

## Digital Anthropology (ANT 4851) | Fall 2019

T 11:45-1:40 (5-6): MAT 0251

Th 12:50-1:40 (6): MAT 0114

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

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**Office:** Turlington B129/B129A

**Office hours:** T & Th 2-3:30pm

**Course description:** Digital anthropology examines the relationship between digital technologies and human cultures. This course offers an introduction to the theory, methods, and applications of this growing field. As digital technologies increasingly influence all aspects of our sociality – from our sense of identity to our experience of community, from our labor practices to our political strategies – anthropologists are adapting the tools of ethnography to better understand the conditions they create and change. Drawing on theoretical texts, ethnographic research, and other kinds of media products, we will explore the multiple makings, meanings, and impacts of the digital across a range of cultural contexts.

This course is divided into two units. In the first, we will survey the field of digital anthropology, asking how the tools of cultural anthropology can help us understand emerging digital spaces, experiences, and communities. Unit I concludes with a midterm exam. In the second unit, we will take up the practical question of how to *do* digital anthropology: how do we use ethnography to explore digital spaces, and how can digital technology enhance other kinds of anthropological research? In Unit II, students will organize, conduct, and analyze their own research.

### Learning outcomes:

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

- Understand how anthropologists study digital technologies and practices
- Understand how digital technologies and practices are changing anthropological research
- Identify key theoretical frameworks and important debates in digital anthropology
- Analyze the ways that digital experiences can differ across social, cultural, and political contexts
- Employ the methods of digital anthropology to organize, conduct, and analyze research

### Course materials:

Required (available at UF Bookstore): *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Methods* by Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T.L. Taylor. Princeton University Press, 2013.

Other readings will be made available as PDFs on the course eLearning site.

Graduate students should plan to read at least two of the following full ethnographies in addition to generally assigned readings (indicated “Grads” on the course schedule):

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

- Julie Archambault (2016). *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sareeta Amrute (2016), *Encoding Race, Encoding Class: Indian IT Workers in Berlin*. Duke University Press.
- Victoria Bernal (2014). *Nation as Network: Diaspora, Cyberspace & Citizenship*. University of Chicago Press.
- Tom Boellstorff (2007). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton University Press.

**Evaluation:**

**Assessment**

Your grade will be calculated based on the following components:

- Participation (15%) - Ongoing
- Discussion Questions (15%) - Every Tuesday
- Midterm Exam (20%) - Oct 17
- Ethnographic Explorations:
  - Observations (15%) - Nov 5
  - Interview (15%) - Nov 14
  - Analysis (20%) - Dec 3

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

*Discussion Questions*, designed to demonstrate engagement with the readings and start productive conversation, are due every Thursday that we have class.

The *Midterm Exam* will cover Unit I, and will consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

*Ethnographic Explorations* assignments ask you to practice some of the skills of ethnographic research, reflect on your experience, and link your findings to themes and texts from the course.

*Graduate students will complete a final paper in lieu of a midterm exam, due Dec. 12.*

**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	F	Below 60

## **Submissions, late policy, and “grace day”**

Written assignments (Discussion Questions and Ethnographic Explorations) should be submitted online through the course eLearning site. All assignments are due by the *start of class on the due date* (with the exception of grad students’ final papers, due by midnight Dec 12).

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

That said, we all come up against the unexpected and unavoidable. For this reason, each student is granted one “grace day” that you may use to turn in *one* assignment *one* day (24 hours) after it is due. When invoking your grace day, simply write “Grace” in the comment box of your submission on eLearning (there is no need to alert me in advance).

## **Accessibility and 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/](http://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 to the instructor promptly so I can make the necessary accommodations. 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.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. *In this course, cheating and plagiarized work will result in a grade of zero, and will be reported to the Dean of Students.*

## **Course policies**

### **Expectations:**

Your full participation in this course requires reading, reflecting on, and coming prepared to discuss the required texts. 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, close reading, and to come to class with any questions you have. Likewise, you are not required to agree with all the viewpoints raised in this classroom, but you are expected to engage with them respectfully and in good faith. Class discussions and activities are sites to practice learning collaboratively across and through our differences. To this end, debate and critique are encouraged, but personal attacks will not be tolerated.

Readings listed under a course date should be read *by the start of class that day*.

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).

### **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. Cell phones should be turned off or kept on silent. Please come to class each day with a notebook and writing utensil, even if you plan to take notes on your computer.

### **Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at: <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

### **University Resources**

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

E-Learning / Technical Support: [learningsupport@ufl.edu](mailto: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](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) / 352-294-2273

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center / 352-392-1161

## UNIT I: ORIENTATIONS

### T 8/20 | **Introductions**

[In class] Kyla Wazana Tompkins (2016), "Some Notes on How to Ask Good Questions About Theory That Will Provoke Conversation and Further Discussion From Your Colleagues," *Avidly*, September 13.

