

American Studies 418B — Digital Diversity

COURSE SYLLABUS

Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-10:45am

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Description: In this course, we will explore the cultural impact of digital media on practices of everyday life and issues identity and difference such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability. We will begin by looking at the problem of the “digital divide.” As digital technologies -- especially the internet -- become more and more essential to our everyday lives, how are communities and nations without access to these technologies impacted? What are some solutions to this growing problem? We will then move on to look at how our individual and collective identities are built and sustained through our interaction with technologies. We will look at how we present ourselves and interact with one another on social networking sites. How do race and gender translate to these online environments? How are race and gender represented in digital media such as videogames? We will also look at how those with various disabilities must contend with media designed with able-bodies in mind. Finally, we will look at how communities utilize technology to remain connected, culminating in a student-created documentary of a particular community in the DC-Baltimore areas. The final project for this course will be a paper that applies the theories studied in this course to your experience interacting with your chosen community.

Required Texts (available in the campus bookstore):

- Mark Warschauer. *Technology and Social Inclusion*. MIT Press: ISBN-10: 0262731738
- Additional Readings posted on ELMS

Assignments: Reading assignments are listed on the day they will be discussed in class. You are expected to arrive to class having read the works listed. All written assignments are to be turned in at the beginning of class. No papers will be accepted via e-mail and computer problems are not an excuse for late work. **NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

Grades:

Identity Tourism essay: 15%

Accessibility Map: 5%

Midterm: 15%

Documentary: 20%

Documentary Revisions: 5%

Final Paper synthesizing documentary and course research: 20%

Participation: 10%

Twitter Responses: 10%

Written Assignments:

There will be one essay and a final paper. The first essay must be 4-6 pages in length and the final paper for the course will be an 8-10 page research paper. These papers must be written in 12 point Times New Roman font, double spaced, and cite sources accurately in MLA or APA style. You must turn in your essays electronically by emailing them to me (jasonfarman@gmail.com) as either Word Documents or PDF files. Essay 1 on “Identity Tourism” is worth 15% of your grade. Your final paper for the course is worth 20% of your grade.

Note on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism: Any source that you draw ideas and quotes from must be cited accurately in your paper in APA or MLA style. If you use any source in your work without correctly citing the work, this constitutes plagiarism. Any intentional plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and may result in a failing grade for the course.

Plagiarism:

Category A: Sloppiness. Automatic “0” on paper, with option to rewrite for no better than a “C”

Category B: Ignorance. Automatic “0” on paper, with option to rewrite for no better than a “C”

Category C: Obvious Conscious Cheating. Automatic “0” on paper, with no option for rewriting

Students caught plagiarizing a second time will be asked to leave the class and will receive an automatic “0” in the course.

For those of you who are not aware of what constitutes plagiarism, here is a breakdown of the various types:

1. Buying papers, borrowing papers, or recycling former papers unrevised and claiming these types of papers as your own for your assignment in this course. (This constitutes a Category C offense)
2. Cutting and pasting parts of a webpage or borrowing passages from a book for your paper without properly citing these parts and claiming the material as your own for the expressed intent of cheating. (This constitutes a Category C offense)
3. Failing to use proper citation style for material you borrow, accidentally. (This constitutes either a Category A or B offense)

Participation:

Your participation is crucial to the learning you will experience in this class and absences are weighed accordingly. Because this is a discussion-driven and hands-on class, the quality of the class for everyone is in large part dependent on the quality of preparation and visible engagement of each participant. Please realize that although you may have prepared the readings and assignments and may be listening to others, if you do not actively demonstrate your preparation and ideas in discussion, there is no way to observe and, hence, evaluate the quality of your preparation and participation. You may miss up to three classes, however, anything beyond this amount will lower the grade significantly and six missed classes may constitute a failing grade. Attendance is taken only during the first 10 minutes of class. If you are 10 minutes late, this will constitute a tardy. Multiple tardies equate an absence and can affect your grade just as missing a class can. Class participation constitutes 10% of the grade.

