

# To be Human in the Digital Age<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Course Description

Digital technologies and digital spaces—from smart phones, computers, the internet, to social media platforms and online communities—have enabled humans to reimagine forms of communication, representation, and interaction. The digital shapes processes of knowledge production—how we come to know and represent ourselves, others, and the world. Power, inequality, and political-economic contexts intersect with digital technologies, shaping differentiated access, visibility, and participation. Through digital technologies we have perhaps gained new forms of interpersonal, intergroup, cross-cultural, and even interspecies interactions. As our lives intertwine with the ever-evolving digital, how does this shift what it means to be human—the perennial concern of anthropology? This course examines the digital as a site of human interactions and representation, interrogating new questions that the “digital” raises as well as circling back to familiar inquiries into human interaction, communication, relations of power, and global connection.

In this course, students will consider “the digital” through the prism of anthropological theories and, through the rich tapestry of ethnographies and digital content (podcasts, zines, blogs, long reads, videos), grapple with the myriad ways through which humans engage and negotiate digital technologies and spaces in their everyday lives.

By the end of the course, students will develop a critical understanding of how digital technologies are enfolded in contemporary lives and be able to attend to continuities and novelties of what it means to be human in the digital era.

## 2. Learning Objectives

Learning Outcomes	Activities	Assessments
Develop a foundational understanding of digital research	Readings and audio-visual resources, class discussions, tutorials	Short written assignments, final project, discussion forum, group-led class discussions.
Ability to recognize and work with diverse and multi-modal forms of research output		
Develop an understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences		
Cultivate critical and creative thinking	Readings and audio-visual resources, written assignments	
Strengthen reading comprehension and analysis of evidence	Written assignments, class discussions, discussion forum, tutorials	

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<sup>1</sup> This course owes its genesis to two individuals—Tom Boellstorff, who asked the early and persistent questions about the role and place of humans and of anthropology in the digital era and has led the field of digital anthropology. Second is my friend, colleague and fellow anthropologist, Sean Furlong. This course was first conceptualized in our conversations and in form and substance, it bears Sean’s early imprints.

Strengthen writing and argumentation skills	Written assignments and feedback, discussion forum	
Cultivate ability to work in collaborative projects	In-class small group activities, group-led class discussions	

### 3. Scheme of Evaluation and Grading

#### Evaluation Break-Up

This course is an immersive and interactive one and the class is designed as a discussion-based seminar and involves a fair amount of group work and individual work. It is absolutely essential for everyone to complete the required readings before class for us to have a productive and fruitful discussion each week.

- Class participation: 15 marks
- Individual reflection essay: 10 marks
- Mid-term written assignment: 20 marks
- Group presentation: 15 marks
- Final written assignment: 40 marks

#### Grade Definition

JSLH approves the use of this rubric for FINAL ASSESSMENT grading as indicated below:

O (80% and above) [8.0]	Outstanding	Exceptional knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and extraordinary critical and analytical ability
A+ (75–79.5%) [7.5]	Excellent	Sound knowledge of the subject matter, thorough understanding of issues; ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles and critical and analytical ability
A (70–74.5%) [7.0]	Very Good	Sound knowledge of the subject matter, excellent organizational capacity, ability to synthesize ideas, rules and principles, critically analyse existing materials and originality in thinking and presentation
A- (65–69.5%) [6.0]	Good	Good understanding of the subject matter, ability to identify issues and provide balanced solutions to problems and good critical and analytical skills
B+ (60–64%) [5.0]	Fair	Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills. Average understanding of the subject matter, limited ability to identify issues and provide solutions to problems and reasonable critical and analytical skills

B (55–59.5%) [4.0]	Satisfactory	Adequate knowledge of the subject matter to go to the next level of study and reasonable critical and analytical skills
B- (50–54.5%) [3.0]	Acceptable	Limited knowledge of the subject matter and irrelevant use of materials and, poor critical and analytical skills
P1 (45-49.5) [2.0]	Marginal	Poor comprehension of the subject matter; poor critical and analytical skills and marginal use of the relevant materials.
P2 (40- 44.5) [1.0]	Very marginal	Bare minimum comprehension of the subject matter; incoherent articulation.
F	Fail	Course needs to be repeated. Level of understanding is well below required standard of critical and creative thinking.

#### 4. Academic Integrity

##### **A Note on Classroom Punctuality/Conduct:**

JSLH conducts all classes on a foundation of professionalism. It is expected that students should be present in class within five minutes of the class start time. Students arriving after a ten-minute window from the designated start time can be refused attendance. Please show courtesy to your instructors and co-learners by observing punctuality. Please also note that the classroom is a place for free expression and critical thinking and this comes with a responsibility on the part of students to respect opinions expressed and actively participate in the work of the classroom discussion.

##### **A Note on Plagiarism:**

In line with JGU policy, JSLH operates a zero-tolerance approach to Plagiarism. The unacknowledged use of material by others within your work is a violation of academic integrity and all reported cases will be investigated before potential disciplinary action. Instructors will address methods of citation and presentation within written work.

