

Digital Cultures and Communities (ANT 3930)

MWF 11:45-12:35 | TUR L011

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

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

Course description: How are digital technologies reshaping social worlds? How do we perform our identities (and interpret others') online? Does constant communication strengthen relationships or threaten community? And when we go online, do we really leave our bodies behind? This course explores these questions and others by situating "the digital" in cross-cultural context. While IT is often imagined to be universalizing – making distant and different places more alike – in practice digital technologies have a wide range of impacts. Using the tools of cultural anthropology, this course will analyze both online social worlds (i.e. gamers, vloggers, and hacktivists), and the ways that IT seeps into social life "offline" (i.e. ideologies of innovation, corporate surveillance, and e-waste). Students will also mobilize course materials to reflect on their own digital experiences. Topics addressed will include identity, intimacy, embodiment, community, environment, and politics.

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

- Analyze the ways that digital experiences differ across social, cultural, and political contexts (including nation, race, gender, and dis/ability)
- Apply course content to current events and conversations, including debates about social media, surveillance, and information economy
- Reflect on the role that digital technologies play in shaping their own subjectivities and socialities

Course materials:

Will include academic texts, journalistic articles, essays, and podcasts. They will be made available as links or PDFs on the course Canvas site.

Assessment: Your grade will be based on the following components:

| | | |
|---------------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| Participation | 15% | Ongoing |
| Digital Life Logs | 20% | Friday, Jan 31 Friday, Feb 28 |
| Midterm Exam | 25% | Friday, Mar 20 |
| Op-Ed | | |
| Proposal | 10% | Friday, Apr 3 |
| Draft / peer review | 10% | Friday, Apr 20 |
| Final op-ed | 20% | Wednesday, Apr 29 |

Participation will be assessed on the basis of in-class engagement and activities. Most class periods, you will complete a short writing reflection, reading quiz, or group activity designed to demonstrate that you are keeping up with the class. If you miss more than four class sessions over the semester, it is likely to compromise your participation grade.

Digital Life Logs are short writing assignments that ask you to reflect on course readings and connect them to your own experience.

The *Midterm Exam* is an in-class, closed-book test comprised of multiple-choice and short answer questions. It will cover both course reading and lectures.

The *Op-Ed* assignment asks you to mobilize course material in order to make a convincing argument about a digital issue of your choice. This assignment will be broken up into smaller components (a proposal, draft, and peer review) to be completed over the second half of the term.

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 presents a survey of anthropological approaches to digital topics – this means that we will be moving quickly, exploring a new set of questions each week. It is crucial that you keep up with readings and lectures. Lectures will not simply review or explain the reading, but will introduce context, case studies, and counter-examples (on which you will also be assessed). Readings listed under a course date should be read *by the start of class that day*.

Participation in this course requires that you come to class prepared and engage fully in discussions, assignments, and assessments. Please note: your lowest three participation scores will be dropped automatically to accommodate the occasional absence. Consequently, there is no need to email me if you miss a class section, and it is not possible to “make up” participation points.

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.

Written work should be typed in a 12 point font (Times New Roman or similar), and should always include the assignment title, your name, and the date.

If you have questions or concerns about your grade on an assignment, come speak with me in 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 generally about your 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% (roughly half a letter grade) 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) will result in a grade of zero, and may be reported to the Dean of Students.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two weeks of the semester, and I will make time for you to complete your evaluations in class. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

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:

| Wk | Topic | Date | Reading | Due |
|----|---|--------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Introductions | M 1/6 | | |
| | | W 1/8 | Miller, "Digital Anthropology" | |
| | | F 1/10 | Boellstroff, "Three Brief Histories" | |
| 2 | Digital divides and digital development | M 1/13 | Penn State, "The Digital Divide" | |
| | | W 1/15 | Omari, "Digital Access Amongst the Marginalized" | |
| | | F 1/17 | | |
| 3 | The digital other | M 1/20 | NO CLASS | |
| | | W 1/22 | De Seta, "Postdigital Wangluo" | |
| | | F 1/24 | | |
| 4 | The digital self | M 1/27 | Dow Schull, "Data for Life" | |
| | | W 1/29 | Gershon, "Selling Your Self" | |
| | | F 1/31 | | Dig Life Log |
| 5 | Virtual embodiment | M 2/3 | Benjamin, "Engineered Inequity" | |
| | | W 2/5 | Ginsburg, "Disability in the Digital Age" | |
| | | F 2/7 | | |
| 6 | Digital intimacies | M 2/10 | Berryman and Kavka, "The Role of Intimacy in Celebrification" | |

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|----|-------------------------------------|--------|--|----------------|
| | | W 2/12 | Archambault, "Breaking Up Because of the Phone" | |
| | | F 2/14 | | |
| 7 | Digital communities | M 2/17 | Boellstorff, "Zuckerberg and the Anthropologist" | |
| | | W 2/19 | Whippey, "Community in World of Warcraft" | |
| | | F 2/21 | | |
| 8 | Digital nations, digital states | M 2/24 | Bernal, "Nationalist Networks" | |
| | | W 2/26 | Latonero and Kift, "On Digital Passages" | |
| | | F 2/28 | | Dig Life Log |
| 9 | | M 3/2 | | |
| | | W 3/4 | SPRING BREAK | |
| | | F 3/6 | | |
| 10 | Online politics | M 3/9 | Postill, "Digital Politics" | |
| | | W 3/11 | Rough Translation, "Ukraine vs. Fake News" | |
| | | F 3/13 | | |
| 11 | Algorithms and/as culture | M 3/16 | Seaver, "Captivating Algorithms" | |
| | | W 3/18 | | |
| | | F 3/20 | MIDTERM | |
| 12 | Surveillance and privacy | M 3/23 | Zuboff, "Surveillance Capitalism" | |
| | | W 3/25 | Marwick, "The Public Domain" | |
| | | F 3/27 | NO CLASS | |
| 13 | Labor and value | M 3/30 | O'Mara, "Silicon Valleys" | |
| | | W 4/1 | Irani, "Difference and Dependence" | |
| | | F 4/3 | | Op-ed proposal |
| 14 | Infrastructure | M 4/6 | Stephenson, "Mother Earth, Motherboard" | |
| | | W 4/8 | Taylor, "Failover Architectures" | |
| | | F 4/10 | | |
| 15 | Environment | M 4/13 | | |
| | | W 4/15 | Carruth, "The Digital Cloud and the Micropolitics of Energy" | |
| | | F 4/17 | Ahmed, "The Global Cost of Electronic Waste" | |
| 16 | Digital dreams / digital nightmares | M 4/20 | Op-ed peer review prep | Op-ed draft |
| | | W 4/22 | | |
| | | W 4/29 | NO CLASS | Op-ed final |