UMBC UGC Instructions for New Course Request Form (revised 4/2016)

Course number & title: Enter the number and title of the course at the top of the page. Contact the Registrar's Office to confirm that the desired course number is available.

Date submitted: The date that the form will be submitted to the UGC.

Effective date: The semester the new course is in effect, if approved.

Contact information: Provide the contact information of the Chair or UPD of the department or program housing the course. If the course is not housed in a department or program, then provide the same information for the head of the appropriate academic unit. (See UGC Procedures) If another faculty member should also be contacted for questions about the request and be notified about UGC actions on the request, include that person's contact information on the second line.

Course number: For cross-listed courses, provide all the numbers for the new course.

Transcript title: Limited to 30 characters, including spaces.

Recommended Course Preparation: *Please note that all 300 and 400 level courses should have either recommended course preparation(s) or prerequisite(s) and that 100 or 200 level courses may have them.*
Here fill in what previous course(s) a student should have taken to succeed in the course. These recommendations will NOT be enforced by the registration system. Please explain your choices in the "rationale" (discussed below).

Prerequisite: *Please note that all 300 and 400 level courses should have either recommended course preparation(s) or prerequisite(s)* Here fill in course(s) students need to have taken before they enroll in this course. These prerequisites will be enforced through the registration system. Please explain your choices in the "rationale" (discussed below).

NOTE: Please use the words "AND" and "OR", along with parentheses as appropriate, in the lists of prerequisites and recommended preparation so that the requirements specified will be interpreted unambiguously.

NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.

# of credits: To determine the appropriate number of credits to assign to a course please refer to the UMBC Credit Hour Policy which articulates the standards for assignment and application of credit hours to all courses and programs of study at UMBC regardless of degree level, teaching and learning formats, and mode of instruction.

Maximum total credits: This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.

Grading method(s): Please review the grading methods document before selecting a grading option. Please do not select all three grading options by default.

Proposed catalog description: Provide the exact wording of the course description as it will appear in the next undergraduate catalog. Course proposals should be a) no longer than 75 words, b) stated in declarative sentences in language accessible to students, and c) avoid reference to specific details that may not always pertain (e.g., dates, events, etc.). Course descriptions should not repeat information about prerequisites (which are always listed alongside the course description)."

Rationale: Please explain the following:
a) Why is there a need for this course at this time?
b) How often is the course likely to be taught?
c) How does this course fit into your department's curriculum?
d) What primary student population will the course serve?
e) Why is the course offered at the level (ie. 100, 200, 300, or 400 level) chosen?
f) Explain the appropriateness of the recommended course preparation(s) and prerequisite(s).
g) Explain the reasoning behind the P/F or regular grading method.
h) Provide a justification for the repeatability of the course.

Cross-listed courses: Requests to create cross-listed courses must be accompanied by letters of support via email from all involved department chairs. Proposals for new courses or the addition of a cross-listing to an existing course must include as a part of the rationale the specific reason why cross-listing is appropriate. Email from all involved department chairs is also required when cross-listing is removed and when a cross-listed course is discontinued. Please note that Special
Topics courses cannot be cross-listed.

Course Outline: Provide a syllabus with main topics and a weekly assignment schedule which includes complete citations for readings with page numbers as appropriate. Explain how students' knowledge and skills will be assessed.

Note: the UGC form is a Microsoft Word form. You should be able to enter most of the information by tabbing through the fields. The document is protected. In the rare case that you need to unprotect the document, use the password 'ugcform'. Beware that you will lose all the data entered in the form's fields if you unlock and lock the document.

UMBC UGC New Course Request: **MCS345: Virtual Ethnography + Digital Life**

Date Submitted: March 2, 2017   Proposed Effective Date: May 15, 2017

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Dept Chair or UPD	Jason Loviglio	loviglio@umbc.edu	53259	MCS
Other Contact	Abigail Granger	Abigail3@umbc.edu	52041	MCS

COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	MCS 345
Formal Title	Virtual Ethnography + Digital Life
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Virtual Ethnography
Recommended Course Preparation	
Prerequisite **NOTE:** Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	Grade of "C" or better in MCS 101 or MCS 222
# of Credits Must adhere to the [UMBC Credit Hour Policy](#)	3
Repeatable for additional credit?	☐ Yes X No
Max. Total Credits	3 This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.
Grading Method(s)	X Reg (A-F) ☐ Audit ☐ Pass-Fail

**PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (**Approximately 75 words in length. Please use full sentences.**):**

This course introduces students to the social scientific theories, techniques, and applications of virtual and digital ethnography. Our readings range from academic books focused on international connectivity, to professionals' use of ethnographic methods for social media design. We will focus on developing research and writing strategies that capture the empirical and ethical complexity of understanding and representing peoples' digital lives and virtual experiences.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE

Virtual Ethnography and Digital Life is designed to introduce undergraduate students in MCS and beyond to the important theories and methods and skills of ethnographic work and to the wide array of professional applications for them, particularly in the new social world made possible by the internet and digital networks. We see this course as a valuable addition to building the research skills in undergraduates to better prepare them for success in upper level coursework and for professional careers that increasingly require the skills of ethnographic research, and writing and which frequently require a sophisticated understanding of the virtual worlds and discourses created on the interent and in digital networks. We plan to offer this course at least once a year and anticipate that it will become a popular elective for MCS majors, certificate students, and others looking for ethnographic coursework in the context of digital media. We're offering this course at the 300-level because we believe it will build upon the disciplinary work students have gained in lower level courses in their majors while preparing them for the demands of 400-level writing and research intensive courses. The rationale for the prerequisites being "A 'C' or better in MCS 101 or MCS 222 " is because these courses prepare students to read, write, and think critically about media

practices and institutions, which will be necessary for success in this class. Like all substantive courses in the MCS curriculum, MCS 345 will be regular graded and will not be repeatable. Regular grading ensures that students are evaluated properly. Non-repeatability is the standard choice for substantive academic courses in our discipline. We are confident that this course will be a welcome addition to the MCS curriculum and to the undergraduates who take it.

ATTACH COURSE SYLLABUS (mandatory):
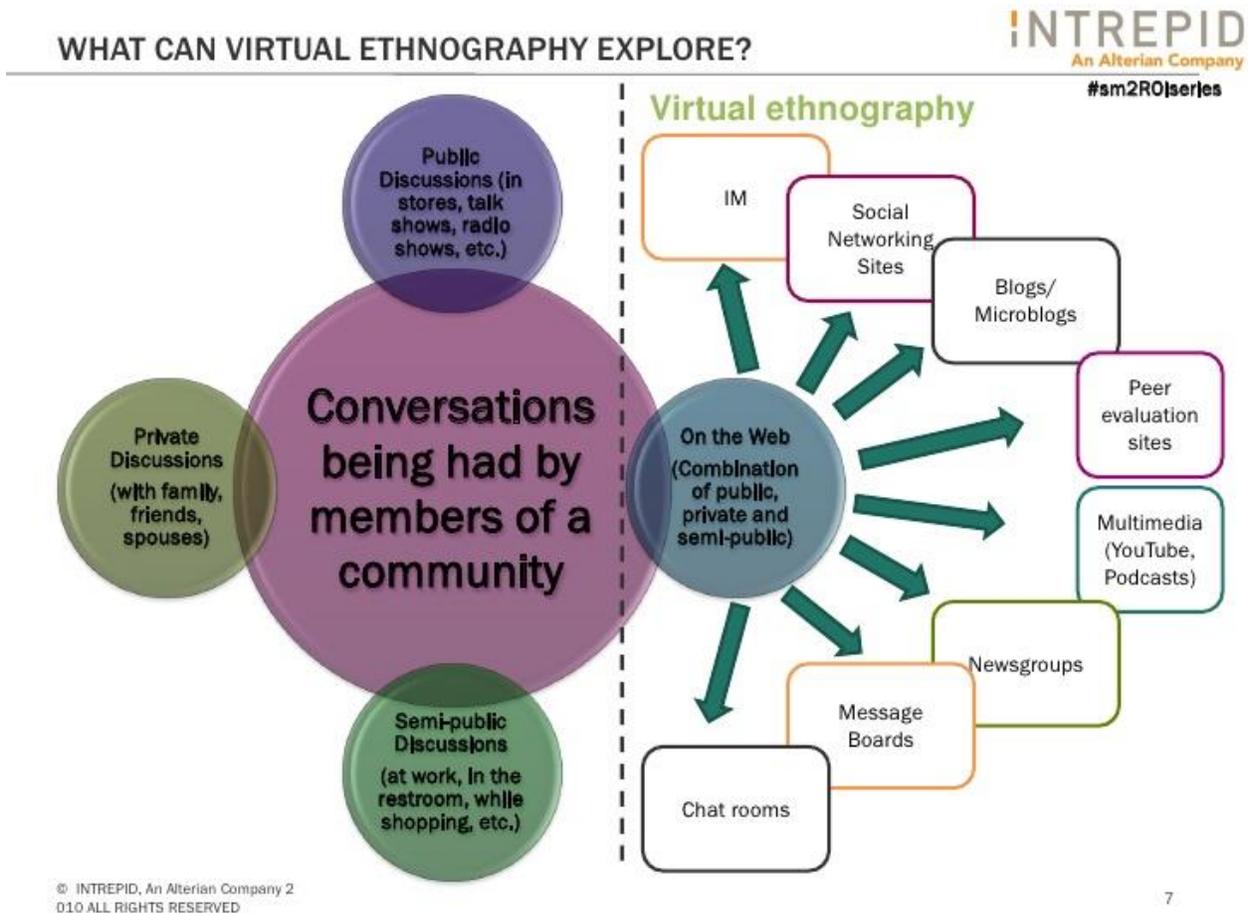
MCS345: Virtual Ethnography + Digital Life

