

SPRING 2020 COMM489A BLACK DISCOURSE AND DIGITAL MEDIA

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OFFICE HOURS: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will explore the history of black discourse and orality and how the unique communicative traditions of African diasporic people in the U.S., were formed in relation to technological skill. In this process, we will discuss how the parallel development of racism and black cultural traditions have equipped black users to wield digital technology skills in ways that often outpace and differ from the dominant group. We will then interrogate manifestations of this use by reading/exploring digital technologies and academic writings about them. Students will investigate the different mechanisms by which communication researchers can study black users and discourse (social scientific, interpretive and critical methods) with a specific emphasis on critical cultural studies methods and digital humanities tools. Finally, we will together design a digital artifact that demonstrates our increased knowledge on the subject and makes this knowledge accessible to a public of our choosing. This course will ask many of us to think about communication and culture in ways that are different than we may previously have approached either of these topics. We will be focused on the communicative practices and technology use of the Black community in the U.S.. By necessity, we will explore concepts like race, gender, power, and class. We will also engage deeply with black cultural expression making sure that earnest academic inquiry guides our discussion.

This classroom will serve as a space where ideas, topics, and materials that provoke discussion and debate are welcome. This comes with the understanding that engaging in these ideas creates a certain risk for participants. It is my goal that this classroom environment is a place where students may learn to be comfortable in the state of risk rather than seeking the safety of avoiding the ideas necessary to advance knowledge.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the term undergraduate students in this course will:

- *Be confident in their ability to summarize and respond to academic texts in the fields of black studies and communication*
- *Analyze platform affordances as a part of the study of online discourse*
- *Utilize key concepts and theories from black studies and communication to analyze current black digital rhetorical and communicative practices online.*
- *Develop comfort with understanding various DH tools and critical methodological approaches to studying black communicative practice online.*
- *Produce a digital artifact suitable for an audience outside of the classroom*

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation and Reading Summary Worksheets

Students are expected to be in class and be engaged with the material within each class session. To aid in our class discussion and ensure we are all prepared to engage, students are required to submit a reading summary worksheet for each assigned reading prior to the start of class. During the first few weeks of class we will go over these summaries together in class. There are a total of 25 assigned readings in the class. The lowest five of these submissions will be dropped from the grade. Submissions will not be accepted after the start of the class session. In addition to these worksheets, participation will be graded based on your active participation in the course.

At-Home Exam

Take-home exams will be in essay format wherein you will respond to a prompt. For each exam, you will be required to define key terms, apply key concepts to digital communication and draw connections between the readings. For each exam, students can use their notes and the assigned readings for that unit or for other units when appropriate. Students must cite their sources (at least 2 for each exam). The exam response should include an analysis which demonstrates how the students understands and see the work fitting into the context of our class' subject area and how they see an application for the material within and outside of the classroom. Students can study together but must complete the exam alone. The exam will be taken at home (outside of class) and therefore, no make-up exams will be provided. Exams become available on the last class session of each unit and are available until the start of the next unit. The lowest exam gram will be dropped.

Digital Artifact

In addition to studying the uses of digital technology, students will become producers of a digital artifact meant to translate their learning to an audience outside the classroom. Students may select among a pre-approved artifact or propose their own ideas. Students may decide to work individually or in teams of 2-3 to propose, produce and present their artifact. Some examples of a digital artifact suitable for this class may be a podcast, a blog, a storymap, or a digital video. Each artifact will begin with a 500-word proposal which includes a review of relevant literature and an argument for the platform chosen. Along with the submission of the digital artifact, students will submit a 4-5pg final paper that explores the decisions made in designing the product as well as how the literature we read in the class contributes to the project design and content for their selected audience. The digital artifact will consist of reflection on each of the six course modules. For example, if you select a blog, you must have a post focusing on ideas in each unit. If you select a podcast or vlog, you will produce an episode for each module.

EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING PROCEDURES

The goal of providing feedback via grades on assignments is for students to work toward achieving their goals in the course and creating an external measure by which achievement of those goals can be assessed. For every assignment in the class, feedback in advance of submission is possible via office hour consultation with the instructor. If students elect to participate in a group assignment, their work will be graded as a whole.

