ANTH 138A
Anthropology of Digital and Biotechnologies
Fall 2015

Class: Tuesdays and Fridays 11:00 AM–12:20 PM
Location: Brown Social Science Center 316
Instructor: Faris A. Khan; khanf@brandeis.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 PM; Fridays 1:30-2:30 PM
Office: Brown Social Science Center 219; (781) 736-8741
TA: Zhiduo (Jude) Cheng; zdcheng@brandeis.edu

Course Description
This course will examine how anthropology can contribute to the understanding of new communication and bio technologies as transformative socio-cultural forces that are changing what it means to be human. With its two overarching themes being identity and the body, the course will explore how conceptions of the personal and physical self are changing due to certain technological innovations. The course will provide an introduction to various forms of digitally-mediated communication (e.g., social media, texting, online dating, virtual worlds) and the ways in which people interact in different online spaces. It will investigate how forms of connectedness are affected not only by advances in communication technology but also through developments in the fields of biological surveillance, reproduction, and genetics. We will explore how new digital and bio technologies are shaping and reproducing practices, identities, and communities. In addition, we will examine both ethnographic methods and the ethical challenges of studying human interactions through and with these technologies. Students will have the opportunity to apply the insights gained from the course material to a real world situation through an ethnographic research study. This project will provide hands-on experience in research design, data collection, and analysis through either online or on-the-ground research.

Required Texts
The following books are available on reserve and for sale at the bookstore:


Additional required readings include journal articles and book chapters that are posted to LATTE.
Course Requirements

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Each student is required to attend class, complete reading assignments on time, and participate in every class discussion. Absences are permitted only in cases of real emergencies, for which you must provide written notification. You will lose two points from your final grade for each unexcused absence or if you miss more than two class sessions. Persistent lateness will add up to one absence over the course of the semester, but arriving more than 10 minutes late to any class will count as an absence. All assigned readings should be completed prior to the class on the day they are listed on the course schedule below. Daily readings will be discussed in class for which you must come prepared to talk. Please read the following piece for tips on reading critically: http://www.smirkingchimp.com/thread/8863. You are encouraged to raise questions about points that are unclear to you. What you have to say may be useful both to you and to your fellow classmates.

2. **Reading Reflections:** You are required to post short reading responses (no more than 100 words) before each class session on the course’s online discussion board in LATTE. Post either a comment or a question related to the day’s assigned readings. For instance, you may provide a critique of key points from the readings, compare articles, relate them to current affairs, or raise new questions inspired by them. The responses must be posted to LATTE by 6 am on Tuesdays and Fridays prior to each class. Late responses will not be accepted. Your responses must be thoughtful and respectful of your classmates. The reading responses are meant to give you the chance to engage not only with the course readings but also with the ideas of your classmates.

3. **Group Presentation:** You will be paired into groups of two and be required to present an assigned reading at least once during the semester. This will involve giving a 20-minute long presentation and will be followed by a presenter-led discussion. Each team member will receive the same grade and you may divide the labor as you see fit. You must do the following in your presentation:
   - Provide a brief summary of the text and cover key points
   - Provide a critical analysis of the piece
   - Provide three discussion questions

Do not simply outline the content of the reading. In addition to time management, you will be evaluated on the clarity of your presentation for which you are required to use audio visual aids (e.g., Powerpoint/Prezi, images, audio/video clips, etc.). When using a presentation tool, please provide very brief bullet points instead of filling up your slides with too much text! You are not required to post a reading response on the days you present.

4. **Offline Life Journal Entry:** For this exercise, you will go offline for two whole days, and not use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.), online games, texting or video conferencing (e.g., WhatsApp, Vimeo, Skype, FaceTime), web browsing, other smart phone applications, or any other form of digitally mediated communication. The only exception to this rule is that you are allowed to make and receive phone calls and use email, but you must keep your usage of both to a bare minimum. During your time offline, you will use a pen and
paper to write about your experience of being “off the grid” and how it affects your social interactions. This is also an opportunity for you to reflect on how technology shapes your life and fills up your day. The journal entry should be 1½ - 2 pages long, single-spaced, and written on 8½ - 11 paper. It is due in class on Friday, October 2.

5. **Short Essay:** You will write a 4½ - 5 page paper with a clearly articulated thesis, supporting evidence, and analysis. The essay question will be provided 2-3 weeks prior to the submission deadline. The paper is due by email at 5pm on Friday, October 16.

6. **Final Project:** For your final project, you are required to conduct either online or on-ground research. This ethnographically informed paper should be an analytical case study of some aspect of either digital or bio technologies for which you may focus on an individual, organization, community, or event. You may use a variety of ethnographic research methods to conduct your study, including interviews (no more than one), participant observation, surveys, focus groups, discourse analysis, etc. To assist you with your project, the reading assignments for September 22 and 25 will focus on research methods and ethics. The primary data you collect must be supplemented with library research beyond the assigned course readings.

