



# DIGITAL CULTURE

## Digital? Culture?

Digital cultures (DC) consist of the cultures situated in and supported by the new digital media platforms and devices.

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The major differences between DC and pre-digital culture stem from the affordances and characteristics of the new tools

and media techniques, such as interactivity, simultaneousness, multitasking, convergence, and immediacy. These devices and techniques and our adoption have altered how people express cultural identity.

Culture is a complex and challenging concept, and digital, likewise. The culmination of the two gives a problematic theoretical concept that is hard to describe, let alone definitively define. The study of DC explores the consequences and meaning of technical innovations in social media, economics, politics, social life, and more through the observation of the artifacts and rituals connected with digital technologies and new media.

As the digital media landscape is constantly evolving, this course will take a specific interest in understanding the evolution of media technologies and investigate the emergence of older forms of “new” media, from the original internet to big data, from graphical user interfaces to social media platforms. As we do so, we will focus on how we use digital media and how that use impacts individual identities, connections between people, our knowledge levels, relationships of power, and so on.

## Course Objectives

Students will gain an understanding of core concepts of digital content, such as mobility, interactivity, and networking, as well as its technical components and how it impacts communication and information.

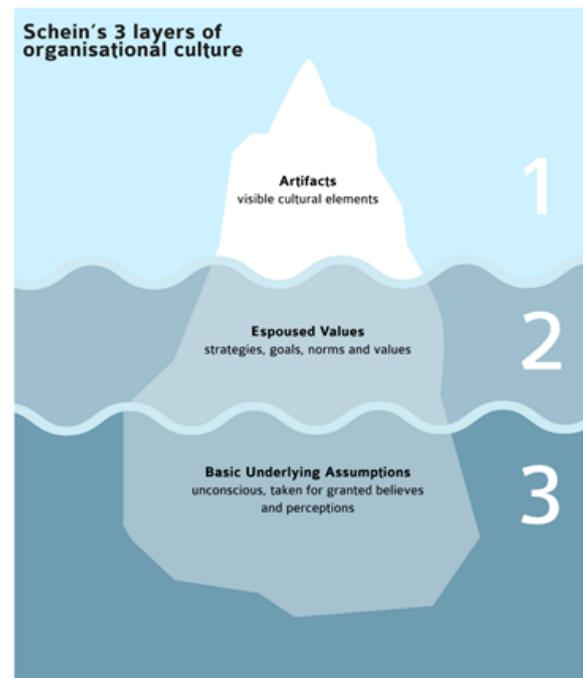
- Students will historicize media technologies we consider(ed) “new” media.
- Students will understand and contribute to contemporary debates over changes in identity, sociality, the economy, education, and play associated with the emergence of new media.
- Students will recognize how digital media constantly impact and/or structure their everyday social interactions, identities, and seemingly mundane or rote behaviors.

## We Slack

I like using Slack as a communications platform in my courses. It is faster, more informal, and more fun (?), enabling you to get to know each other and help each other answer questions you may have. So in Digital Cultures, we will use Slack to post questions, share information, and goof off. Indeed we could argue that Slack IS a form of digital culture... (how Meta?!) - if you have any questions, they will be answered quicker on Slack than via email. Make sure you are on the course slack channel. Have you read the syllabus? Tell me what your favorite food is on #random (no explanation why)

## How the course works

Each week is a new module that begins on Monday, and I expect you to have read the material for the coming week to be able to participate in the discussion. We will begin with two student presentations (see weekly presentation instructions below); students not presenting are expected to ask questions. A traditional lecture follows this. We will dig further into the topic on Thursdays through a mix of lectures and group discussions. Part of Thursday's class will be dedicated to discussing the book.



