

# *Digital Ethnography & Filmmaking*

Mondays 1:00-3:30 | IFI Building Room 102

*Professor Kouross Esmaeli*

This is a practice-based course meant to introduce students to both the possibilities as well as the problematics of documenting human social and cultural phenomenon through digital technology. The course will challenge students to think actively and critically about their use of digital tools for documentary and ethnographic purposes. First, the course will provide an overview of the ethnographic documentary tradition. Second, it will explore the practical and ethical questions that digital devices and the internet present as both tools and sites of studying human societies and sociality. Finally, the course will guide students to use digital tools (smart phones, cameras, sound recorders, the internet) to gather and produce digital documentation on an ethnographic topic. The course works best for students with some understanding of their interests and ideas who will use digital methods and field sites to further their projects. Possible final projects for the course could be: a video documentary, an audio soundscape, an ethnographic study of an online community, using the internet as a component of multi-sited fieldwork, or a critical analysis of a case of the digitization of social or institutional processes.

## ***Course Materials Required Text:***

*All course material will be posted on Moodle, emailed or handed out in class*

## ***Course Work and Evaluation:***

Attendance – 10%

Participation – 20%

Midterm Exam - 25%

Final Project Proposal – 5%

Final Project Rough Edit – 10%

Final Project Completed – 30%

## ***Attendance & Participation:***

Late arrivals are discouraged. Two (2) late arrivals will count as an unexcused absence.

Two (2) unexcused absences will lower your overall course grade by 5%

Three (3) unexcused absences will lower your overall course grade by 10%

Missing more than three classes will result in an F and I will ask you to withdraw from the class

If you have a legitimate excuse to miss class or be late, you need to share that with me BEFORE class. The only reason for you to miss class without telling me is in the case of an emergency for which you need a note from doctor, dean or advisor.

This class is an interactive that will be structured primarily through discussion. The quality of the discussion rests squarely on your preparation. Because we meet once a week and there are a significant number of Monday holidays, your attendance is important. The readings are relatively short because I want you to read them and have an understanding of them before class. Because your active participation in discussion is the cornerstone of the class discussion, you should come prepared to ask questions and to air your thoughts. Being prepared for class includes how carefully you have read and thought about the readings, and how often you ask and answer questions and make relevant comments. Since class discussion and activities will call for

reference to reading material, you are required to bring printouts or digital copies of all assigned readings to class. Do not read the texts on your mobile device as they are not allowed in class.

### ***Midterm Exam***

The midterm exam will be administered in class and will be a combination of short and long response questions.

Please be advised that no late work will be accepted, and no exam will be rescheduled without a preceding agreement with me. Delayed due dates will be rare, authorized only under truly justified circumstances (which will be defined as such only by me).

### ***Final Project***

Your final project is the most important aspect of your grade. We will be preparing for your projects from the beginning of the semester. My role is to help you identify a project that is feasible within the limitations of the semester and the technology at our disposal. Identifying a clear idea and then carrying this out will be a three-step process: a project proposal, presentation of the rough version to the class, and the final form due at the end of the semester.

### ***Grade Appeals***

Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

### ***Special Circumstances, Considerations, Needs:***

If you have any special circumstances, consideration or needs that you feel will either affect your ability to complete assignments or participate in recitation discussions, please let me know as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Providing documentation is critical to processing special requests. I will help facilitate your requests to the best of my abilities. In most cases, special circumstances, considerations and needs should be facilitated through the Moses Center.

### ***Student Resources:***

Students with physical or learning disabilities are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Office (<https://www.aub.edu.lb/SAO/Pages/Accessible-Education.aspx>). You are under no requirement to share your disability with me but I encourage you to do so after you register the AEO office, especially if you need extra time for assignments and exams. Every student should be using the resources at the Writing Center ([https://website.aub.edu.lb/units/writing\\_center/Pages/index.aspx](https://website.aub.edu.lb/units/writing_center/Pages/index.aspx)) and to drop by their offices at Ada Dodge Hall, Room 214 and West Hall, Room 336 to use their help and resources in improving your writing habits and writing skills.