Student's grades will be available on ELMS. All questions regarding grades should be addressed during office hours or by appointment. Calculation errors may be addressed via email.

Undergraduate	
At Home Exams	45%
Participation (in-class participation and reading summary worksheets)	20%
Digital Artifact	35%
Proposal	5%
Final Product	25%
Presentation	5%

COURSE PROCEDURES AND POLICIES:

Official University undergraduate policies can be found here:

<http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>.

COMMUNICATION ABOUT THIS COURSE

This course uses ELMS and email regularly. All course documents, information, grades, and readings will be available on ELMS. Please make sure your email information with UMD is up-to-date so that you can receive all relevant information. You are responsible for receiving information sent through ELMS and email. My preferred method of contact for short clarifying questions is email. However, be sure to first check the syllabus and schedule as the answers to many questions can be found in these documents. ***I will return emails during business hours M-F and within 24 hours on the weekend.*** For extended questions and feedback on assignments, grades, and readings you are encouraged to visit during office hours or set up other times to meet which are mutually convenient.

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES:

[\[V-100\(G\) University of Maryland Policy on Excused Absence.](#)

Students are expected to be present and engaged in course material at each class meeting. Understanding that we are all adults who make appropriate decisions about our behavior, I expect that outside of emergency situations you will be committed to being present and engaged. Absences (excused or not) do not remove the responsibility for timely completion of assignments and submission of assignments via ELMS. Missing more than three class sessions will negatively impact the attendance portion of your grade.

The University of Maryland policy on Excused Absences reads as follows: Events that justify an excused absence include: religious observances; mandatory military obligation; documented illness of the student or an immediate family member; participation in university activities at the request of university authorities; and compelling circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., death in the family, required court appearance). Absences stemming from work duties other than military obligation (e.g., unexpected changes in shift assignments) and traffic/transit problems do not typically qualify for an excused absence.

Students claiming an excused absence must notify the course instructor promptly and provide appropriate documentation. The notification should be provided either before the absence or as soon afterward as possible. In the case of religious observances, athletic events, and planned absences known at the beginning of the semester, the student must inform the instructor during the schedule adjustment period. All other absences must be reported as soon as is practical. The student must provide appropriate documentation of the absence. The documentation must be provided in writing to the instructor by the means specified in this syllabus.

For this course, all students may evoke three absences before the lowering of their course grade. Students may, but are not required to provide a rationale to the instructor for these three absences. However, any student missing more than three class sessions who wishes to assert that these absences should be excused must provide documentation or will risk lowering their grade by 10% for each absence beyond the three allowed.

EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

In the event of a university closure or delay or the need to cancel class arises you will be notified via email. If the instructor needs to cancel class, students will be notified as soon as possible and online activities may be provided. Please ensure that you check your email and ELMS for any communication in these instances.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE:

Students are expected to be in class on time and leave class only when it is finished. The instructor is committed to doing the same. Frequent late arrival or early departure will be considered as a disturbance to class and will affect your participation grade. Should you leave the class early or arrive late for an unavoidable reason, please let me know before or soon after the class. Please show respect to your peers and me by having your attention on the subject of the day rather than work from other classes or side conversations. This is a course based on the premise that technology is integral to our lives and learning. Therefore laptops, tablets, and cell phone use are allowed and encouraged if they aid in your participation in the class. However, if you need to take a call or respond to a text during a class session, please step outside to do so. Please do not allow your use of technology to interfere with your classmate's ability to remain engaged in class activities. If this is the case, participation grades will suffer. I do not anticipate needing to remind adults of these basic rules of respect.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

(<https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf>). The UMD Honor Code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents and forging signatures. On every examination, paper or another academic exercise not exempted by the instructor, students must write by hand and sign the following pledge:

I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination (or assignment).

Allegations of academic dishonesty will be reported directly to the Student Honor Council:

<http://www.shc.umd.edu>

Students who engage in academic dishonesty in this course will receive no points for the assignment in question and will be immediately reported to the Honor Council and Office of Judicial Programs for further action. There will be no warnings.