Prof. Bryce Peake

Email: bpeake@umbc.edu

This course will focus on ethnographic reading and writing, exposing students to the theories and methodologies being used by communication professionals across a range of academic and professional fields. Our readings will focus on developing basic research skills in relation to foundational texts focused on interpretation and understanding. Beyond the course, we will focus on reading entire books, and understanding how authors tell complex stories about mediated life using primary and ancillary arguments.

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

       a) Demonstrate basic ethnographic techniques

       b) Understand complex, multifaceted arguments about media and everyday life

       c) Discuss ethical concerns in the ways ethnography defines and collects data

    d) Plan and propose an ethnographic project
    e) Create ethnographic vignettes across multiple modes

Required Materials:

The readings from this class will be from <u>six</u> books

Nicole Constable, *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail Order" Marriages*

Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*

Whitney Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*

Natasha Dow Schull, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas*

Wendy Gunn et al, *Design Anthropology: Theory and Practice*

These are the only reading materials you need for the class. Weekly assignments will build from the chapters you read, while lectures connect key concepts to the readings to other research in media literacy, theory, and methods.

Instructor Availability

To be included here

Academic Integrity Statement

To be included here

Attendance Policy

This course allows you 4 absences total before a significant penalty to your grade (5% for every absence after). These include excused and unexcused absences. Please contact me if you have a significant emergency that might result in more absences than this.

Grades and Assignments

Assignments for this course are pass/fail. We will use Medium to share our writing the colleagues and the world – you can find our class publication at medium.com/media-ethnography. Once posted, students can assume that the piece has received full credit. If a piece is denied based on the attached rubric of 'unacceptable work,' students will have 24 hours to correct and resubmit. Students must meet ALL of the tasks for a grade to receive that grade. Grades are based on the following completion:

Final Grade: D

    4 weekly 350-500 word posts (one per week, three by midterm) responding to class prompts, posted on Medium

    1 experimental piece posted on Medium from the semester following the prompts in the calendar

Final Grade: C

    6 weekly 350-500 word posts (one per week, three by midterm) responding to class prompts, posted on Medium

    6 experimental pieces (1 every other week) responding to prompts, posted on Medium

One 750-1000 word book review for one of our course books, connecting it to other readings, posted to Medium – please follow the BOOK REVIEW prompts for the assignment throughout the course calendar.

Final Grade: B

8 weekly 350-500 word posts (one per week, four by midterm) responding to class prompts, posted on Medium

13 experimental pieces (1 per week) responding to prompts, posted on Medium

1 substantial comment per week on other students' work, posted on Medium

One 750-1000 word book review for a book not from this course, which references course readings, posted to medium – please follow the BOOK REVIEW prompts for the assignment throughout the calendar.