|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| Th 1/19                                | <b>Introduction</b>   |   |
| Module 1<br>Mon 1/23<br>Th 1/26        | <b>What is Culture?</b><br>Schein's The Three Levels of Culture.<br><b>Prompt: Apply Schein to your family dinner. What significant artifacts, values &amp; assumptions are expressed/present?</b>  | <b>Culture: show and tell BB 1/25, in class 1/26</b><br>Elliot Chap 1 |
| Module 2<br>Mon 1/30<br>Th 2/2         | <b>Origin Stories</b><br>Marinetti (1909) The Futurist Manifesto<br>Perry Barlow (1996) A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace<br>Swartz (2008) Guerilla Open Access Manifesto<br>Zuckerberg (2017) The Mark Manifesto<br><b>Prompt: Focus on a difference between expected future and current tech.</b> | Elliot Chap 2   |
| Module 3<br>Mon 2/6<br>Th 2/9          | <b>Performing Identities</b><br>Waugh (2017) Post-Internet identity<br><b>Prompt: What is lost/gained in mediated identity?</b>   |   |
| Module 4<br>Mon 2/13<br>Th 2/16        | <b>Influencer Culture</b><br>Abidin (2017) #Familygoals<br><b>Prompt: What kind of labor is an influencer doing?</b>  | Elliot Chap 3   |
| Module 5<br><b>Tue 2/21</b><br>Th 2/23 | <b>Digital Fitness Culture</b><br>Toner (2018) Exploring the dark-side of fitness trackers<br><b>Prompt: Is there a conflict between fitness, health and apps?</b>  | <b>2/23 CULTURE EXERCISE</b>  |
| Module 6<br>Mon 2/27<br>Th 3/2         | <b>Alternative Religion</b><br>Miller (2020) How Modern Witches Enchant TikTok<br><b>Prompt: What's the connection between technology and beliefs?</b>  |   |
| Module 7<br>Mon 3/6<br>Th 3/9          | <b>Participatory Culture (and Subversive Sharing)</b><br>Peterson-Reed (2019) Fanfiction as Performative Criticism<br><b>Prompt: Who controls our stories and knowledge?</b>  | Elliot Chap 4   |



|                                  |   |               |
|----------------------------------|---|---------------|
| Mon 3/13<br>Th 3/16              | <b>SPRING RECESS</b>  |               |
| Module 8<br>Mon 3/20<br>Th 3/23  | <b>Digital Public Sphere</b><br>Chambers (2021) Truth, Deliberative Democracy, and the Virtues of Accuracy<br><b>Prompt: Why does truth matter in democracy?</b>                                    |               |
| Module 9<br>Mon 3/27<br>Th 3/30  | <b>Activist Culture</b><br>Milan & Barbosa (2020) Enter the WhatsApp.<br><b>Prompt: Why tools matter for the activist?</b>  | Elliot Chap 5 |
| Module 10<br>Mon 4/3<br>Th 4/6   | <b>Neo-Luddite Culture</b><br>Syvertsen & Enli (2019) Digital Detox<br><b>Prompt: Why is it important to maintain control in a technological world?</b><br><b>EASTER</b>                            |               |
| Module 11<br>Mon 4/10<br>Th 4/13 | <b>EASTER</b><br><b>Memory &amp; Forgetting in Obsolescence Culture</b><br>Đurković (2021) The Impossibility of Forgetting<br><b>Prompt: Why does it matter if digital tools effect our memory?</b> |               |
| Module 12<br>Mon 4/17<br>Th 4/20 | <b>Play Culture &amp; End</b><br>Woodcock & Johnson (2018). Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it.<br><b>Prompt: Is it harmful if work becomes playful?</b>                                 | Elliot Chap 6 |
| Module 13<br>Mon 4/24<br>Th 4/27 | <b>Open Topic - TBD</b>   |               |

**The Future of Digital Culture Exercise**



| ASSIGNMENT             | DUE          | POINTS |
|------------------------|--------------|--------|
| Show & Tell            | 26 January   | 20     |
| Culture                | 23 February  | 60     |
| Weekly Module          | See schedule | 130    |
| Elliot                 | See schedule | 60     |
| Midterm                | 9 March      | 100    |
| Future Digital Culture | 1 May        | 30     |
| Final Paper            | 10 May       | 130    |
| Total                  |              | 530    |

The final letter grade for the course is a percentage of your total points, A 94 or above A- 90–93, B+ 87–89, B 83–86, B- 80–82, C+ 77–79, C 73–76

## Resource Page

If you want to know what the course is about, the directions it will take, and the thinking behind it (and too many digressions, bad jokes, and other useless information), then I highly recommend you keep one eye on the Digital Culture Spring 2023 resource page.

## Show & Tell

This exercise aims to bring an artifact (or an image of an artifact) and use it to explain the espoused values and basic underlying assumptions (check out Schein) of a group. If you like, you may use this artifact as a precursor to the upcoming culture exercise. Imagine how the artifact may be understood and misunderstood by members and non-members of the culture. Aside from discussing these in class, please submit a **200-word** explainer to Blackboard.