### ***Miscellaneous:***

As in all of your courses, good faith, respect and trust are crucial to enabling class discussion. The ideas and concepts we'll be discussing may challenge or conflict with our commonly held beliefs and perspectives. Such challenges should not be construed as value judgments nor should anything discussed in class be construed as a personal offense. Our goal (and that of the university more generally) is to get us thinking critically about the things we often take for granted and to enable us to support our beliefs intelligently and thoughtfully. If you experience any discomfort with material discussed in class, please talk with me directly, and we'll work together to resolve the situation effectively.

Week		Theme	Readings - Viewings
1	1/21	What is ethnography? What is meant by the “digital”? What	Watch: Mead/Bateson` - “Birthing Babies in Three Cultures” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5NUoy0fMLQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5NUoy0fMLQ</a> Jena 6 <a href="https://vimeo.com/184258567">https://vimeo.com/184258567</a> Legacy of the Imam <a href="https://vimeo.com/184256967">https://vimeo.com/184256967</a> Generation Z <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OctEVyXOcJY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OctEVyXOcJY</a> The Kingdom of Women <a href="https://vimeo.com/60512238">https://vimeo.com/60512238</a>
2	1/28	1- Ethnography as social practice & cultural critique  2- Ethnography of marriage in Lebanon	1- Marcus & Fischer, <i>Anthropology as Cultural Critique</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Intro to 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (xv-xxviii)</i></li> <li>• <i>Ch. 2 (17-25), pp. 73-76,</i></li> <li>• <i>“Documentary Criticism in America” (125-128),</i></li> <li>• <i>“A concluding Remark” (165-168)</i></li> </ul> - George E. Marcus 1995. “Ethnography in/of the World System: the Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography.” <i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i> 24(1): 95–117.  2- Ethnography of marriage in Lebanon - Abillama, “Contesting Secularisms” - Panchetti, “Ethnography of a Secular Setting” - Cyprus: Island of Forbidden Love <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jk8bT0GdcEc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jk8bT0GdcEc</a>
3	2/4	The problem of visuality & representation	- Mirzoeff, “The Right to Look” <i>excerpts</i> - Fabian, “Presence and Representation” - Heider, “Ethnographic Film” <i>excerpts</i>
4	2/11	Society & technology: Digitization	- Pink, “Conversing Anthropologically” <i>concentrate on pp.164-170</i> - Hadi Afif’s Artist Statement and website on “Kids These Days” <a href="https://mcom292gfinalproject.wordpress.com/">https://mcom292gfinalproject.wordpress.com/</a> ----- - Schull, <i>Addiction by Design</i> , Introduction <i>concentrate on pp. 1-20</i>

			- Esmaeli, <i>Testing Technology</i> , Summary & Introduction, concentrate on Summary & 26-36
5	2/18	The internet as field site	- Boellstoff, <i>Coming of Age in Second Life</i> , Ch. 8. Concentrate on 205-215 - Lin Zhongxuan, “Paradoxical Empowerment and Exploitation: Virtual Ethnography on Internet Immaterial Labour in Macao” - Nardie, Bonnie. <i>An anthropological account of World of Warcraft. My Life as a Night Elf Priest</i> . Concentrate on 26-37 - Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0). Available at: <a href="https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf">https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf</a>
6	2/25	Virtual ethnography & Twitter as Field Site	- Hine, “The Making of a Virtual Ethnography” - Marwick, “Ethnographic and Qualitative Research on Twitter” - Marwick & boyd “‘Tweet Honestly, I Tweet passionately’: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience.”
7	3/4	1. Mid Term Exam 2. Documentary film	
8	3/11	Mobile media capture and production	- Berry, “Creating with Mobile Media” - Hjort, Larissa, Burgess, Jean & Richardson, Ingrid “Studying Mobile Media: Cultural Technologies, Mobile Communication and the iPhone” <b>Due: Final Project Proposal</b>
9	3/18	Production – camera, mobile phone, audio capture ....	
10	4/1	Class Presentations	
11	4/8	Class Presentations	

12	4/15	Class Presentations	<b>Due: Final Project Rough Cut/First Draft</b>
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