DIGITAL CULTURE (DIGC)

The courses listed on this page are exclusive to the LPS BAAS degree (https://lpsonline.sas.upenn.edu/features/what-bachelor-applied-arts-and-sciences-degree/) and LPS Online certificates (https://lpsonline.sas.upenn.edu/academics/certificates/).

DIGC 120 Digital Literacy & Cultural Change
The growing presence of technology in our personal and professional lives provides incontrovertible evidence of change. From individual reflections on the costs of innovation to meaningful connection through digital communication, each of us has an impulse to shape change. This impulse often pushes us to learn, adapt, and create. It also demands digital literacy. Together, we'll explore digital literacy as a concept and practice that offers tools for shaping cultural change, as we navigate the present and look toward the future. In DIGC 120, students will learn to deconstruct, create, and remix projects using digital tools they'll encounter in a variety of settings outside of this course. Students will also grapple with concepts that shape our current technological and social landscape. Together, we'll question assumptions about digital citizenship and challenge claims about digital natives. I'll push students to think critically about audience, genre, rhetorical purpose, and design, along the way, and by semester's end, we'll have created various digital artifacts that speak to cultural change.
Taught by: Clay Colmon
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 160 A History of Digital Culture
Technology is never just about the things we use or the things we do - what we see and do quickly become everyday occurrences. In our current world, this means the world of digital culture, but what led to this was a blending of technologies and material culture that we would not always consider as "technological." The cultural practices that go along with these technologies are invariably not visible to us without interrogation: the ways technological usage shapes and is shaped by the cultures that create them, as well as how technologies shape and are shaped by other cultures that adopt them. Oftentimes, technology tools practices are translated in ways that their creators never envisioned, and take on meanings that shift dramatically. Across time, even within a single culture, technology means very different things from one era to the next. Examples include the roles of basic tools like glass, to complex tools like audio tape. In DIGC 160, students will explore and develop an understanding of contemporary digital culture based on the idea that media and information technologies operate in a cycle of constant dialogue with the communities and modes of cultural practice that surround them. Using case studies of technological innovation and transformation, we'll examine the political and social impacts of what has become our contemporary digital culture through the resulting material culture objects we use every day. Students will be encouraged to explore from their own experiences how they interact with, create, and understand technocultural objects in their active and living world from an interdisciplinary, social science-based perspective, drawing from disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Some of the guiding questions for the course include: How do we understand something as a "new" technology? How can we analyze the ways that members of a culture use technology as a locus for evolving or conflicting cultural practices and social change? And, how does culture affect our understanding of a technology and how we use it?
Readings will consist of articles and book chapters provided in the course Canvas site. There will be no required synchronous sessions, though there will be optional synchronous sessions offered throughout the course. This course fulfills Qualitative Foundational Requirement (in Historical Perspectives) and to serve as a Gateway class. DIGC 120 is recommended but not required.
Taught by: Dr. Meryl Krieger
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 200 Foundations for Working with Code
Code can seem intimidating, especially when it creates a barrier for customizing and completing important digital projects. In DIGC 200, students will develop a basic understanding of programming languages and repositories that can help with communication among colleagues whose roles include collaborating and working with code—across skill levels. This course will invite students to analyze some of the possibilities and limitations of repositories, like GitHub, while exploring strategies for engaging with digital development tools, like Python. We will tackle questions that encourage us to think critically about the coding decisions we make and about what affect these decisions can have on people's everyday lives. We will also have opportunities to try creative solutions for activities and simulations that speak to real-world challenges. The course will conclude with a project that invites students to work with code to make something that might serve them and others in future digital environments.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit
DIGC 220 Design Thinking for Digital Projects

Design thinking as a strategy and toolkit is usually defined as having five stages: Empathize, Define the problem, Ideate, Prototyping, and Testing. A crucial step in effective use of this toolkit is learning how to use empathizing with an audience or public, and learning what questions to ask in order to ideate. Students in DIGC 220 will build on critical thinking and technological context from DIGC 120 and DIGC 160, applying these skills to understanding specific problems in digital spaces. We will examine case studies from this perspective, and unpack both the strengths and weaknesses of how everyday professional life. Narratives also connect us within a web of social and cultural relationships that shape the world around us. But some narratives are historically given more attention than others. This practice often leads to marginalization in digital public spaces. In response, DIGC 260 centers a selection of diverse narratives that exemplify inclusive digital projects. This course invites students to explore how historically underrepresented narratives are created, curated, and shared in a range of digital formats using diverse forms of data. Surveying the broad concept of digital publics, I’ll invite students to reflect on the ways race, gender, and sexuality intersect in a variety of digital environments. We’ll examine interactive journalism, public scholarship, digital literature, and other types of media. Students will also have a chance to produce, workshop, and revise their own data-informed digital projects—from personal portfolios, to professional narratives—that communicate their perspectives as consumers, critics, and creators in digital publics. Prerequisite: Recommended - DIGC 120 provides helpful foundational knowledge for materials and activities in this course.