Definitions for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating, etc. can be found at:

<http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>.]

If you are concerned about issues of plagiarism, please see the instructor. It is my goal that we all work toward academic integrity and that no one is penalized.

ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY SUPPORT:

<https://www.counseling.umd.edu/ads/>

Students with a documented disability should inform the instructors within the add-drop period if academic accommodations will be needed. NB: You are expected to meet with your instructor in person to provide them with a copy of the **ACCOMMODATIONS LETTER** and to obtain your instructor's signature on the **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF STUDENT REQUEST** form. You and your instructor will plan together how accommodations will be implemented throughout the semester. To obtain the required Accommodation Letter, please contact Disability Support Service (DSS) at 301-314-7682 or dussup@umd.edu.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

Class lectures and other materials are copyrighted. They may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from the instructor. Copyright infringements may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. **The instructor does not permit video or audio recordings of class sessions without consent.**

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT:

[<http://www.president.umd.edu/administration/policies/section-vi-general-administration/vi-160a-0>. You may consider using the following text from the Faculty Handbook:

The University of Maryland is committed to providing support and resources, including academic accommodations, for students who experience sexual or relationship violence as defined by the University's Sexual Misconduct Policy. To report an incident and/or obtain an academic accommodation, contact the Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct at 301-405-1142. If you wish to speak confidentially, contact Campus Advocates Respond and Educate (CARE) to Stop Violence at 301-741-3555. As 'responsible university employees' faculty are required to report any disclosure of sexual misconduct, i.e., they may not hold such disclosures in confidence. For more information:
<http://www.umd.edu/ocrsm/>]

DIVERSITY:

[<https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-900A.pdf>

Feel free to compose your own statement, such as

"The University of Maryland values the diversity of its student body. Along with the University, I am committed to providing a classroom atmosphere that encourages the equitable participation of all students regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation. Potential devaluation of students in the classroom that can occur by reference to demeaning stereotypes of any group and/or overlooking the contributions of a particular group to the topic under discussion is inappropriate."]

FOR INFORMATION ON ELMS, COUNSELING, HEALTH, LEARNING WORKSHOPS, TUTORING, WRITING HELP, STUDENT RIGHTS IN UNDERGRAD COURSES, QUESTIONS ABOUT GRADUATION OR ADD/DROP/WITHDRAW, PLEASE SEE [HTTP://WWW.UGST.UMD.EDU/COURSERELATEDPOLICIES.HTML](http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Course schedule is subject to change with written notice from the instructor

Jan 28	Syllabus and Introductions
Jan 30	Reading Summary practice and note-taking, Black Oral Culture
Feb 4	Orality and Literacy Ong, W. [1988] (2002). Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word. New York: Routledge. (excerpt pp. 31-56)
Feb 6	Black Discourse & Communicative Practice Gates, H. L. (1989). The signifying monkey: a theory of African-American literary criticism. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (excerpt pp 70-96)
Feb 11	Beyond Digital Divide - Race and/as Technology Fouché, R. (2006). Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud: African Americans, American artifactual culture, and black vernacular technological creativity. American Quarterly, 58(3), 639-661.
Feb 13	Digital Griots and Storytelling Banks, A. (2011) Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric In a Multimedia Age. (excerpts)
Theory in Black Digital Communication	
Feb 18	AT HOME EXAM DUE Black Counterpublics Squires, C. R. (2002), Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres. Communication Theory, 12: 446-468.
Feb 20	Race, Memory, and Digitality Florini, S. (2014) "Recontextualizing the Racial Present by Retelling the Past: Intertextuality and the Politics of Remembering Online." Critical Studies in Media Communication. 31, no. 4 (2014): 314-326.
Feb 25	Racial Formation Theory and Online Discourse as a Racial Project Cole, N.L. (2017) Racial Projects: A Sociological Approach to Race https://www.thoughtco.com/racial-project-3026510
Feb 27	Digital Black Feminism and CyberFeminist Rhetoric Online Steele, C.K. (forthcoming) Digital Black Feminism (excerpt)
Methods and Approaches to Black Digital Communication Research	

