolidate all spider-man characters into a single multi-verse series (the Spider-verse). In order to complete this research project, I will need to examine several different comic book storylines, consolidate the different spider-man characters that appear in these series, and provide both narrative back-stories but also a character chronology of when the character first appeared in a comic book. In order to do so, I will be requiring the services of an undergraduate researcher, to help compile a database of these disparate Spider-man characters.

In the conducting of this work, the USSRF student will be examining both comic book and filmic iterations of the spider-verse and compile a database of all spider-man characters within that spider-verse.

In doing so, the student will also complete their own undergraduate research paper on the 'Spider-verse', with the aim of presenting their own research work at an undergraduate research conference, and hopefully publishing in an undergraduate research journal.

USSRF Learning Outcomes and Skill Development.

- Parsing large volumes of material
- Identifying patterns within that material
- Researching histories and backstories of characters
- Organizing that data into a research table / chart
- Developing a chronology of the 'spider-verse'
- Analyzing data
- Constructing a research paper that creates meaningful conclusions from data analysis.

Timeline and Milestones.

Time line May 1 – June 30 / August 27-30

Pre-departure (student meets with project lead to discuss expectations and overall shape of project)

Week 1, May 1 - 7: Preliminary research – student begins by re-viewing films 'Into the Spiderverse' (2021) and "Spider-man No Way Home" (2022).

Week 2, May 8 – 14: Student begins parsing Spider-verse comic lines. Follows all spider-verse storylines published across comic media from August 2014 – August 2015.

Week 3, May 15-21: Student begins construction of database by identifying all spider-man characters present in Spider-verse comic series and films.

Week 4, May 22 – 28: Student begins researching character backstories and first appearances of each character in spider-verse for that database.

Week 5, May 29-June 4: Student begins outlining research paper on a key topic (to be developed) about one of the characters in the spider-verse, considering its significance to a 21st century context of diversity or pluralism.

June 5 – June 11: Student begins drafting research paper on one spider-verse character.

June 12 – 18: Student begin drafting and outlining research presentation for undergraduate student research conference.

June 19-25: Student revises and polishes draft of undergraduate research paper.

June 26 - 30: Student completes draft of undergraduate research paper.

August 28 – August 30 – student attends (virtually) 7th Annual Global Meeting of Superhero Research Group held at Bader College.

Students interested in submitting an application for this project should complete the USSRF student application found on the Queen's USSRF website. Applications are due to Traci Allen by March 1st, 2023. See submission instructions posted in the Program Guidelines.