Final Grade: A

10 weekly 350-500 word posts (one per week, five by midterm) responding to class prompts, posted on Medium

13 experimental pieces (1 per week) responding to prompts, posted on Medium

2 substantial comments per week on other students' work, posted on Medium

One 750-1000 word ethnographic essay based on original research posted to Medium – please follow the ETHNOGRAPHIC PROJECT prompts for this assignment throughout the calendar.

Course Calendar

Week 1: Some foundations

Day 1 Syllabus
      What is ethography? Why ethnography

Day 2 Constable, "Introduction" and "Making Introductions"
      What's a narrative? Do we need research ethics?

No Assignments this week

Week 2: Foundations Continued

Day 3 Constable, "Ethnography in Imagined Virtual Communities"
      What are the parts of ethnographic research? Is generalizing important?

Day 4 Constable, "Feminism and Myths of "Mail Order Marriages"
      What is the relationship between research and politics? What is participant observation?

Post Prompt:

Write an ethnographic narrative that compares "mail order marriages" (according to Constable) with your and/or your peers' practices of finding intimacy online (dating/love/relationship/sex/etc.).

Experiment Prompt:

"Mail order marriages" is a reference to an old medium that was adapted to the internet. Use 10 images to tell a story about another similar medium or community that transferred mediums.

Final Paper:

Free week – be thinking and exploring potential ethnographic topics or books

Week 3: Thinking Ethnographically About the World Around Us

Day 5 Constable, "Political Economy and Cultural Logics of Desire"
      Can we use other sources besides people? What is reflexivity?

<u>Day 6</u> Constable, "Tales of Waiting: History, Immigration, and the State"
    What does the past tell us about the present? How do we 'advance' ethnographic knowledge?
Post Prompt:
What is 'virtual culture,' and how do people understand it as part of their lives? What do people think "virtual" is? How does that differ from Constable's definition of "virtual ethnography"?
Experiment Prompt:
Go observe a computer lab, computer work center, video game arcade or other primarily digital space, and take ethnographic notes by hand for approximately a ½ hour. Think creatively about capturing what the space and people are doing. Focus on what Constable describes as "commoditization." Post a photo(s) of your notes to Medium.
Final Paper:
<u>Book review</u>: Identify your book and why you want to read it. Submit a 100-200 word post on Medium describing why this book matters and is worthy of reviewing.
<u>Ethnography</u>: Identify what your topic will be, and how you will do digital fieldwork on this community. What do you hope to learn? Make a research plan. Submit this in 100-200 words (Calendar may be bullet points) to Medium.

Week 4: Going Virtual
<u>Day 7</u> Boellstorff, "The Subject and Scope of this Inquiry" and "History"
    What is virtuality? Is *Second Life* a video game? What is a game, anyways?
<u>Day 8</u> Boellstorff, "Method"
    What is virtual ethnography? How's it different empirically and ethically?
Post Prompt:
Find a public forum for a primarily virtual community (like Second Life). How do members inadvertently discuss the relationship between the virtual and the real as defined by Boellstorff? Use screenshots as evidence for your answer.
Experiment Prompt:
Using pen and paper, draw your favorite social media environment from memory. Highlight areas that emphasize interactivity. Post your hand-drawn images and, in 100 words, discuss how this corresponds with the actual interface of the social media environment.
Final Paper - Break

Week 5: Relations in Cyberspace
<u>Day 9</u> Boellstorff, "Place and Time"
    Where is an ethnography located? What counts as "enough time" to tell a story?
<u>Day 10</u>Boellstorff, "Community"
    How do we do an ethnography of people behaving badly? Are there ethical concerns?
Post Prompt:
Find a virtual community that engages in "creationist capitalism." Who owns their platform, and how does this community understand its relationship to political economy (as defined by Boellstorff)?
Experiment Prompt:
Using audio only, recreate a "virtual world" from a user's perspective. Your audio should be at least 1 minute long. In 100 words, describe how this approach my complement Boellstorff's.
Final Paper – Break

Week 6: Technique and Techne
Day 11 Boellstorff, "Political Economy"
    What is the relationship between individual creativity and global economy? How do we capture that ethnographically?
Day 12 Boellstorff, "The Virtual"
    Who does virtual ethnography? Does it matter beyond the internet/gameworld?

Post Prompt:
Discuss the political economy of a social media platform with 5 people. What are some common themes in how they talk about the relationship between producing information, advertising, and relationships? How do they believe it affects their use?