Mar 3	<p>AT-HOME EXAM DUE</p> <p>Big Data, Social Science and Black Communication online</p> <p>Ray, R., Brown, M., Fraistat, N., & Summers, E. (2017). Ferguson and the death of michael brown on twitter: #BlackLivesMatter, #TCOT, and the evolution of collective identities. <i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>, 40(11), 1797-1813. doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1335422</p>
Mar 5	<p>Interpretive methods and Discourse Analysis</p> <p>Clark, M. (2015) Black Twitter: building connection through cultural conversation. In: Rambukkana, N (ed.) #Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, pp. 205-218.</p>
Mar 10	<p>Critical Inquiry, design and ethics online</p> <p>Florini, S. (2019) Beyond Hashtags appendix</p>
Mar 12	<p>Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis</p> <p>Sweeney, M.E. (2016). "The Ms. Dewey 'experience': Technoculture, gender, and race." In, Daniels, J., Gregory, K & Cottom, T. (Eds.), <i>Digital Sociologies</i> (401-420). Policy Press, 2016.</p>
Mar 17	SPRING BREAK
Mar 19	SPRING BREAK
Digital Humanities Tools in Black Digital Media	
Mar 24	<p>AT HOME EXAM DUE</p> <p>What is Digital Humanities?/Design Thinking/Universal Design</p> <p>Bailey, M. All the Digital Humanists Are White, All the Nerds Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave." <i>Journal of Digital Humanities</i></p>
Mar 26	<p>Archiving the Web</p> <p>Sutherland,T. (2016) From (Archival) Page to (Virtual) Stage: The Virtual Vaudeville Prototype. <i>The American Archivist: Fall/Winter 2016, Vol. 79, No. 2, pp. 392-416.</i></p>
Mar 31	<p>Reclaiming Black Social Movements using Digital Methods - Kevin Winstead</p> <p>Reading: TBD</p>
Apr 2	<p>Encoding for Black Lives - Jessica Lu</p> <p>Reading: TBD</p>
Platforms	

Apr 7	<p>AT HOME EXAM DUE</p> <p>Affordances and History of Black software studies</p> <p>McIlwain, C. (2019) Black Software: The Internet & Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter (excerpt)</p>
Apr 9	<p>Social Media - From Black Planet to Black Twitter</p> <p>Brock, A. (2020) Distributed Blackness (excerpt)</p>
Apr 14	<p>Blogging and Other Online long-form writing</p> <p>Steele, C.K. (2016) The Digital Barbershop: Blogs and online oral culture within the African American community, Social Media + Society</p>
Apr 16	<p>Podcasts</p> <p>Florini, S “The Podcast “Chitlin’ Circuit”: Black Podcasters, Alternative Media, and Enclaved Social Spaces.” Journal of Radio and Audio Media. 22, no. 4 (2015): 209-219.</p>
Apr 21	<p>Gaming</p> <p>Gray, K. “‘They’re just too urban’: Cultural production, colorblindness, and racialized discourse surrounding Black gamers streaming on Twitch.” In Daniels, J., Gregory, K., & Cottom, T.M. (Eds). Digital Sociologies, University of Bristol: Policy Press. http://bit.ly/2d1kXuD</p>
Apr 23	<p>FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE - REQUIRED MEETINGS DURING CLASSTIME</p>
<p>Critical Conversations in Black Digital Research</p>	
Apr 28	<p>AT-HOME EXAM DUE</p> <p>Surveillance and Activism</p> <p>Browne, S (2015) - Introduction, and Other Dark Matters-1.pdf - introduction</p>
Apr 30	<p>Algorithms and Bias</p> <p>Noble, S (2018) Algorithms of Oppression (excerpt)</p>
May 5	<p>Disinformation and Black Political voices</p> <p>Reading TBD</p>
May 7	<p>Ratchet Digital Practice</p> <p>Brock, A. (2020) Distributed Blackness (excerpt)</p>
May 12	<p>AT HOME EXAM DUE + Individual/Group Meetings</p>
Final Exam period May 15 8-10am	<p>DIGITAL ARTIFACT DUE FINAL CLASS PRESENTATIONS</p>