

Digital Anthropology (ANT 4851 / ANG 6930)

M 5:10-6:00 / W 5:10-7:00 | RNK 0225

Instructor: Alix Johnson (*she/her/hers*)

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Office hours: M & T 1:30-3:00 & by appt.

Course description: As more social practices and processes move online, anthropologists are moving their research online, too. This course introduces the theory, methods, and applications of digital anthropology: a growing subfield that includes a wide range of research – including ethnographies of online social spaces, studies of technology users and use, and explorations of digital infrastructure and industry. In this course we will examine texts across this spectrum, asking how anthropologists approach the study of digital technologies and practices – *and* how digital technologies and practices are re-shaping the practice of anthropology. We will also consider emerging issues of representation, and experiment with using digital tools to communicate anthropological research. Students in this class will conduct their own original research, reflecting together on the practical, ethical and theoretical dilemmas (as well as the opportunities) posed by doing anthropological research online.

The first half of the course, “Orientations,” surveys approaches to digital anthropology. In this unit, students gain a sense for how “the digital” interacts with longstanding anthropological concerns (i.e. identity, experience, intimacy, space, and materiality). The second half of the course, “Applications,” takes up questions of research design, production and representation, considering case studies across disciplines as well as outside the academy. Throughout, course materials will be augmented by guest lectures and on-campus fieldtrips.

Learning objectives:

To succeed in this course, students will demonstrate their ability to:

- Identify key theoretical frameworks and engage with debates in the field of digital anthropology
- Describe how anthropologists study digital technologies and practices, *and* how digital technologies and practices are changing anthropological research
- Employ the methods of digital anthropology to organize, conduct, and analyze independent research

Course materials:

Required for purchase:

Pink, Sarah (2016). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

Tom Boellstorff, et. al. (2013). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Other readings will be made available on the course Canvas site.

Recommended:

Selections from these authors will be assigned to the whole class; it is recommended that graduate students read the following ethnographies in their entirety:

Tom Boellstorff (2007). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.

Jenna Burrell (2012). *Invisible Users: Youth in the Internet Cafés of Urban Ghana*. MIT Press.

Julie Archambault (2017). *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique*. University of Chicago Press.

Victoria Bernal (2014). *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace & Citizenship*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Gabriella Coleman (2013). *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton University Press.

Assessment

Participation	15%	Ongoing
Discussion Questions	20%	Every Weds
Ethnographic Explorations		
Fieldnotes	10%	Mon, Mar 23
Interview	10%	Mon, Apr 6
Research Presentations	15%	Mon, Apr 20 and Weds, Apr 22
Final Project	30%	Weds, Apr 29

Participation will be assessed on the basis of your in-class contributions, including discussions, group work, and activities.

Discussion Questions, designed to demonstrate engagement with the readings and prompt productive conversation, are due before the start of class every Wednesday.

Ethnographic Explorations assignments ask you to practice some of the skills of ethnographic research (participant observation and interview) and reflect on your experience.

Final Projects synthesize your research and connect it to course material. Projects may take the form of a term paper, or a creative engagement using tools of digital storytelling (i.e. a podcast, website, interactive map, etc.). Students will present their research informally on April 22, and submit a final product by April 29 at 5:00 pm.

Graduate students and undergraduates will complete the same assessments – differences in requirements and expectations will be clarified in each assignment. Graduate students are also required to schedule a meeting with me within the first two weeks of class.

Grading scale:

A	100-93	B-	82-80	D+	69-67
A-	92-90	C+	79-77	D	66-63
B+	89-87	C	76-73	D-	62-60
B	86-83	C-	72-70	E	Below 60

Course policies:

Expectations

This course is organized as a discussion seminar, and as such, its success depends on you. I will offer short lectures to introduce context, case studies, and counter-examples, but the majority of our class time will be spent in conversation. Participation, then, requires having read, reflected on, and otherwise prepared yourself to discuss the day's assignments. Readings listed under a course date should be read *by the start of class that day*.

Some of the readings in this course will be challenging - I do not expect you to understand everything, but I do expect you to make time for careful reading, and to come to class with any questions you have. Likewise, you are not required to agree with the opinions presented here, but you are expected to engage with them respectfully and in good faith. Discussions with your peers should follow the same principle: disagreement and critique are welcome, but personal attacks will not be tolerated.