Twitter Responses (to Readings and to Lectures):

You will need a Twitter account to interact with the course readings and the in-class lectures. For each set of readings, you must write a short reaction (comment, question, challenge) that directly addresses one or more of the readings. You will post this before class every Tuesday and Thursday, which must include the hashtag #amst418. At the end of the semester, you will be posting updates about your documentary fieldwork and project progress. During lecture, we will have a backchannel for Twitter responses. You must write a similar reaction to the content covered and can take any form (reaction, question, conversation with other students) and must include the course hashtag. You will need to provide at least one reaction during each class. I recommend setting up a Twitter archive through a service like Backupify.com/Tweetbackup.com so you can track how many times you have contributed throughout the semester. Your Twitter Responses are worth 10% of your grade.

Documentary: As a group, you will create a 10-15 minute documentary about a community and its uses of digital media. You may explore communities that exist solely in the virtual realm (such as online gamers) or an “offline” community that uses digital technology as a way to maintain societal bonds (such as teens use of text messaging). Though the community you choose should exist in some form regionally (anywhere from DC to Baltimore) other members might be spread out geographically — perhaps never seeing each other face to face — or might be gathered together in one neighborhood. Your documentary must contain a broad range of perspectives, gained through interviews, voice-over, and great footage that is well edited. You will turn in your video to me as either a .MOV or .MP4 file, which will be uploaded to the class’s YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/communitydocumentary>. Though you will work as a group, you will receive individual grades for this assignment. This documentary is worth 20% of your grade. After you screen your documentary for the class, you will receive feedback from me and from you classmates. Based on this feedback, you are expected to edit your documentary to address these critiques. Your final documentary will be due during finals week. Documentary revisions are worth 5% of your grade.

Final Paper: You must take your experience working on the documentary of a digital community and tie it into an analysis of how new media are altering the ways we understand identity and community. You must draw on the readings from this class as well as bring in two outside scholarly journal articles and one scholarly book related to your thesis. Your thesis should develop a strong theory of culture in the digital age, such as, “As seen in the example of the pervasive gaming group, NERO, I argue that cultural experiences of space no longer distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘virtual,’ but instead have become an experience of hybrid reality.” As stated above, your paper should be 8-10 pages long, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, and must cite all outside sources accurately in MLA or APA style. This final paper is worth 20% of your grade.

Students with Disabilities: The University is legally obligated to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. The campus' Disability Support Services Office (DSS) works with students and faculty to address a variety of issues ranging from test anxiety to physical and psychological disabilities. If a student or instructor believes that the student may have a disability, they should consult with DSS (4-7682, email Dissup@umd.edu). Note that to receive accommodations, students must first have their disabilities documented by DSS. The office then prepares an Accommodation Letter for course instructors regarding needed accommodations. Students are responsible for presenting this letter to their instructors.

—Please Note: This syllabus is subject to change at any time according to the professor’s discretion. The assignments below may also include readings handed out in class, which each student is responsible for completing.

Schedule

Week 1:

Jan. 26: Course Introduction

- Watch *Digital Nation*

Week 2: What’s “New” About New Media?

Jan. 31: What’s “New” About New Media?

- Read, *Remediation* by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (selections)
- Finish *Digital Nation*
- **DUE:** Bring in advertisement showing cultural imaginaries/ideologies of technology with one paragraph analyzing its message (if using a YouTube video or Internet link, please

email me the link as well as include it on a hard copy printout of your paragraph, turned in at the beginning of class).

