# ANTHROPOLOGY OF DIGITAL CULTURES

Syllabus Version 1.0

ANTH 290-01, Spring 2016
Time: Tuesday/Thursday, 9:30-10:50am
Room: SH 107
CRN 21050

## Description

How is culture affected by modern digital technology? How does human experience shift as the Internet affects more and more pieces of our lives, from communication and shopping to love and friendship to government and political activism? This course will take an anthropological look at a broad spectrum of digital cultures, including hackers, lovers, entrepreneurs, teenagers, journalists and political rebels, and it will ask you to reflect on your own digital experience.

## About the instructor

Eli Thorkelson, Postdoctoral Fellow, DigLibArts/Anthropology
Email: ethorkel@whittier.edu
Office hours: Thursdays 8:45-9:20am, Platner Hall

## Requirements

Here are the course requirements:

1. Participation (worth 20%)
2. Two short papers (worth 30%, or 15% each)
3. Groupwork and in-class assessments (worth 25%)
4. Weekly scrapbook and final analysis (25%)

(Note that I may need to adjust these weightings slightly at the end of the course, to ensure fair outcomes.)

To expand on this slightly:

**Participation** in class is required. This means that you should come to class each day in a reasonable state of consciousness, ready to talk about the week's topic with your classmates. You should do the required readings and should bring them to class (in either electronic or paper format).

There will be **two short papers** in the class, due February 21st and April 1st. These papers will ask you to write about a topic of your choosing while using the concepts we have talked about in class. I will provide more details on these papers as we move through the course.

Each student will be assigned randomly to a **research group** in Week 2. Each group will be responsible for a number of different tasks, including commenting on each other's papers and scrapbooks, doing a little bit of collaborative research, and giving class presentations on the readings. Each group will present 2-3 times during the semester.

Your **group presentations** should do two things: (1) summarize the main ideas and argument of the readings and (2) ask a few questions about the readings that you think would be interesting to talk about in class. The presentations should be short — say 5-10 minutes long.

Finally, for this course you will be asked to make a **scrapbook** about a digital culture of your choosing. Each week, you will be asked to look at your chosen culture through a new lens related to that week's readings,

and at the end of the course, instead of a final exam or paper, you will write brief annotations on each week's materials. As we move from topic to topic, your analysis of your chosen digital culture should become more nuanced and sophisticated.

Pick your course topic from something like the following:

- A digital culture (or subculture) you belong to or find interesting.
- A contemporary digital technology that has recently become popular or just has a lot of social attention around it.
- A site in your everyday life that uses technology in an interesting way.
- Some other topic related to the course that you are interested in.

(If you have trouble thinking of a topic, email me after the first day of class and I'll help you find one.)

I will announce scrapbook topics each week on Thursday, and they will be due the following Tuesday in class. You will need to post your scrapbook entries on Medium. We'll discuss how to do this.

## Textbooks and readings

The course has two required textbooks. They should both be available at the campus bookstore or on Amazon.

- Ilana Gershon, The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media. Cornell University Press. http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100088380
- Alice E. Marwick, Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age. Yale University Press. http://yalepress.yale.edu/book.asp?isbn=9780300209389

All other readings are available in PDF format on the course homepage on Moodle.

# COURSE POLICIES

Some of the following policies are based on Anne Cong-Huyen's Digital Labor syllabus from JanTerm 2016. Those in turn were adapted from documents shared by Andrea Rehn & Bill Kronholm and Nadia Dawisha and Karen Dawisha.

## Classroom Community

Each student in this class is expected to treat other students with respect and consideration regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, economic background, religion, age, ability, etc. Hate speech or other acts of targeted discriminatory speech will not be tolerated. Any student's behavior that intimidates or makes difficult the attendance of another student will be considered harassment. If you ever feel uncomfortable with a situation or a discussion that occurs before, during, or outside of class, please do not hesitate to talk to me, or, if you are not comfortable speaking with me, please talk to someone in the Office of Student Life or Counseling Services. Your best interests will always be respected in taking any action.

## Communications

If you have questions about the course, it's always good for you to come to my office hours. They are before class on Thursdays in my office in Platner Hall (from 8:45am until 9:20).

The rest of the time, the best way to reach me is via email at ethorkel@whittier.edu. I'll normally respond within a day during the week, or on Monday if you get in touch over the weekend.

## Gadgets

Needless to say, this course is not anti-technology. In fact, to participate in the course, you will need to have access to the internet, whether at the campus library, at your home, or via a mobile device.

However, part of the purpose of the course is to think critically about how we use our devices. So if you are bringing gadgets to class, we will want to talk about the best way of using them. You will lose your gadget privileges if I catch you using your device unproductively during class.

As the class goes on, we will adjust the gadget use policy as needed. Some days we may experiment with having more digital communication as part of the classroom experience. Other days we will intentionally stop using our gadgets.

## Late Work

Late work is penalized 1/3 of a grade per day, and is not accepted after one week. Failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in a failing course grade of "F." If you know that you will be missing class, please notify me ahead of time so we can make alternate arrangements. If you fall ill or encounter some sort of emergency, notify me as soon as possible. Your participation grade will suffer if you are repeatedly absent from class, except in exceptional circumstances.