Taught by: Krieger, Meryl
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 260 Diverse Projects for Digital Publics

Narratives matter. They encourage imagination and creativity through visions of what could be, even as they challenge us to think critically about the practical realities of everyday professional life. Narratives also connect us within a web of social and cultural relationships that shape the world around us. But some narratives are historically given more attention than others. This practice often leads to marginalization in digital public spaces. In response, DIGC 260 centers a selection of diverse narratives that exemplify inclusive digital projects. This course invites students to explore how historically underrepresented narratives are created, curated, and shared in a range of digital formats using diverse forms of data. Surveying the broad concept of digital publics, I’ll invite students to reflect on the ways race, gender, and sexuality intersect in a variety of digital environments. We’ll examine interactive journalism, public scholarship, digital literature, and other types of media. Students will also have a chance to produce, workshop, and revise their own data-informed digital projects—from personal portfolios, to professional narratives—that communicate their perspectives as consumers, critics, and creators in digital publics. Prerequisite: Recommended - DIGC 120 provides helpful foundational knowledge for materials and activities in this course.

Taught by: Colmon, Clayton
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 300 Intermediate Work with Code

Building on the foundational concepts and approaches offered in DIGC 200, this course provides students with strategies for using digital development tools and repositories like Python and GitHub to create critical projects. Students will engage with case studies and practical simulations that will help them expand the contextual knowledge and critical thinking skills which are central to all DIGC certificate courses. DIGC 300 will invite participants to continue work that supports digital fluency and familiarity with using data across disciplines. The course will also offer opportunities to practice collaboration across teams while exploring pathways for imagining and implementing real-world solutions that address complex questions. By the end of the course, students will address a critical problem that may mirror one they’ll encounter in a professional environment outside the course.

One-term course offered either term
Prerequisite: DIGC 200
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 320 Designing Critical Futures

In her Nebula award-winning novel Parable of the Talents, Octavia Butler writes that “(w)e can, each of us, do the impossible as long as we can convince ourselves that it has been done before.” But what if this “before” is located somewhere in critical futures? Why should these futures matter to people who are concerned with practicable strategies for building a more just world? DIGC 320 invites students to imagine what “each of us” can do to reframe the possible by engaging with: (1) creative labor from sonic, literary, and visual artists; (2) critical labor from scholars, media experts, and non-profit professionals; and (3) social movement labor from activists, journalists, and civic participants. Along the way, students will design visions of critical futures that speak to the communities they hope to serve outside of the course. The course is organized around four essential units that each culminate in a creative project. The first unit focuses on place-making efforts that connect speculative design to community organizing and civic engagement. The second thickens these connections through discussions of queer community, liberatory imagination, and feminist praxis. The third centers mutualistic collaboration and critical play as radical practices for advancing equity and affirming generative difference. These practices set up the final unit which invites students to make a digital object that engages with a critical future of their design. Each unit will frame speculative work and other materials as case studies for designing critical futures.

Taught by Colmon, Clayton
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 360 Applications of Digital Culture

The rapid pace of technological changes since the invention of the microchip in the 1970s has by some accounts outstripped society’s mechanisms for evaluating and managing the way we engage with one another and social systems in the larger world. When cell phones first became common in the early 2000s, taking a personal call in a restaurant was rude behavior - today it is rare that this same activity would be questioned or challenged. In short, the social, economic, and cultural parameters that define how we understand ourselves and our place in the world have been challenged and in many cases overturned at all levels in our society. In this class, students will take a deep dive into the implications and consequences of digital culture and digital literacy in four arenas: ethics, privacy, communication, and identity. At the conclusion of the course, students will work on developing specialized arenas of digital culture with a framework and tools for engaging with technological change as a living component of their daily lives.

Prerequisite: Students are expected to either have taken a minimum of either DIGC 120 or DIGC 160, or bring sufficient prior expertise to analyze the social implications of technological change.

One-term course offered either term
Prerequisite: DIGC 120 OR DIGC 160
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit
DIGC 400 Advanced Work with Code
Building on the intermediate work offered in DIGC 300, students will have opportunities to engage with more advanced, real-world, projects using digital development tools and repositories. While the course is not a replacement for a coding bootcamp, DIGC 400 will invite participants to perform deep work through blended case studies and simulations. Among other considerations, students will be asked to account for social and cultural contexts that inform coding and data use across digital environments. The course will also offer opportunities to practice collaboration across teams while exploring pathways for answering complex questions. By the end of the course, students will create a critical project that they can use outside the course.
One-term course offered either term
Prerequisite: DIGC 200 AND DIGC 300
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit

DIGC 460 Practices in Digital Culture
Understanding literacy, having context for technocultures, telling stories, and exploring ethics are critical to being an informed individual in contemporary life; but becoming an active citizen in society requires the skills to engage on a deeper level with technologies. In this class, students will focus on living technocultures from 1970-present and engage in critical evaluation and analysis of technocultures in the modern and postmodern eras. Over the course of the term, students will focus on a particular technological category, located in its own cultural setting. They will develop, and implement their own project proposal for in-depth study of a specific technology or use-case that has application for their own interests or goals. Students will begin their exploration using grounded theory, though the nature of their projects will dictate what methodology they will employ. During the class, they will work in small groups with others using similar methods in the exploration of their research and course content. Students will be incorporating tools and skills developed in at least two of the DIGC track courses in their projects. Students are expected to either have taken at least two of the following: DIGC 120, DIGC 160, and/or DIGC 200 or bring sufficient prior expertise to analyze and problematize a technological practice or arena in a real world setting with the guidance of the instructors of those courses. The full cluster is recommended.
One-term course offered either term
Activity: Online Course
1.0 Course Unit