Feb. 2: Changes Brought About by Digital Media

- Watch RSA Video, “The Secret Powers of Time”: <http://youtu.be/A3oliH7BLmg>
- Nicholas Carr, “The Web Shatters Focus, Rewires Brains,” http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/05/ff_nicholas_carr/all/1
- Cathy Davidson, “The Future of Learning” at Mobility Shifts: <http://youtu.be/IlCeLx7Ghyc>

Week 3: Contextualizing the Digital Divide

Feb. 7: Contextualizing the Digital Divide

- Andy Carvin, “Mind the Gap: The Digital Divide as the Civil Rights Issue of the New Millennium” online at: <http://www.infotoday.com/MMSchools/Jan00/carvin.htm>
- Vint Cerf, “Internet Access is Not a Human Right,” *New York Times*, January 4, 2012, <http://nyti.ms/wWTIrC>
- Note: (*Today is the last day to drop without a “W” on your transcript*)

Feb. 9: The Digital Divide

- Read *Technology and Social Inclusion*, Introduction and Ch. 1-2

Week 4: The Digital Divide

Feb. 14: The Digital Divide

- Read *Technology and Social Inclusion*, Ch. 3-4

Feb. 17: The Digital Divide

- Read *Technology and Social Inclusion*, Ch. 5-7

Week 5: Virtual Connectivity: Economies and Activism

Feb. 21:

- Katie Brown, Scott Campbell, and Rich Ling, “Mobile Phones Bridging the Digital Divide for Teens in the US?” *Future Internet* 3.2 (2011) <http://www.mdpi.com/1999-5903/3/2/144/>
- Joel Johnson, “1 Million Workers. 90 Million iPhones. 17 Suicides. Who’s to Blame?” *Wired*, March 2011: http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/02/ff_joelinchina/all/1
- In-Class: Watch, “The Hidden History of your Cellphone”
- In-Class: Play *Phone Story* Game

Feb. 23:

- Nathan Jurgenson, “When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution,” *Future Internet* 4.1 (2012): <http://www.mdpi.com/1999-5903/4/1/83/>
- Bill Wasik, “#Riot: Self-Organized, Hyper-Networked Revolts — Coming to a City Near You,” *Wired Magazine*, January 2012: http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/12/ff_riots/
- In-Class: Play “Spent”: <http://playspent.org>

Week 6: Identity in Online Environments

Feb. 28: Identity in Online Environments

- Read, “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites” by danah boyd:
<http://www.danah.org/papers/WhyYouthHeart.pdf>
- Read, “White Flight in Networked Publics?” by danah boyd:
<http://www.danah.org/papers/2009/WhiteFlightDraft3.pdf>

March 1:

- Read, “Race in/for Cyberspace” by Lisa Nakamura in *Cybercultures Reader*.
- Andil Gosine, “Brown to Blonde at Gay.com: Passing White in Queer Cyberspace.”
- ***Class will meet in chat room***

Week 7: Gender, Sexuality, and Digital Media

March 6:

- Sharif Mowlabocus, “Digital Cruising: Mobile and Locative Technologies in Gay Male Subculture” from *Gaydar Culture*.
- Mary L. Gray, “From Websites to Wal-Mart: Youth, Identity Work, and the Queering of Boundary Publics in *Small Town, USA*,” *American Studies* 48.2:
<https://journals.ku.edu/index.php/amerstud/article/viewFile/3140/3908>

March 8:

- Jessie Daniels, “Rethinking Cyberfeminism(s): Race, Gender, and Embodiment” *WSQ* 37: 1-2 (Spring/Summer 2009).
- Read, “Does Lara Croft Wear Fake Polygons?: Gender and Gender Role Subversion in Computer Games” by Anne-Marie Schleiner online at
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/leonardo/v034/34.3schleiner.html>
- In-Class: Play *Tomb Raider*
- **ESSAY 1 DUE**

Week 8: Disability in the Digital Age

March 13:

- Jonathan Lazar & Paul Jaeger, “Reducing barriers to online access for people with disabilities.” *Issues in Science and Technology*, 27(2), 68-82.
- Brian Wentz, Paul Jaeger, and Jonathan Lazar, “Retrofitting accessibility: The legal inequality of after-the-fact online access for persons with disabilities in the United States.” *First Monday*, 11(7):
<http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3666/3077>
- Guest lecture from Paul Jaeger, author of *Disability and the Internet*