##### **Disability Support and Accommodation Requirements:**

JGU endeavors to make all its courses accessible to students. All students with a known disability needing academic accommodations are required to register with the Disability Support Committee [dsc@jgu.edu.in](mailto:dsc@jgu.edu.in) The Committee has so far identified the following conditions that could possibly hinder student's overall well-being. These include physical and mobility related difficulties; visual impairment; hearing impairment; medical conditions; specific learning difficulties e.g. dyslexia; mental health. The Disability Support Committee maintains strict confidentiality in its discussions.

#### 5. Detailed Session Plan

The instructor reserves the right to make slight changes to the following session plans, such as changes to readings or emphasis. All changes will be communicated to students ahead of time and a new updated course manual will be circulated.

Session	Title	Readings/Resources
Session #1	Introduction to Digital Anthropology– Brave New World	<p>Everyone to download Miller, Daniel et al. 2016. <i>How the World Changed Social Media</i>. <a href="https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/83038">https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/83038</a></p> <p>Miller, Daniel. (2018) 2023. “Digital anthropology”. In <i>The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology</i>, edited by Felix Stein. Facsimile of the first edition in <i>The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology</i> <a href="https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/digital-anthropology">https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/digital-anthropology</a></p> <p>In-class viewing– Welcome to the Internet: Bo Burnham <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1BneeJTDCU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1BneeJTDCU</a></p>
<b>Unit 1 (Sessions 2–5)</b>	<b>Self and Sociality</b>	
Session #2	Self & Social Media	<p>Miller, Daniel. <i>What is Social Media?</i> Pp. 1–8.</p> <p>Understanding <i>Techne</i>: Boellstorff, Tom. 2015 [2008]. Selections from <i>Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human</i>. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.</p> <p>In-class viewing– Wesch, Michael. <i>The Machine is Us/ing Us</i> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g</a></p>
Session #3	Selfies	<p>Miller, Daniel. <i>Visual Images</i>. Pp. 155–180; <i>Individualism</i>.</p> <p>Humphreys, Lee. 2018. <i>Introduction</i>. In <i>The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life</i>. Pp. 1–28. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.</p> <p>Nemer, David, and Guo Freeman. 2015. <i>Empowering the Marginalized: Rethinking Selfies in the Slums of Brazil</i>. <i>International Journal of Communication</i> 9:1832-1847.</p> <p><u>Recommended:</u> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23nRTxE97Yo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23nRTxE97Yo</a></p> <p>Dattatreyan, Ethiraj. (2015). <i>Waiting Subjects: Social Media-Inspired Self-Portraits as Gallery Exhibition in Delhi, India</i>. <i>Visual Anthropology Review</i>. 31. 134-146. 10.1111/var.12077.</p>
Session #4	Lose Yourself	Miller, <i>Does Social Media Make People Happier?</i> , Pp. 193–204.

		<p>Turkle, Sherry. 2011. <i>Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other</i>. New York: Basic Books. Ch. 11-12.</p> <p><u>In-class listen</u>: Elmhirst, Sophie. 2021. <i>Brazilian buttlift—Behind the World’s Most Dangerous Cosmetic Surgery</i>. The Guardian: Audio Long Read.  <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/feb/22/brazilian-butt-lift-behind-the-worlds-most-dangerous-cosmetic-surgery-podcast">https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/feb/22/brazilian-butt-lift-behind-the-worlds-most-dangerous-cosmetic-surgery-podcast</a></p>
Session #4	This is (not) a Selfie: Reflection Essay	<p><u>The Selfie</u>: <b>Individual reflection essay</b>. Prompt will be circulated.</p> <p>Must Revisit: Humphreys, Lee. 2018. <i>Introduction</i>. In <i>The Qualified Self: Social Media and the Accounting of Everyday Life</i>. Pp. 1–28. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.</p>
<b>Unit 2 (Sessions 6–9)</b>	<b>Digital Intimacies</b>	
Session #6	Love, Friendships, Alliances	<p>Miller, Daniel. <i>Online and Offline Relationships</i>. Pp. 100–113.</p> <p>Dasgupta, Rohit. 2017. <i>Virtual Intimacies on Digital Queer Platforms</i>. In <i>Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politics, Intimacies and Belongings</i>. Pp. 41–68. New Delhi–Routledge India.</p> <p>In-class viewing: Finding Mr. Right (28 mins)  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_Ct8VsYnPM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_Ct8VsYnPM</a></p>
Session #7	Policing Intimacies	<p>Krishnan, Sneha. 2018. <i>‘Bitch, Don’t Be a Lesbian’: Selfies and Same-Sex Desire</i>. In <i>Queering Digital India: Activisms, Identities, Subjectivities</i> (eds.) Dasgupta Rohit K. and DasGupta Debanuj. Pp. 151–164. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.</p> <p>Are, Carolina. 2021. <i>The Shadowban Cycle: an autoethnography of pole dancing, nudity and censorship on Instagram</i>. <i>Feminist Media Studies</i>. <b>OR</b> Are, Carolina. <i>How Instagram’s algorithm is censoring women and vulnerable users but helping online abusers</i> (10 mins).  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnwWrJqfr7w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnwWrJqfr7w</a></p>
Session #8	Safety & Risks	<p>Das, Vishnupriya. 2019. <i>Designing Queer Connection: An Ethnography of Dating App Production in Urban India</i>. EPIC Proceedings. Pp. 384–397.</p>

