Department of Anthropology

ANTH 2286B-200 – Computers, Culture, and Connectivity

PROVISIONAL COURSE OUTLINE

Winter 2024

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Instructor and course information

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Trombley

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Mode of delivery: Blended (in-person class with asynchronous activities).

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: None

Course Description

You are surrounded by computers. They link us together across enormous distances, allow us to complete tasks at untold speeds, and open new realms of artistic expression. But computers are not just technical devices. They also shape the way that we experience the world around us and our social behaviors and norms. They are, in turn, shaped by the social contexts in which they are created. How are our lives changing, for better and worse, because of computers? How can we think about computers and computation in new and inspiring ways? This course will help you to begin to answer these questions and more.

This course is designed to encourage you to think differently about computation – to think about it as primarily a human social practice. In it you will learn about the history of computation, how computation has shaped our social lives over the last century, and how we can study computation from an anthropological perspective. You will be introduced to concepts from the anthropology of science and science and technology studies and will learn to analyze and critique technological narratives to understand how they intersect with existing social ideologies and cultural norms. In keeping with the topic, this is a blended course, so we will have an in-person and online component to this course. In-person classes will consist of lecture and in-class activities designed to help you think critically about computers and computation in your everyday lives. The online component will primarily consist of discussion of the readings and other relevant topics.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Describe the history of computation.
- Reflect on computation as a human practice shaped by social and cultural contexts.
- Discuss the intersections of race, gender, class and computation in the past and present.
- Analyze and critique technological narratives.

- Conduct independent research on the social dimensions of computational technologies.
- Challenge widespread assumptions about computing and develop fresh, alternative views.

Course Materials

There is no required textbook for this course. Required readings and materials will be posted on OWL under the Course Readings feature. These will include PDFs of scholarly articles and book chapters, websites and online sources, and other media (e.g., videos, podcasts). You are responsible for checking the course site, completing weekly readings, and coming to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials.

Evaluation

My philosophy of teaching is that students learn when they are actively involved in a course, working through materials, and having discussions with the instructor(s) and other students. This is how we build new connections and learn to use materials and ideas in our lives. I am not a difficult grader, but I do expect students to <u>demonstrate</u> their active involvement to me in order to receive a good grade.

The following rubric will help you understand how I will be grading assignments in this course – it is based on the general grading policy for the University. Please be familiar with it so that you will know how to get the grade you expect in the class.

General Grading Rubric:

A+	A	B	C	D	F
90-100	80-89	70-79	60-69	50-59	<50
Assignment is without error or flaw.	Assignment is exceptionally high quality with few minor errors or flaws	Assignment is high quality with some minor errors or flaws.	Assignment is good, but contains several errors or flaws.	Assignment is low quality with many errors or flaws.	Assignment is very low quality with extensive errors or flaws.
Demonstrates that student has gone above and beyond the requirements	Demonstrates effort to go above and beyond the requirements.	Student has completed the assignment according to the requirements.	Student has mostly completed the assignment according to the requirements, but has missed one key element.	Student has missed multiple essential elements of the assignment.	Student has failed to follow the requirements of the assignment.
Reflects the student's own voice and work.	Reflects the student's own voice and work.	Reflects the student's own voice and work.	Reflects minimal work and voice.	Reflects minimal work and voice.	Reflects none of the student's work or voice.

Evaluation items:

Engagement   15%
In-Class Exercises (x12)   50%
Group Documentary Project   30%
Course Reflection   5%

Engagement (15%)

I believe that learning takes place through active participation and involvement in the course, interaction with the instructor and other students, and working through the concepts presented in the readings. Altogether, I call this "engagement." This is not something that I prefer to place a point value on because it is difficult to quantify. However, the following is a list of potential things you can do to get a good grade:

- Attend class regularly (see the missed class section below for more details)
- Actively participate in class sessions (e.g. respond to questions, ask questions, offer comments or perspectives, etc.)
- Demonstrate that you have come to class prepared (e.g. do the readings ahead of time and be ready to comment on them)
- Be kind and supportive to your fellow students who are working to help you learn, too.
- Participate regularly in the online discussion (comment at least two days per week)
- Complete and submit assignments on time.
- Work well with and be supportive of your documentary group (groups will be asked to submit evaluations of other members at the end of the course)
- Communicate with your instructor (e.g. ask questions, come to office hours, discuss any issues or concerns, etc.)

This list is not exhaustive but should give you some ideas about how to get a good engagement grade.

In-Class Exercises (50%)

In the second hour of each week, I will give you an exercise to complete on your own or in groups. Each exercise is worth 5% of your grade and the two lowest grades will be dropped leaving you with a total of 10 grades for 50% altogether. You will do an activity related to the topic of the week, think about it and discuss it in relation to the readings for the week, and write a short response either individually or as a group.

The exercises will be turned in at the end of class and no late assignments will be accepted. If you miss two or fewer classes, those will be counted as your dropped exercise grades. If you miss more than two classes, you must talk to the academic counselling office to arrange a makeup assignment.

Group Documentary Project (30%)

In small groups, you will work over the course of the semester to develop a short video or audio (i.e. podcast) documentary on some aspect of computation in daily life that is covered in the course. Your documentary should delve deeper into the topic than our course discussions allow, drawing on additional materials, interviews, and concepts that were not covered in class. You should work together as a group to collect these materials and assemble them into a well-produced

discussion and explanation of the topic and its relevance to ordinary people, providing new perspectives that are not generally familiar. I will share a list of example documentaries and podcasts that you can use as reference for how to produce a quality product. I do not expect these to be perfectly produced but do expect you to demonstrate that you have done the work of delving into the topic and learned something new.

