

University of Massachusetts Amherst  
Faculty First Year Seminar  
Department of Anthropology

Social Media, Digital Technology, and Communicative (Trans)Formations  
FFYS 197ANTH7-01 (19764)

Spring 2015



Instructor: Dr. Jonathan Rosa  
Office: 204 Machmer/101 Herter  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-3:30pm  
Classroom: Herter 110  
Class Meetings: Tuesdays, 4:00pm-4:50pm

**Course Description**

Popular conceptions of new media often involve stereotypes about communication, whether in terms of anxieties surrounding new generations' orientation to "proper" or "traditional" communicative conventions, or the notion that humans are more connected than ever. Such perspectives presume upon communicative similarities and differences associated with imagined pasts, presents, and futures. This course investigates what, precisely, is new about "new media" by analyzing the relationship between communicative continuity and change in the context of the emergence of digital social media. We will locate our analysis of a range of contemporary social media platforms in relation to historical technological developments in communication, such as the telephone and personal computer. Each week will focus on a distinctive modality (e.g., smart phone, tablet, etc.) or platform (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). Students will analyze and discuss these topics on a course blog. Throughout the semester we will read Jose van Dijck's *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (available for purchase at the bookstore) and Naomi Baron's *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (available for free as an ebook through the library website). The goal of the course is for students to develop critical analytical skills for understanding how participation in contemporary social media simultaneously (re)produces and (trans)forms communicative practices.

## **Course Requirements**

This course is a Faculty First Year Seminar. As such, it is intended to provide first-year students with the opportunity to gather with a faculty member for in-depth discussions focused on a given topic. The requirements for this course are: regular readings, attendance, in-class participation, and regular participation in our course blog:

<http://socialmediacourseblogspring2015.blogspot.com>. Each student will be responsible for posting media corresponding to the topic for a designated week. This posting must consist of at least 500 words and 2 different representations (e.g., videos, songs, pictures, etc.). It is due by Monday evening at 10pm, so that there is plenty of time to view the blog before our Thursday class. Each student is required to post a 100-word response to at least 8 blog postings, 4 for Weeks 1-8 and 4 for Weeks 10-15. The responses are due by Friday at 10pm during same week that the posting was published. To post on the blog, go to [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com). The username is “anthrocourseblog” and the password is “courseblog”. I will demonstrate how to create blog postings on the first day of class. The grading for this course is pass/fail.

## **Outline of Weekly Topics**

Week 1 (1/20): Introductions

Week 2 (1/27): Telephone/Cellular Phone/Smart Phone  
Chapter 7 in *Always On*

Week 3 (2/3): Desktop/Laptop/Tablet  
Chapters 1 & 2 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 4 (2/10): Email/Instant Messaging/Text Messaging  
Chapter 4 in *Always On*

Week 5 (2/17): NO CLASS (Monday course schedule)

Week 6 (2/24): Myspace/Facebook  
Chapter 3 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 7 (3/3): NO CLASS (Away for presentation)

Week 8 (3/10): YouTube/Vine/Snapchat  
Chapter 6 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 9 (3/17): NO CLASS (Spring recess)

Week 10 (3/24): Flickr/Instagram/Pinterest  
Chapter 5 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 11 (3/31): Blogging/Tumblr  
Chapter 6 in *Always On*

Week 12 (4/7): Wikipedia

Chapter 7 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 13 (4/14): Twitter

Chapter 4 in *The Culture of Connectivity*

Week 14 (4/21): Yelp/Tinder

Chapter 8 in *The Culture of Connectivity* and Chapter 10 in *Always On*

Week 15 (4/28): Communicative Transformations?

Chapters 8 and 9 in *Always On*