March 15:

- Michael Peterson, Laurie Beth Clark, and Lisa Nakamura, “‘I See You?’: Gender and Disability in Avatar,” *Flow* 11.7 (2010): <http://flowtv.org/2010/02/i-see-you-gender-and-disability-in-avatarmichael-peterson-laurie-beth-clark-and-lisa-nakamura/>
- Katie Ellis and Mike Kent, “iTunes Is Pretty (Useless) When You’re Blind: Digital Design is Triggering Disability When it Could be a Solution,” *M/C Journal* 11.3 (2008): <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/55>
- In-Class work on creating an “Accessibility Map”

Week 9: SPRING BREAK

Week 10:

March 27: Midterm Review / Form Documentary Groups

- **ACCESSIBILITY MAP DUE**

March 29: **MIDTERM**

Week 11:

April 3: Case Study of Online communities: Massively Multiplayer Gamers

- Read, *Communities of Play* Part I by Celia Pearce
- In-class screening of *Second Skin*

April 5: Case Study of Offline communities: gaming beyond the personal computer

- Read, “From Cyber to Hybrid” by Adriana de Souza e
- Read, “Games and Pervasive Games” in *Pervasive Games*
- In-class screening of *Monster Camp*

Week 12:

April 10: Documentary Workshop

April 12: Documentary Workshop

Week 13:

April 17: Group Work on documentary

April 19: Group Work on documentary

Week 14:

April 24: Group Work on documentary

April 26: Group Work on documentary

Week 15:

May 1: Screenings of documentaries

May 3: Screenings of documentaries

Week 16:

May 7: Discussions about research papers

May 10: Wrap-up and discussions of research papers

Week 17: Finals Week - Papers and Final Documentaries are due Monday, May 14 between 9-10am in our classroom

Essay #1: Practicing Identity Tourism

In Lisa Nakamura's article, "Race In/For Cyberspace," she talks about "identity tourism," which is taking on an identity different than your own while on the Internet. In chat rooms, people often choose to present themselves as being a person of a different gender, race, or sexuality (or all three). Because of the Internet's anonymous nature, people often feel free to take on new identities in a way they could never in "real life."

For this project, I want you to enter a chat room using identity tourism: choose a persona to "perform" in a chat room. This persona should be different than you in some way (gender, race, sexuality) and your screen name should fit this persona. You should not tell anyone in the chat room your "true" identity (thus, this should be completely anonymous) and you will accurately perform this new persona — WITHOUT using any sort of racist, sexist, or homophobic remarks. Chat for an extended period of time as this new character (at least 30 minutes) keeping in mind the ways people react to your new persona.

After you have done this, you will write a paper discussing your experience in the context of Nakamura's article. Your paper needs a strong introduction that offers readers an overview of the topic, your experiment, and a strong thesis statement summarizing the argument you are making. Your thesis needs to offer a perspective about chat room spaces that is informed by the course reading(s) and your personal experience with "identity tourism." This thesis should be supported and developed in every paragraph, often using direct quotes from the readings and specific examples from your experience. As you develop your argument, be sure to discuss the new identity you chose to present in the chat room and how people reacted to this character. Were you ever asked about your race or gender, or were assumptions made about these aspects of your identity? After your experience, do you agree with Nakamura that, "The choice not to mention race does in fact constitute a choice — in the absence of racial description, all players are assumed to be white"? What types of biases and prejudices do chat rooms foster? Why does this particular medium foster such biases? Are there ways to resist or counter negative assumptions and perspectives in these new media spaces?