### Th 8/22 | **What is Digital Anthropology?**

Tom Boellstorff et. al. (2013) *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, "Three Brief Histories" (pp. 13-28).

### T 8/27 | **Thinking Technology**

Langdon Winner (1986), "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" in *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in the Age of High Technology* (pp. 1-12), Chicago University Press.

### Th 8/29 | **Digital Selves**

Ilana Gershon (2014). "Selling Your Self in the United States," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 37(2): 281-295.

### T 9/3 | **Digital Subjectivities**

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

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

### Th 9/5 | **NO CLASS**

### T 9/10 | **Digital Socialities**

Joyce Davidson (2008), "Autistic Culture Online: Virtual Communication and Cultural Expression on the Spectrum," *Social & Cultural Geography* 9(7): 791-806.

Watch in class: *Even Asteroids Are Not Alone* (2018)

### Th 9/12 | **Digital Intimacies**

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

Grads: Julie Archambault (2016). *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique*. University of Chicago Press.

### T 9/17 | **Digital Workers**

Lily Irani (2015), "Difference and Dependence among Digital Workers: The Case of Amazon Mechanical Turk," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114(1): 225-234.

Watch in class: *The Cleaners* (2018)

### Th 9/19 | **Digital Work**

Sareeta Amrute (2014). "Proprietary Freedoms in an IT Office: How Indian IT Workers Negotiate Code and Cultural Branding," *Social Anthropology / Anthropologie Sociale* 22(1): 101-117.

*Grads*: Sareeta Amrute (2016), *Encoding Race, Encoding Class: Indian IT Workers in Berlin*. Duke University Press.

### T 9/24 | **Digital Values**

Margaret O'Mara (2011), "Silicon Valleys," *Boom: A Journal of California* 1(2): 75-81.

### Th 9/26 | **Digital Value**

Bill Maurer, Taylor C. Nelms and Lana Swartz (2013), "'When Perhaps the Real Problem is Money Itself!': The Practical Materiality of Bitcoin," *Social Semiotics* 23(2): 261-277.

### T 10/1 | **Digital Politics**

Victoria Bernal (2005). "Diaspora, Digital Media, and Death Counts: Eritreans and the Politics of Memorialization." *African Studies* 72(2): 246-264.

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

### Th 10/3 | **Digital Politics**

Gabriella Coleman (2012). "Our Weirdness is Free: The Logic of Anonymous - Online Army, Agent of Chaos, Seeker of Justice. *Canopy*, 15.

### T 10/8 | **Digital Infrastructures**

Neal Stephenson (1996). Mother Earth, Motherboard. *Wired Magazine*, December 1, 1996.

### Th 10/10 | **Digital Environments**

Allison Carruth (2014), "The Digital Cloud and the Micropolitics of Energy," *Public Culture* 26(2): 339-364.

## T 10/15 | **Digital Waste**

Jennifer Gabrys (2011). *Digital Rubbish*, "Media in the Dump: Salvage Stories and Spaces of Remainder" (pp. 127-146).

## Th 10/17 | **MIDTERM EXAM**

### UNIT II: EXPLORATIONS

## T 10/22 | **The Digital Field**

Tom Boellstorff (2007). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, "The Subject and the Scope of this Inquiry" (pp. 3-29 only). Princeton University Press.

## Th 10/24 | **Digital Fieldwork**

Tom Boellstorff et. al. (2013) *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, "Myths About Ethnography" (pp. 29-51). Princeton University Press.

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

## T 10/29 | **Access**

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

## Th 10/31 | **Ethics**

Mieke Schrooten (2016). "Writing eFieldnotes: Some Ethical Considerations," in *eFieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology in the Digital World*, Roger Sanjek and Susan W. Tratner, eds. University of Chicago Press.

## T 11/5 | **Interviews**

Tom Boellstorff et. al. (2013) *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, "Interviews and Virtual Worlds Research" (pp. 92-112). Princeton University Press.

*Due: Observation*

## Th 11/7 | **Images**

Sarah Pink (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.

**T 11/12 | Archives**

Francine Barone, David Zeitlyn, and Viktor Mayer-Schönburger (2015). "Learning From Failure: The Case of the Disappearing Website," *First Monday* (20)5: 1-17.

**Th 11/14 | Analysis**

Tom Boellstorff et. al. (2013) *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, "Data Analysis" (pp. 159-181). Princeton University Press.

*Due: Interviews*

**T 11/19 | NO CLASS**

**Th 11/21 | NO CLASS**

**T 11/26 | Applications**

Natasha Singer (2014). "Intel's Sharp Social Scientist," *The New York Times*, February 15.

**Th 11/28 - NO CLASS (BREAK)**

**T 12/3 | Conclusions**

*Due: Analysis*