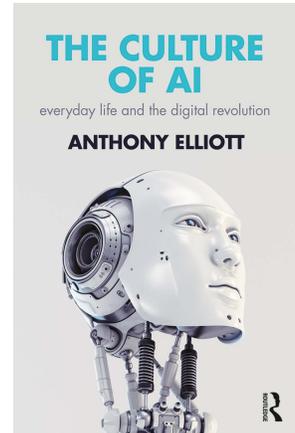


## Culture Exercise

The purpose of this exercise is to begin to understand the recognition and interpretation of culture. For this exercise, you should identify a practice that is common in your culture and explain it to the class. One way of identifying a cultural practice is to imagine that you are explaining why your group (family, team, class, etc.) does something to an intelligent creature from another planet. The point is not to explain something wildly exotic but to demonstrate that something very normal (for the group) can be seen as exotic to everyone else. In **300 words**, connect your observation to Schein's 3 levels of culture.

## The Culture of AI

The main readings for this course consist of an array of articles and chapters, but to get a deeper dive told from an individual perspective, we will be reading Anthony Elliott's book "The Culture of AI". On Thursdays, when we discuss the book, you are to have submitted your **250-350 word** analysis (can be longer) via BB before class (due Wednesday Midnight). Once we are in class, you should be prepared to discuss the main points in the text. I will ask one of you to recap the main points briefly, but the focus should be on your analysis of the text in relation to the theories we discuss in the course. At its most basic, be prepared to discuss (a) the primary arguments and their strengths and weaknesses. (b) if you disagree with the argument, what would it take to convince you (what is missing)? (c) what are the similarities and differences between this argument and others put forward by readings in the same and previous weeks?



## Subculture Exercise

The idea is to conduct a short analysis of an internet subculture. For this exercise, you need to choose any internet (or technologically mediated) subculture and use Schein's The Three Levels of Culture to attempt to analyze and explain it. Therefore in **500 words**, you will give examples of your chosen culture 1. Artifacts, 2. Espoused Beliefs and Values, and 3. Basic Underlying Assumptions. You will also need to explain why you argue this is a subculture as opposed to culture, counterculture, or individuals behaving similarly.

## Midterm

What can I say? It's a midterm. Some short questions, some long questions. It's me testing to see if you have read, understood, and analyzed the materials thus far. I don't like timed exams, and I don't like the pressure these cause. So the midterm is on **9 March**, but it is NOT in class.

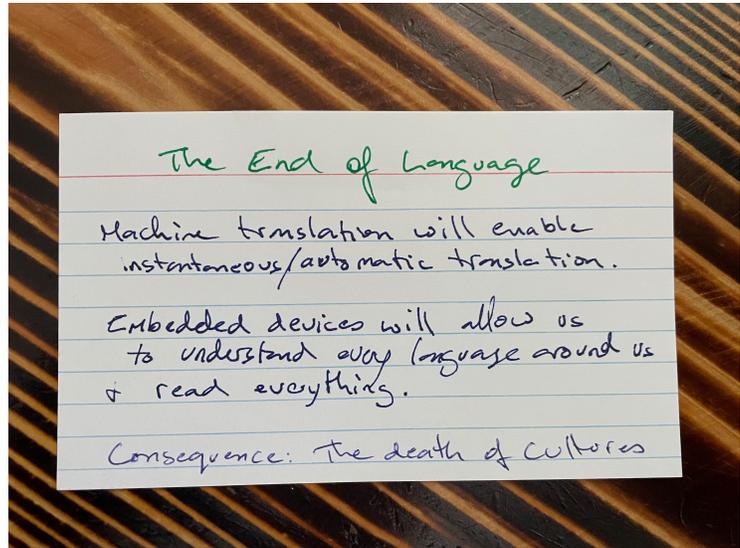
## Weekly Module

Each new module begins on Monday and begins with students presenting an overview of the topic based on the readings. The idea is not to present the article per se but to capture the general topic of the module. The focus is on connecting the reading to the overall topic and not necessarily presenting your assigned reading. The best way to do this is to read the article with the module question in mind and then extrapolate from the article to catch the main thrust of the module.