You may draw from your experience while chatting in the class chat room on Thursday, March 1st as the foundation of your paper. Or you may simply want to experiment with identity tourism again by choosing another chat room to conduct this experiment in. Common chat rooms can easily be accessed through Talk City (www.talkcity.com), ICQ Chat (<http://chat.icq.com/icqchat/>), Yahoo Chat (<http://messenger.yahoo.com/features/chatrooms>), or 3-D and VRML sites like Second Life and gaming spaces like World of Warcraft.

Your essay should be 4-6 pages in length, typed in Times New Roman 12-point font, and double-spaced. Your only outside research should be from the Nakamura article, but if you do incorporate other outside sources, be sure to cite them accurately according to MLA or APA style. In addition to your strong introduction and thesis statement, your essay should have an appropriate concluding paragraph. Please give your essay an informative title (NOT "Identity Tourism"). Please email me (jasonfarman@gmail.com) a copy of your paper as either a Word Document or a PDF before the beginning of class on **Thursday, March 8**. NOTE: Please save your paper and email it with the following format: yourlastname_essay1.doc. This essay is worth 15% of your final grade. No late papers will be accepted.

Rubric – Essay #1: Practicing Identity Tourism

1. Has a strong introductory paragraph.
2. Has a strong and well-developed thesis statement.
3. Thesis statement is supported and developed in each paragraph.
4. Uses clear examples from chat room experiences.
5. Engages the Nakamura reading in a compelling way.
6. Makes a convincing argument at the role of race in online chat spaces.
7. All ideas are clear and fully developed.
8. Well-written essay: no spelling or grammatical errors/no awkward sentences.
9. Has a strong concluding paragraph.
10. Has met all of the basic requirements (title, font, pages, works cited)

NOTES:

When logging in as your new persona, you must stay with that identity the entire time

Avoid celebrity identities

You must take this persona to another chat space and continue the experiment

We used Zippy Chat during spring 2012

Final Paper

For your final paper, you must take your experience working on the documentary of a digital community and tie it into an analysis of how new media are altering the ways we understand identity and community. Your paper must have a well-worded and strongly argued thesis that develops a theory of culture in the digital age, such as, “As seen in the example of the live action role playing (LARP) gaming group, NERO, I argue that cultural experiences of space no longer distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘virtual,’ but instead have become an experience of hybrid reality.” Your thesis should go at the end of your introductory paragraph. Your introductory paragraph should also function as a road map for your reader – let us know exactly where you plan on taking us. Tell us what argument you’re going to make and how you’re going to make it. Be sure to include enough detail to give your readers a clear sense of the specifics of your argument.

While your essay will, at times, be descriptive and given from your own perspective, it is important that you do not simply describe the documentary or simply retell your experience with the group. Instead, use these descriptive moments as a springboard into a deeper analysis of the group’s use of technology. Therefore, your group’s use of technology should comment on the larger implications of these technologies for your chosen community as a whole. Be sure to keep the big picture in mind: what are the consequences implied (for this segment of society) in your chosen group’s use of digital technologies?

Your paper must utilize at least one of the readings from this class as well as quoting from *two outside scholarly journal articles and one scholarly book* related to your thesis. Your paper should also have an informative title. You must also include a conclusion that revisits your ideas and offers readers a clear sense of the arguments that your paper worked through. Your paper should be 8-10 pages long, typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, and must cite all outside sources accurately in MLA or APA style.

You must turn in an electronic copy of this essay to me on **Monday, May 14th by 10am** to jasonfarman@gmail.com. This final paper is worth 20% of your grade.

Here is the grading rubric I will use to determine your grade on this assignment:

1. Has a strong introductory paragraph.
2. Has a strong and well-developed thesis statement.
3. Thesis statement is supported and developed in each paragraph.
4. Uses clear examples from documentary.
5. Engages outside sources in a compelling way.
6. Analysis comments on the larger implications for this community and technology.
7. All ideas are clear and fully developed.
8. Well-written essay: no spelling or grammatical errors/no awkward sentences.
9. Has a strong concluding paragraph.
10. Citations are done correctly.