

Department of Anthropology

ANTH 4411F-650 – Anthropology in The Virtual World

Course Outline

Fall 2023

Version date: Sept. 1, 2023

Instructor and course information:

Instructor: Dr. Jeremy Trombley

Email: jtrombl@uwo.ca

Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: Enrollment in fourth year.

Please note: This course does ***not*** require an application, although stated in the timetable. If you wish to take this course, please email the Undergrad Program Advisor in the [Anthropology Department](#).

Course Description:

As our world and lives become increasingly shaped by virtual interactions and connections, anthropological research has shifted to incorporate the virtual world and community. In this course, students will explore the theory and practice of virtual anthropology and the opportunities and challenges that might be encountered as we conduct ethnographic research in virtual worlds. Students will read a selection of ethnographic research conducted virtually. This may include communities in virtual worlds such as video games or social media sites as well as real-world communities that can be accessed through online technologies. Additionally, students will have the opportunity to craft their own research virtual ethnography research project and develop valuable online research skills. To align with the research topic, this course will be held online and we will discuss the benefits and drawbacks of virtual technologies for education.

Use of OWL

This course will take place entirely online facilitated by Western's online course management program. All course content, assignments, and discussions will be available on the course management system.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Discuss different conceptual approaches to virtual anthropology.
- Critique and analyze ethnographic texts.
- Explain the history of ethnographic methods and the emergence of virtual ethnography.
- Describe ethnographic methods and how they can be applied to virtual communities.

- Discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with conducting ethnography among virtual communities.
- Design an ethnographic research project among virtual communities.
- Collect and analyze ethnographic data among virtual communities.

Course Materials:

Readings will consist of assorted journal articles, blog posts, videos, and other content that will be accessed through OWL’s Course Readings feature. These readings are listed in the weekly schedule.

Evaluation:

Field Notes	40%
Virtual Worlds Research Paper (1500 words)	30%
Ethnographic Project (1500 words)	30%

Field Notes – 40%

Keeping field notes is an important part of doing ethnographic research. This assignment will give students experience creating field notes and reflecting on their experiences through an anthropological lens.

Students will complete weekly “field notes” on their experiences with the course and their thoughts about the topics and methods we will discuss. These notes can be short written pieces, videos, images or other media that illustrate, demonstrate, or otherwise reflect the content of the course. Each note will be worth 4% of your total grade and the lowest two grades will be dropped. The notes will be submitted each week on OWL and ultimately collected in a virtual field notebook at the end of the course.

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com).

Virtual Worlds Research Paper 30%

In this course you will complete two linked papers. The first is a virtual worlds research paper in which you will write an approximately 1500-word literature review and analysis of a topic or issue in the anthropology of virtual worlds. The review should pull together recent and relevant sources, synthesize them, and provide an analysis. Among the questions you will answer in this paper are: 1) What anthropological research has been done on this topic? 2) what has the research found? And 3) what gaps or limits exist with the research?

This paper will be due in the middle of the term. Your topic should relate to the topic of your second paper, which will be an ethnographic project.

Ethnographic Project 30%

For the second paper, you will complete an ethnographic project on a topic or issue in the anthropology of virtual worlds. This topic should connect with the topic of your research paper. You

will submit at the end of the term an approximately 1500-word summary of your research including: 1) participant observations notes (about 500 words), 2) interview notes (about 500 words), and 3) an analysis of your data (about 500 words).

Each student will meet with me in the third week of the course to discuss their topic and plans for research.

Late Policy for Assignments

There will be a 2% reduction of the assignment grade for each day that an assignment is late (including weekends and holidays). Unless accommodation is granted, assignments that are not handed in within 10 days of the due date (including weekends and holidays) may receive a grade of zero.

Academic Statements and Policies:

Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course:

In order to pass this course students must pass the Analysis and Discussion Essay regardless of the numerical grade for the course.

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.

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. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

All required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absences:

For students who have missed, or will miss, any course work, whether it be for medical related or non-medical related, please read the details and instructions on "[What is Academic Consideration](#)".

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

All missed work must be made up by the end of the exam period in the applicable term.

Accessible 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.

Weekly Topics and Readings:

Note – this is a tentative schedule. Any additions or adjustments made to it will be announced in advance in class and on OWL.

Week 1 – What is ethnography?

Week 2 – Methods and Fieldnotes

Week 3 – Research Design

Week 4 – Material and Virtual

Week 5 – Anthropological Ethics in the Virtual World

Week 6 – Virtual Connection

Week 7 – Gaming and Virtual Worlds

Week 8 – Platforms and Politics

Week 9 – Models, Algorithms, and Artificial Intelligence

Week 10 – Surveillance and The Virtual State

Week 11 – Dis/information

Week 12 – Analyzing Ethnographic Data

Week 13 – Virtual Speculation

~ End ~