## Future of Digital Cultures

Once we reach this point, you will have a grasp of the concepts of culture and a wide array of dives into different aspects of digital cultures. This final exercise is an attempt at predicting the future. Despite the warning from Niels Bohr (Nobel laureate in Physics and father of the atomic model) that

“Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future,” we shall attempt to gaze into the future of digital culture. Write your prediction in one sentence on an index card and use the rest to explain what you mean and/or provide arguments. End with a consequence the technology will bring (something like my example here). In class, you will be divided into groups, and each group will pick the prediction they think is best and present it to the class.



## Final Paper

The final paper is an original piece of research. The topic must be within the course's parameters, chosen by the participant, and approved by the instructor. The paper should be double-spaced, 2000 words long, not including footnotes or a bibliography.

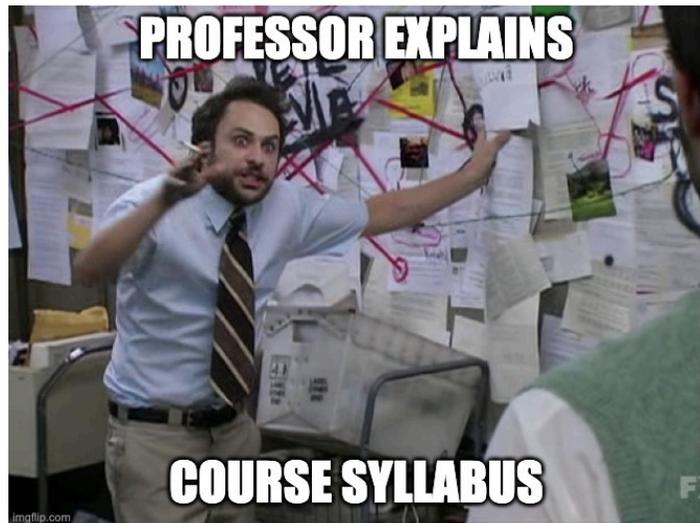
**FOCUSED:** Provide all the arguments needed to support your thesis/answer your question. Do not add random facts or quirky points of interest. Unrelated or unsupported facts/arguments lower the legibility and grade.

**STRUCTURED:** You may know what you mean but you are not there when the paper is being graded. Expect to be misunderstood. Creating an outline, putting arguments in order, & rereading your paper are excellent ways of improving the structure.

**DOCUMENTED:** The point of the paper is to provide strong arguments. The weakest argument is the unsupported argument. I may agree with you, but it's still weak. Provide support for the positions you take. For example, if I were to argue that smoking is healthy, you wouldn't believe me if all I said to support the argument was “because I said so”. Show me the expert. Show me that you have read and understood the expert.

**WELL PRESENTED:** You are a student of communication. This course is not about grading your grammar or spelling. However, turning in a badly written paper will not improve your grade.

I am looking for your ability to present analytical substance in a structured argument. I want to see you use supporting material in a clear and persuasive manner. I want you to show me that you have



thought about the issue you are discussing and can argue in a way that does not confuse assumptions and value judgments with analysis and argument. And I want you to do all this with high-quality of writing.

More information <http://klangable.com/uploads/teaching/FinalPaper.pdf> and thoughts on grading <http://klangable.com/blog/teaching/grading/>

## Annoying faculty & other advice

I keep a bunch of resources aimed at helping students in navigating the more obscure details of academia. Check out [Annoy the faculty](#), which has surprisingly good advice on how to email your professor. Matt Might has a great page on college, and the Reddit thread on [College Classroom Norms](#) has some gems. I have an unfinished page of [Classroom reflections](#) and [writing resources](#) which are probably less useful but may help combat insomnia some nights.

## Effort

While it may seem odd to include it in a syllabus, your effort is a required component of this course.

The federal definition of credit hours assumes a minimum of “two hours of out-of-class student work per Module for a semester hour.” According to this metric, a student should assume at least six hours of out-of-class work per Module for each 3-credit course.

## Inclusivity

Inclusivity: Every student in this classroom, regardless of personal history or identity categories, is a valued member of this group. Your experiences are valuable and important; you should feel free to share them as they become relevant to our class. No student in this class is expected or believed to speak for all group members.