As part of your research project, you will submit a 1-2 page research project proposal plus a preliminary bibliography on Friday, October 23. Your project proposal should include the following:

- **Research question.** Describe your research topic and state your research question(s). What do you plan to study? What is the larger question you hope to answer from this study? What do you expect to find (i.e. your hypothesis)?
- **Significance.** Why is this project significant to you? Why would this project be significant for others? Who is your audience for this paper?
- **Methodology.** What research methods will you use? What kind of data will you collect or consider? Who will you interview? What kind of library-based material will you consult? What other methods will you use? Choose a topic that is methodologically feasible.
- **Preliminary Bibliography.** Provide a list of at least five scholarly articles or books related to your research topic that will inform your analysis.

During the last two weeks of the course, you will give a 5-minute oral presentation about your project. The use of visual aids for this presentation is optional, and if need be, you may use no more than one slide or image as part of your talk. In your presentation, explain your research question, your method of exploring that question, any methodological challenges you faced, and preliminary findings.

The project paper should be 10-12 pages long.

Graduate student papers must be 18-20 pages long and should be theoretically informed. Graduate students are expected to describe their theoretical armamentarium in the project proposal, and relate their findings to pertinent theoretical perspectives in the project paper.
You may draw upon theories covered in the course readings or find relevant ones through additional research.

Students are encouraged to meet with me during office hours to brainstorm ideas or if you want me to review an outline or a rough draft of the essay. The project paper is due by email at 11:59 pm on Friday, December 11.

**Grading**
- Attendance and Participation (20%)
- Reading Reflections (20%)
- Group Presentation (15%)
- Offline Life Journal Entry (5%)
- Short Essay (10%)
- Final Project (30%)
  - Project Proposal (5%)
  - Oral Presentation (5%)
  - Paper (20%)

**Assignment Policies**
Late assignment and paper submissions will not be accepted except in special circumstances. You are expected to notify me at least 24 hours in advance if you are unable to submit your work on time in order to receive consideration. You will lose points from your final grade for each day that your work is past the due date. All written assignments must be carefully proofread, double-spaced, and typed in Times New Roman size 12 font with a 1-inch margin all around. When emailing written assignments to me (at khanfi@brandeis.edu), please be sure to copy the TA at zdcheng@brandeis.edu.

**Academic Dishonesty**
The University holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the University’s policy on academic dishonesty, and be familiar with general academic expectations with regard to plagiarism and the proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort. If I find that you have violated the integrity policy, you will receive an F on that assignment and possibly for the course. This will be accompanied by a formal complaint to the Director of Academic Integrity.

**Students with Disabilities**
Students in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with Disabilities Services and Support. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should speak with me during the first week of class.

**Class Conduct**
The use of cell phones, email and web browsing is not permitted in class. Cells phones must be turned off before entering class, and laptops and other devices may not be used to take notes. Please do not converse with classmates during class, and be attentive during lectures and class discussions. Please be respectful of everyone in the classroom and allow them to fully express their points.

Course Schedule

Friday, August 28- Introduction
• No reading. Course introduction.

Tuesday, September 1- Science and Digital Anthropology

Friday, September 4- Facebook

Tuesday, September 8- Facebook
• Daniel Miller. 2011. Tales from Facebook. Polity. (pp. 111-218)

Friday, September 11- Gender and Technology

Tuesday, September 15-
• Rosh Hashanah. No class.

Friday, September 18- Mobiles Cultures


Tuesday, September 22—Digital Research Methods and Ethics


Friday, September 25—Bioethics


Tuesday, September 29-

- No class. Brandeis Monday. Monday class schedule in effect.

Friday, October 2—Biopower

- Offline Life Journal Entry due!

Tuesday, October 6—Technologies of Surveillance

**Friday, October 9- Identity and Virtual Space**


**Tuesday, October 13- Identity and Virtual Space**


**Friday, October 16- Genetics, Race and Identity**

- Short Essay due!

**Tuesday, October 20- Genetics, Race and Identity**


**Friday, October 23- Politics of Representation**

- Project Proposal due!

**Tuesday, October 27- Politics of Representation**

- Alice Marwick. 2013. *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*. Yale University Press. (Chapter 4-6 and Conclusion)
**Friday, October 30—Self-Presentation**


**Tuesday, November 3—Body and Technology**


**Friday, November 6—Avatars and Virtual Lives**


**Tuesday, November 10—Avatars and Virtual Lives**


**Friday, November 13—Reproduction and Kinship**


**Tuesday, November 17—Surgical Technologies**


Friday, November 20- Activism and Digital Engagement

Tuesday, November 24- Activism and Digital Engagement

Friday, November 27-
• Thanksgiving holiday

Tuesday, December 1- Activism and Digital Engagement

Friday, December 4- Post Humanism
• Student Presentations!

Tuesday, December 8-
• Student presentations!