Experiment Prompt
Ask five users of any one platform to draw the advertisements they hate the most. Post their drawings, and in 100 words describe a common pattern.

Final Paper
Book Review: In 200 words, describe why you have the authority to review your book. What special insights can you give that others cannot? Post this to Medium.
Ethnography: Write a 400 word ethnographic vignette that introduces us to your topic. At the end, you should tell us 1) what your paper is about, and 2) some of your guiding research questions. Please see the sample vignettes on our class Medium.

Week 7: The Mediated Relationship between Culture and Subculture
Day 13 Phillips, "Introduction," "Defining Terms," and "The Only Reason to do Anything"
    How do you do ethnography without people? What is a person, anyways?
Day 14 "Toward a Method/ology" and "The House that Fox Built"
    Does ethnography require facts? Whose facts, and why?

Post Prompt:
Phillips argues that every joke or insult is a "cultural event." What does she mean by this? Discuss one experience of online harassment with one of your peers, and situate that harassment biographically (why it was hurtful in the context of that person's life) and culturally (beyond themselves). Be sure to address what Phillips calls "Trolling as Fetish" and "Trolling as Generative."

Experiment Prompt:
Make a macro or meme that insults a person or group of people. Post it in Medium and, in 100 words, describe the experience of making it and posting it, focusing on your own feelings and actions.

Final Paper – Break

Week 8: Dealing with Inappropriate Stuff
Day 15 Phillips, "LOLing at Tragedy"
    How do you cope with grief in ethnography? What about our own feelings of disgust?
Day 16 Phillips, "Dicks Everywhere!"
    What are the politics and ethics of reproducing violence in ethnographic form?

Post Prompt:
Discuss what Phillips calls Trolling with four users of a single platform. How do they describe the "ethics" of monitoring and/or moderating content? Do you notice any patterns in how they discuss key topics like censorship and/or 'inappropriate' content? How do they think about banning people from platforms?

Experiment Prompt:
Identify and post 3 mainstream current media clips that represent Phillips evaluation of the parallels between trolling and mainstream culture. In 100 words, describe why these are "troll-y."

Final Paper
Book Review: Identify the book you intend to review. In 200 words, describe what the book is about, what its primary research question is, what the book argues, and its conclusions – all based simply on your reading of the cover and other summaries.
Ethnography: Post 5 interview questions you will use for your ethnography, and describe how they will complement participant-observation in 250 words.

Week 9: Ethnography with Saboteurs

Day 17 Phillips, "Race and the No-Spin Zone"
    What is the relationship between subculture and mainstream? Can ethnography capture the mainstream?
Day 18 Phillips, "Where do we go from here?"
    How are academic ethnographies important for professional practice? How can ethnography inform professional practice and ethics in the communication industry?

Post Prompt:
Observe the comment thread of reportage of one current political event on three different news websites. How does what Phillips calls "corporate punditry" fuel trolling differently on these sites?

Experiment Prompt
On Medium, design a fake news story and write a 100 word lede and first paragraph. Include images. Why do you think your Fake News story would be believable (or not)?

Final Paper - Break

Week 10: Back to Fleshy Bodies and Metal Machines

Day 19 Schull, "Introduction: Mapping the Machine Zone"
    How do ethnographers capture the interiority of the mind of a community?
Day 20 Schull, "Interior Design for Interior States: Architecture, Ambience, and Affect"
    Do ethnographers just tell us what those in power already know?

Post Prompt:
Ask three people what technologies or media they're addicted to. How do they initially respond when you ask? What do they tell you? Are there patterns across all of their stories?

Experiment Prompt
Make two hand-drawn mock ups of a smart phone app. In the first one, draw your app as is and circle possibly addictive elements of its design. Describe how it might generally be addictive in 50 words. Then draw a possible "non-addictive" interface. In 50 words, describe what is different about the non-addictive design.

Final Paper

Book Review: In 300 words, describe what *one chapter* of your book is about and what it argues. Keep in mind that your book review will require you to identify and connect all of the chapters' arguments across the entire book.

Ethnography**:** Write a 150 word ethnographic vignette – in 150 words following that, describe how it builds on one of our authors' arguments and how it departs from their argument.