In this classroom, you have the right to determine your own identity. You have the right to be called by whatever name you wish and for that name to be pronounced correctly. You have the right to be referred to by whatever pronouns you wish. You can adjust those things at any point in your education. If you find that there are aspects of course instruction, subject matter, or classroom environment that result in barriers to your inclusion, please contact me privately without fear of reprisal. For more, see <http://klangable.com/blog/teaching/inclusivity-policy/>

me in class taking a picture of the notes that i'll never look at again



## Attendance

Attendance means more than going to class. It requires speaking up in class and group discussions.

Attendance-wise, you are allowed to miss TWO classes without a penalty to your grade, exclusive of serious emergencies. (If you are very ill or have extenuating circumstances, you need to be proactive about contacting me. If you do that, make-up assignments are possible—but they MUST be cleared with me first). 3 absences automatically take your final grade down one tier of a grade lower (i.e. from an A- to a B+). 4 absences result in a full letter grade lowering (A- to B-). Fordham's university-wide policy is that 4 unexcused absences result in a failing grade. It is your responsibility to get readings/ assignments for missed days from other students, and you are encouraged to come to my office to discuss unclear topics.

Please be on time for class and remain for the whole class period. If you are more than 10 minutes late or leave more than 5 minutes early, you will be counted as absent for that class. Scheduling

Changes to the syllabus may be made at the instructor's discretion and if circumstances require. Participants will be notified of changes via Blackboard/university email. Participants are responsible for keeping up to date with these changes.

## Writing Aid & Writing Center

Writing is a painful but rewarding process. For help and tips, see <http://klangable.com/blog/teaching/writing-resources/>. If you struggle with the writing required in this course, please use the Writing Center. For more information about their services, see [www.fordham.edu/academics/programs\\_at\\_fordham/english/writing\\_center](http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham/english/writing_center)

## University Statement on Academic Integrity

A University, by its nature, strives to foster and recognize the originality of thought. Originality can only be recognized when people acknowledge the sources of ideas or works that are not their own. Therefore, students must maintain the highest standards with regard to honesty, effort, and performance. As a Jesuit, Catholic University, Fordham is committed to ensuring that all members of the academic community strive not only for excellence in scholarship but also for the integrity of character. In the pursuit of knowledge and personal development, it is imperative that students present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique, and eventual reformulation. As part of this process, each student must acknowledge the intellectual contribution of others. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to plagiarism, cheating on exams, falsification, unapproved collaboration, and destruction of library materials. For further details, consult the Standards of Academic Integrity on the University website.

**DAY 18 OF LOCK DOWN: FILLED THE DOG WITH HELIUM.**



## Academic Coaching

Students who struggle with time management and/or organization are invited to one-on-one academic coaching sessions (typically once a week for 45 minutes). Please contact [disabilityservices@fordham.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@fordham.edu) for more information.

## Accommodations

The Office of Disability Services at Fordham University helps ensure equal educational access and opportunity for all community members. In the Jesuit tradition of *cura personalis*, members of the ODS staff work individually with each student to understand his or her strengths and limitations to develop the most effective and comprehensive accommodation plan. Fordham will offer reasonable and appropriate auxiliary aids and services to assist otherwise qualified persons in achieving access to its programs, services, and facilities once students meet with ODS for an initial intake meeting to develop an accommodation plan directly with the student in accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Students seeking accommodation(s) should the Rose Hill Office of Disability Services, (718) 817-0655 or email [disabilityservices@fordham.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@fordham.edu).

If you believe that you have a disabling condition that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, coursework, or assessment of the object of this course, please visit the Office of Disability Services, email, or call them.

## Counseling and Psychological Services

University life is full of challenges. Fordham offers support for anyone who feels like they need help dealing with the pressures of life as a student. CPS offers free individual and group counseling and psychotherapy in a safe and confidential setting. For more information about their services see [www.fordham.edu/campus\\_resources/student\\_services/counseling\\_and\\_psych/](http://www.fordham.edu/campus_resources/student_services/counseling_and_psych/)

## Student well-being

Any student who faces difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat everyday, or who lacks a stable place to live is urged to contact your class dean for support. I also urge you to contact me, or our department chair, about these or other hardships you may be going through. Your well-being is of primary importance to us. if you are facing challenges related to your physical or mental health, or obstacles like food or housing insecurity, please do not hesitate to reach out. **We can help.**