## Non-Discrimination

Title IX makes it clear that all students should have equal access to higher education and should not be hindered based on their gender. Violence and harassment based on sex and gender are a Civil Rights offenses and are subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here, including the names and contact information of your Title IX Coordinators. If you are a victim, or accused, of sexual misconduct you may also consider consulting with a Support Person. The Whittier College Support Person Program can provide non-judgmental support, accompaniment, advising, and information about the process of reporting. Support People are private, meaning they will not disclose any identifying information to the College.

If you do not want the Title IX Coordinator notified, instead of disclosing to me as your instructor, you can speak privately with the Whittier College Support Person Program (562-907-4233), the Counseling Center (562-907-4239 or 562-907-4911 after hours), or Project Sister (909-626-4357).

To learn about your rights as a student and how to protect and preserve the rights of your peers it is also strongly recommended that you familiarize yourself with the campus Sexual Misconduct Policy.

## Accommodations

If you need accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class, you should contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located on the ground floor of the Library, room G003, or by phone at (562) 907-4825.

## Academic integrity

It is expected that all of the work you do for this class will be original, or otherwise cited. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the plagiarized assignment and possible disciplinary action by the College. We will review the proper way to use outside sources in order to avoid plagiarism; however, I encourage you to meet with me or email me, if you are at all uncertain about where something like collaboration

ends and plagiarism begins. If you are unsure about whether the work you are submitting is original, improperly cited, or plagiarized, consult with me, or with the institution's entire Academic Honesty Policy (at http://www.whittier.edu/academics/academichonesty).

# TOPICS, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

## Week 1: Introduction to digital culture

### Jan 26: Introduction to digital cultures

We will have a general introduction to the course topics and logistics. We'll also take collaborative notes.

**ASSIGNMENT (due by 1/31)**

- Come up with a topic for your course scrapbook and add it to this collaborative document: goo.gl/CjvBRN

- Make a Medium account and follow my Medium account ([@decasia](https://medium.com/@decasia)).

## Week 2: Media ideologies I

### Jan 31: Ideologies

Reading: The Breakup 2.0, Chapter 1 ("Fifty Ways to Leave your Lover: Media Ideologies and Idioms of Practice").

### Feb 2: Affect and technology

Reading: The Breakup 2.0, Chapter 2 ("E-mail My Heart: The Structure of Technology and Heartache").

## Week 3: Media ideologies II

### Feb 7: Remediation

Reading: The Breakup 2.0, Chapter 3 ("Remediation and Heartache").

### Feb 9: Publics

Reading: The Breakup 2.0, Chapter 5 ("Breaking Up in a Public").

## Week 4: Web aesthetics

### Feb 14: Internet "High Culture": Web Design

Assignment: Make a list of common elements in web culture. Add your contribution to this document: https://goo.gl/48dnVm

**Feb 16: Internet "Low Culture": Memes**

Assignment: Add 1 or 2 memes to our crowdsourced meme list. Add your contributions here: https://goo.gl/OYyPHi

See also http://knowyourmeme.com/

## Week 5: Network Fantasy

**Feb 21: Network Fantasy, Part 1**

No reading. In-class film screening: *The Matrix* (first half).
** FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE (by midnight) **

**Feb 23: Network Fantasy, Part 2**

No reading. In-class film screening: *The Matrix* (second half).

## Week 6: Internet infrastructure

**Feb 28: Network Reality**

**Group Research Assignment**
Research and diagram every step that happens when you access a single web page.

**March 2: Servers**

No reading.
Fieldtrip (if possible): campus server room.

## Week 7: Interaction and identity I

**March 7: Status and social value**

Reading: Status Update, Chapter 2 ("Leaders and Followers").

**March 9: Digital selfhood**

Reading: Status Update, Chapter 3 ("The Fabulous Lives of Micro-Celebrities")

## Spring Break

No class this week.

## Week 8: Interaction and identity II

### March 21: Self-branding

Reading: Status Update, Chapter 4 ("Self-Branding: The (Safe For Work) Self").

### March 23: Broadcast media

Reading: Status Update, Chapter 5 ("Lifestreaming: We Live in Public")

## Week 9: Confession and love

### March 28: Confessional selves

Reading: Sherry Turkle, "True Confessions."

### March 30: Online dating

Reading: Rebecca Heino, Nicole Elison and Jennifer Gibbs, "Relationshopping."

## Week 10: Hacking

### April 4: Online subversion

Reading: "The Conscience of a Hacker," http://phrack.org/issues/7/3.html.
**SECOND SHORT PAPER DUE (by midnight)**
April 6: Hacking Politics and Lulz
Reading: Biella Coleman, "Our Weirdness is Free."

## Week 11: Underworlds

### April 11: Underworlds

Reading: Wired, "The Rise and Fall of Silk Road," https://www.wired.com/2015/04/silk-road-1/

### April 13: The Spam Economy

Reading: Brunton, "The Botnets."

## Week 12: Digital California

### April 18: The Californian Ideology

Reading: Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology."

**April 20: Entrepreneurship**

Reading: Status Update, Chapter 6 ("Designed in California: Entrepreneurship and the Myths of Web 2.0")

## Week 13: Digital California II

### April 25: Indigenous internet in SoCal

Reading: Sandvig, "Connection at Ewiiaapaayp Mountain."

### April 27: Digital technology in the field

**Group project**

Do an hour of field research on how digital technologies are used at Whittier College or in the city of Whittier. Come to class ready to present your findings.

## Week 14: Conclusion

### May 2: Last day of class

No reading today. We will have a general overview of the course material, and we will go over the details of your finished portfolios.

**Final Portfolio due May 4 by midnight.**