		Dasgupta, R.K. (2017). “Dissident Citizenship.” <i>Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politics, Intimacies and Belonging</i> (1st ed.). Routledge India. Pp. 124–153.
Session #9	Inclusion & Exclusion	Miller, <i>Inequality</i> . Pp. 128–141.  <i>Disability in the Digital Age</i> , Faye Ginsburg. Pp. 99–126.  <u>In-class viewing:</u> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc&amp;t=211s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hI2jc&amp;t=211s</a>  <b>Mid-term Assignment</b>
<b>Unit 3 (Sessions 10–12)</b>	<b>Work, Play, Troll</b>	
Session #10	Content Creators & Microcelebrity	Senft, Theresa (2013) <i>Microcelebrity and the Branded Self</i> . <a href="http://www.academia.edu/3775110/Micro-celebrity_and_the_Branded_Self">http://www.academia.edu/3775110/Micro-celebrity_and_the_Branded_Self</a>  Abidin, Crystal. 2016. <i>Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram</i> . Media International Australia. 161.  <u>In-class listen</u> (44 mins): The Guardian podcast on influencers: <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2019/apr/19/its-genuine-you-know-why-the-online-influencer-industry-is-going-authentic-podcast">https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2019/apr/19/its-genuine-you-know-why-the-online-influencer-industry-is-going-authentic-podcast</a>  <u>Recommended:</u> The Guardian Long Read: Hustle and Hype: <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/feb/24/hustle-and-hype-the-truth-about-the-influencer-economy">https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/feb/24/hustle-and-hype-the-truth-about-the-influencer-economy</a>
Session #11	Gig Economy	<u>Pre-Watch:</u> Zwigato  Miller et. al. <i>Ch. 6–Work and Commerce</i> .  <i>Hustle and Gig</i> , Alexandra Ravenelle. Pp. 1–7; 25–42  <u>In-class viewing:</u> <i>Ritu Goes Online</i> (15:50 mins) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYMybs90jYU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYMybs90jYU</a>  <u>Other relevant video resources:</u> India’s gig economy: Workers escape unemployment but face job insecurity (5:27 mins): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74n6gGmEd4c&amp;t=83s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74n6gGmEd4c&amp;t=83s</a>

		<p>Puerto Rico: AirBnB and Displacement (start at 4:30; 19 mins):  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TCX_Aqzoo4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TCX_Aqzoo4</a></p>
Session #12	Trolling	<p>Phillips, Whitney. 2015. Selections from <i>This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. "The only reason to do anything: Lulz, play, and the mask of trolling" and "The lulz are dead, long live the lulz: From subculture to mainstream." Pp. 27-36, 137-150.</p> <p><u>In-class viewing:</u> Debbie Ging on Incels.  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdo9x7aeMA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEdo9x7aeMA</a></p> <p><u>In-class viewing:</u> John Oliver on Online Harassment:  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuNIwYsz7PI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuNIwYsz7PI</a></p> <p><u>Recommended:</u>  Poonam, Snigdha and Samarth Bansal. 2017. <i>How the Fake-Jobs Industry Scams Indians</i>. Hindustan Times.  <a href="https://www.hindustantimes.com/interactives/inside-fake-job-industry/">https://www.hindustantimes.com/interactives/inside-fake-job-industry/</a></p> <p>This American Life Podcast– <i>If you don't have anything nice to say, say it in all caps</i> (audio with transcript available):  <a href="https://www.thisamericanlife.org/545/if-you-dont-have-anything-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps">https://www.thisamericanlife.org/545/if-you-dont-have-anything-nice-to-say-say-it-in-all-caps</a></p> <p>Sahana Udupa on gaali culture</p>
Session #13	Influence: Virtual ≠ Physical?	<p><u>Watch:</u> <i>Fyre: The Greatest Festival that Never Happened</i>. Documentary on Fyre Festival. Available on Netflix (1hr 37 mins)</p>
Session #14	<b>Conclusion– The Future(s)</b>	<p>Miller et. al. <i>Cb. 14–The Future</i>.</p> <p><u>Recommended:</u>  The Future of Loneliness:  <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/01/future-of-loneliness-internet-isolation">https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/01/future-of-loneliness-internet-isolation</a></p> <p>Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?  <a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/">https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/</a></p>