Assignments

Written assignments should be submitted online through the course Canvas site. All assignments are due *by the start of class on the due date*, with the exception of your final assignment, which is due on April 29 by 5:00 pm.

Assignments should be typed in a 12 point font (Times New Roman or similar), submitted as a .doc file, and should always include the assignment title, your name, and the date.

If you have questions or concerns about your grade on an assignment, please come speak with me during office hours (or make an appointment) *within one week of the day your grade is posted*. No changes will be made to grades after that window, but I am happy to speak with you about your general progress anytime.

Late work

I will grant extensions only in the case of exceptional circumstances, and only if you make arrangements with me in advance (or provide appropriate documentation after the fact). In all other cases, your grade will be reduced by 5% for every day that your assignment is late.

Communication

Email should be used for brief or urgent matters only – please bring questions about course content and assignments to class or office hours. I will reply to all emails sent during the week within 48 hours, but will not respond to course email over the weekend. Please plan accordingly if you need a quick reply.

Technology

Laptops are permitted in class for the purpose of consulting readings, taking notes, and completing activities. Using them in other ways is disrespectful (and obvious!), and you will be asked to leave the classroom if you do so. Phones should be turned off or kept on silent – let me know if you need to leave yours on for childcare or health-related reasons. Please come to class each day with a notebook and writing utensil, even if you plan to take notes on your computer.

Accommodations

UF is committed to achieving full accessibility for people with disabilities, and I am committed to making this classroom accessible to you. If you are a student with a disability and think you may need accommodations, you are encouraged to register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/, or 001 Reid Hall) as soon as possible – but also know that it is never too late. Present your accommodation letter promptly, so I can make the necessary accommodations as soon as possible. Whether or not you are registered with the Disability Resource Center, I always welcome feedback about how to make this class more accessible – to you in particular, or overall.

Academic integrity

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” I encourage you all to review the Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) in its entirety. *In this course, cheating and plagiarism (representing someone else’s work as your own, including through failures of citation) will result in a grade of zero, and may be reported to the Dean of Students.*

UF Resources

Library / Research Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>

E-Learning / Technical Support: learningsupport@ufl.edu / 352-392-4357 (select option 2)

Counseling and Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu> / 352-392-1575

U Matter, We Care (Resources for students in distress): umatter@ufl.edu / 352-294-2273

Course schedule:

UNIT I: ORIENTATIONS

Week 1: The Field and the Field

M 1/6 – No reading

W 1/8

Boellstorff, Tom et. al. (2012). “Ch 2: Three Brief Histories” (p. 13-27) in *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, Princeton University Press

Boellstorff, Tom (2012) “Rethinking Digital Anthropology” in *Digital Anthropology*, eds. Heather Horst and Daniel Miller. Berg Press.

Recommended:

Coleman, Gabriella (2010). “Ethnographic Approaches to Digital Media,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 487-505.

Week 2: Digital Worlds

M 1/13

Pink, Sarah (2016). “Ch 6: Researching Social Worlds” (p. 101-122) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

W 1/15

Boellstorff, Tom (2007). “Ch 1: The Subject and Scope of this Inquiry” (p. 3-31) in *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.

Recommended:

Boellstorff, Tom (2007). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.

Week 3: Technological Practices

M 1/20 - NO CLASS

W 1/22

Pink, Sarah (2016). “Ch 3: Researching Practices” (p. 41-58) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

Week 4: Technological Practices cont.

M 1/27

Dow Schull, Natasha (2016). “Data for Life: Wearable Technology and the Design of Self-Care,” *BioSocieties* 1-17.

W 1/29

Burrell, Jenna (2008). "Problematic Empowerment: West African Internet Scams as Strategic Misrepresentation," *Information Technologies and International Development* 4(4): 15-30.

Recommended:

Burrell, Jenna (2012). *Invisible Users: Youth in the Internet Cafés of Urban Ghana*. MIT Press.

Week 5: Experience, Embodiment, Identity

M 2/3

Pink, Sarah (2016). "Ch 2: Researching Experiences" (p. 19-39) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

W 2/5

Nakamura, Lisa (2008). "Cyber-race," *PMLA* 123(5): 1673-1682.