You will need to turn in multiple pieces of the documentary over the course of the semester which will be graded either individually or as a group. These pieces are:

1. A general idea for a topic (3% group grade)
2. A plan of research (5% group grade)
3. A documentary storyboard outlining the flow of the narrative (5% group grade)
4. The documentary itself (10% group grade)
5. Commentary on other groups' documentaries (5% individual grade)
6. An evaluation of your group members (2% individual grade)

The group member evaluations will be anonymous, and I will use them to help inform the engagement grade at the end of the course.

Course Reflection (5%)

At the end of the course, I ask that you write a short (~300-word) reflection on the course, what you learned or will take away from it, what you would like to see improved, and anything else that you'd like to share. These reflections will help to inform future versions of this class, but also allow you to consider what you've gained as a result of taking it.

Late Policy for Assignments

In-class assignments and fieldnotes will generally be turned in during class time, unless otherwise specified. Please see the "Missed Class Policy" for guidelines on what to do if you miss an assignment due to absence.

Out of class assignments can be submitted up to one week late with an automatic 5% penalty. After one week, the assignment will be closed and will not be reopened unless you have consulted with the academic counselling office and received an extension.

Missed Classes

You are expected to attend every class period. Class periods are important for dialog and engagement and may include important information that you may not get in other ways. That said, I understand that issues arise and sometimes you are not able to attend in person. When possible, please contact me in advance and I can arrange for virtual participation. Failure to attend class regularly (either in-person or with a virtual option) will affect your engagement grade. If you miss a class, you may not make up in-class assignments without an academic accommodation.

Use of OWL and Slack

This is a hybrid course, which means that a portion of your instruction will be online. We will use Slack – a communications platform – to hold weekly discussions on the readings and other topics. I will send out the invitations to our Slack channel in the first week of class, and it is your responsibility to make sure that you are connected to it and able to access and use it. I can help with technical issues as needed. Slack will allow us to have an open and continuous conversation about the topics in the class – you should feel free to ask questions of the instructor and/or the

other students, share your thoughts on the readings, relevant experiences or insights, additional materials you find that are relevant, or anything else you think might be valuable to the course.

I will also use Western's online course management program (OWL) to provide the final course outline and weekly schedule (Syllabus page); provide, submit, and return assignments (Assignments page); communicate with the class (Announcements and Messages tools); and provide PDF copies of weekly readings and links to course materials (Lessons, Resources, or Course Reserves pages), PowerPoint presentations of the lectures will be made available on the OWL Lesson pages after each class. You may make use of the OWL Wiki tool for group collaborations and fieldnotes. All grades will be posted in the OWL Gradebook.

Communication Policy

I will respond to your emails and other communications as promptly as possible, however, I reserve the evenings and weekends for my family. As a result, I will generally not respond to emails after 5pm or during the weekends. Instead, I will respond on the following day or on Monday when I resume work. If you have an urgent request during that time, please place "URGENT" in the subject and I will respond as appropriate.

When you email me, please include your full name and the course you are enrolled in so I can keep track between my three courses. Please use the subject to indicate what you are contacting me about and in the body of the email include any details I might need to address your questions or problem.

Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism:

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. *This includes the use of generative AI to complete any portion of an assignment.* It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

Please read and familiarize yourself with the "Academic Offences" section of the University's Academic Policies. These offenses are taken very seriously by the University and are treated as such. Penalties range from a failing grade for the assignment or the course to suspension or even expulsion from the University. I will provide you with the tools to properly reference and acknowledge other's work in class. Never hesitate to ask if you have a question about academic honesty.

Assignment Submission

All written assignments, unless otherwise specified, must be submitted to TurnItIn.com using the links on the course OWL site. Assignments should adhere to the following formatting guidelines: double-spaced, 11 point, Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins. Students should use an established citation style like Chicago, APA, or MLA for submissions. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that all in-text citations and bibliography entries are formatting properly and contain the correct information. Failure to cite sources appropriately in submissions (e.g., legibly, consistently, and with all necessary info) will result in point deduction.

Accommodation Policies:

It is important to communicate with me as soon as you know you will need additional accommodations (beyond course policies) to complete coursework or assignments, including exams. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking academic consideration based on medical or compassionate grounds ("What is Academic Consideration"). It is your responsibility to keep me informed about accommodations and provide the appropriate documentation so that I can work with you on ways to stay caught up in class. All missed work must be made up by the end of the exam period in the applicable term.essible Education

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see Accessible Education for information.

Academic Rights and Responsibilities

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current Academic Policies in the Academic Calendar which include, but is not limited to, academic consideration for medical illness, accommodation for religious holidays, academic appeals, academic accommodation for students with disabilities, as well as scholastic discipline.

Weekly Topics and Readings

Readings, as well as any additions or adjustments, will be announced in advance in class and on OWL.

Culture and Connectivity	Readings	Assignments
Jan. 8-12	Some Basics	Groups assigned
Jan. 15-19	Data - Databases and Classification	General Ideas due Jan 19
Jan 22 - 26	Data - Algorithms	
Jan 29 - Feb 2	Data - Automation	Plan of Research Due Feb. 2
Feb 5 - 9	Selves - Privacy	
Feb 12 - 16	Selves - Surveillance	
Feb 19 - 23	**Reading Week**	
Feb 26 - Mar 1	Selves - Identity	Documentary Storyboard due Mar 1
Mar 4 - 8	Worlds - Material Worlds	
Mar 11 - 15	Worlds - Virtual Worlds	
Mar 18 - 22	Worlds - Platform Politics	Final Documentaries due March 22
Mar 25 - 29	Documentaries	Documentary Commentaries due March 29
Apr 1 - 5	Speculations…	
Apr. 8		Group evaluations due Apr. 8

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