Week 11: Fleshy Minds and Mental Machines

Day 21 Schull, "Engineering Experience: The Productive Economy of Player-Centric Design"
How do ethnographers discuss work? Entertainment? Is there a clear line between those?
Day 23 Schull, "Matching the Market: Innovation, Intensification, Habituation"
Is addiction a design mechanism? Do ethnographers "create" addictions?

Post Prompt:
Identify two seemingly different technologies built off of the same disciplinary mechanisms, and describe two peoples' experiences of using them. How do they compare to the relationship between ATM and Slot Machine according to Schull?

Experiment Prompt:
Using audio from across the internet, remix fragments into a 1 minute soundscape that represents what a Casino sounds like. In 100 words, describe the motivating and addictive features in this soundscape.

Final Paper – Begin writing final pieces

Week 12: Addiction

Day 24 Schull, "Live Data: tracking Players, Guiding Play"
Do we have an obligation to report manipulation?
Day 25 Schull, "Gambled Away: Liquidating Life"
What are ethnographers responsibilities to the people they study? To the public?

Post Prompt:
Ask five users of a single platform what "big data" is in relationship to their practices as users. Follow up by asking if that affects their practices. What are some patterns you notice in their responses and reactions?

Experiment Prompt
Create a poster advertising therapy for a type of technology addiction, and post it to Medium. In 100 words, describe 1) when this became (popularly) conceived of as an addiction and 2) what some of the ethical dilemmas in advertising therapy are.

Final Paper – Keep Writing

Week 13: The Professional Side

Day 26 Schull, "Balancing Acts: The Double Bind of Therapeutics"
Is it ok to do ethnographies of people suffering?
Day 27 Schull, "Fix upon Fix: Recipes for Regulating Risk"
What are ethnographers' roles in setting public policy?

Post Prompt:
Building from last week's experiment, ask five users whether or not they believe people are addicted to a specific technology and whether or not therapy should exist to help people with

those addictions. Who do they believe should pay for that therapy and why? Conclude your post by describing any recurring patterns in their stories.

Experiment Prompt:
Go to a place that you believe could be "addictive by design" and record 1 minute of the most addictive sounds. In your 100 words, describe why and how the place is addictive (or not) in terms of the relationship between sight, sound, and architecture.

Final Paper
Book Review: Post a 200 word introduction to your book review that addresses 1) what the book is about, 2) what the book argues, and 3) what methods it uses.

Ethnography: Post 200 words about how you, personally and as a researcher, relate to the topic of your paper. Why did you select this topic? What ethical dilemmas did you run into? What logistical obstacles appeared throughout your project?

Week 14: Design Anthropology as Occupation

Day 28 Gunn etc., "Design Anthropology: A Distinct Style of Knowing"
    What is the relationship between academic and professional ethnography?
Day 29 Gunn etc., "Designing by Doing: Building Bridges in the Highlands of Borneo"
    Does professional ethnography have ethics? What are their primary principles?

Post Prompt:
Ask five users of a platform to walk you through, step-by-step, how they believe one mobile app was designed and built. What patterns do you notice in their stories? What do you think they are omitting? Is it important for users to know how applications are designed? Why?

Experiment Prompt
Imagine that you are creating your own design anthropology firm. Design your logo, and then write a 100 word "mission statement" for your firm – be sure to include 1) what your does, 2) what your firm values, 3) how your firm does research, and 4) how it confirms the results of that research. Post your logo and mission statement to Medium.

Final Paper – Share a first draft with a friend! Deadline next week!!!

Week 15: The Professional Side

Day 25 Gunn etc., "Designing Heritage for Digital Culture" and "Generating Publics through Design Activity"
    Is professional ethnography a means to manipulating people? Is it the foundation of social engineering? How does it make money?
Day 26 Gunn etc., "Ethnographies of the Possible"
    What is the relationship between ethnography and the future? How can it be made real?

Post Prompt:
Ask 3 fellow students to describe their experience of this class. What possibilities has it opened up for them? What have they learned? How did their experiences differ? Be sure to identify any patterns in their stories

Experiment Prompt:
Using a camera, take 10 photographs of media or technology that was explicitly designed to create community or "a public." In 100 words, describe what design elements are easily identifiable that connect all of these technologies.

Final Papers – Due on Medium by the Sunday after the final class.