Boellstorff, Tom (2018). "The Opportunity to Contribute: Disability and the Digital Entrepreneur," *Information, Communication & Society* 22(4): 474-490.

Recommended:

Benjamin, Ruha (2017). *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Polity.

Week 6: Digital Intimacies

M 2/10

Pink, Sarah (2016). "Ch 5: Researching Relationships" (p. 79-100) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

W 2/12

Gershon, Ilana (2010). "Breaking Up is Hard to Do: Media Switching and Media Ideologies," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20(2): 389-405.

Archambault, Julie (2011). "Breaking Up 'Because of the Phone' and the Transformative Potential of Information in Southern Mozambique," *New Media & Society* 13(3): 444-456.

Recommended:

Archambault, Julie (2017). *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique*. University of Chicago Press.

Week 7: Digital Places

M 2/17

Pink, Sarah (2016). "Ch 7: Researching Localities" (p. 123-147) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

W 2/19

Bernal, Victoria (2006). "Diaspora, Cyberspace, and Political Imagination: the Eritrean Diaspora Online," *Global Networks* 6(2): 161-179.

Recommended:

Bernal, Victoria (2014). *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace & Citizenship*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Week 8: Digital Things

M 2/24

Pink, Sarah (2016). "Ch 4: Researching Things" (p. 59-78) in *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.

W 2/26

Starosielski, Nicole (2015), "Introduction: Against Flow" (p.1-25) and "Ch 1: Circuitous Routes" (p. 26-63) in *The Undersea Network*. Duke University Press.

Fieldtrip: Campus digital infrastructure tour

Week 9: Spring Break (NO CLASS)

UNIT II: APPLICATIONS

Week 10: Digital Research - Design

M 3/9

Boellstorff, Tom et. al. (2013). "Ch 4: Research Design and Preparation" (pp. 52-64) in *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, Princeton University Press.

W 3/11

Coleman, Gabriella (2015). *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous* [selections]. Verso.

Recommended:

Coleman, Gabriella (2013). *Coding Freedom: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Hacking*. Princeton University Press.

Week 11: Digital Research – Fieldwork

M 3/16

Kane, Abdoulaye (2012). "Haalpular Migrants' Home Connections: Travel and Communications Circuits" in Hans Peter Hans and Kristin Kastner, eds. *Urban Life-Worlds in Motion: African Perspectives*. Transcript Verlag.

Guest lecture: Abdoulaye Kane

W 3/ 18

Boellstorff, Tom et. al. (2013). "Ch 5: Participant Observation in Virtual Worlds" (pp. 65-91) and "Ch 8: Ethics" (p. 129-150) in *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, Princeton University Press.

Week 12: Images and Archives

M 3/23

Boellstorff, Tom et. al. (2013). "Ch 7: Other Data Collection Methods for Virtual Worlds Research" (pp. 113-128) in *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, Princeton University Press.

Fieldnotes due

W 3/25

Pink, Sarah (2011). "Digital Visual Anthropology: Potentials and Challenges," in *Made to Be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology*, Marcus Banks and Jay Ruby, eds.

Week 13: Representation – Tools and Techniques

M 3/30

Peruse the following experiments in digital storytelling:

- "Feral Atlas: Map to the More-Than-Human Anthropocene" (Anna Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, Elaine Gan)
- "Surfacing" (Nicole Starosielski)
- "The Shore Line" (Liz Miller)

W 4/1

No reading

Fieldtrip: Library West digital collections

Week 14: Representation – Questions and Critiques

M 4/6

Elizabeth Povinelli (2011). "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22(1): 146-171.

Interview due

W 4/8

"Staging, Manipulation, and Truth in Photography." *The New York Times*, October 16, 2015.

[Documentary] *National Geographic*, "Outnumbered in Africa" (12 min)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAsIXJVXnU&t=22s>

Guest lecture: Gabby Salazar

Week 15: Impacts and Applications

M 4/13

Natasha Singer (2014). "Intel's Sharp-Eyed Social Scientist," *The New York Times*.

W 4/15

[Reading TBA]

Guest lecture: Ken Sassaman

Week 16: Closing Questions

M 4/20

Research presentations

W 4/22

Research presentations

Final projects due Wednesday, April 29 by 5:00pm