DIGH 3700/AFRI 3200: African Digital Humanities

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Course Description:

As described in the Undergraduate Calendar, this course focuses on a "special topic that takes a thematic approach to African Studies." In this case, the focus is on the emergent field of African Digital Humanities, broadly defined. The course looks at the ways in which digital technology shapes interactions and imaginations of humans in the continent of Africa and its diaspora. Such technology, in turn, is shaped by the human agency of Africans worldwide. It is an interdisciplinary course that is as thematic as it is methodological. By covering themes associated with various disciplines and fields in the social sciences, health sciences, entrepreneurship studies. and innovation studies, it enables students to locate the place of African humanities in the digital age. Special attention in class discussions will be given to ways in which Africa has engaged, albeit in a relatively marginal position, with the first two industrial revolutions and interrogates its apparent leapfrogging into subsequent revolutions – the third and fourth – characterized by rapid digital technological changes. Key themes that will be covered include societal transformations stemming out of the introduction and increasing use of the internet, mobile phones, and new media as well as gendered and racialized digital divides, digital surveillance, digital identities, digital democracy, and digital decolonization. Methodologically, it introduces students to the ways digital tools have been – and can be – used in studying Africa through archiving, analyzing, and sharing data of relevance to people of African descent. Students will get an opportunity to see how social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Clubhouse are rich sources for online fieldwork as Africans in the continent and its diaspora increasingly use them to collect, nostalgically, and share, collectively, stories and pictures from the past. For example, they will be introduced to the Nigerian Nostalgia 1960-1980 Project, South African History Online, African Digital Heritage, Africa is a Country, The Elephant, Corona Times, African Arguments, The Chanzo Initiative, Udadisi: Rethinking in Action, and Brittle Paper. Various electronic tools for searching topics on Africa online will also be introduced to enable students to familiarize with digitized sources and how to use them in their projects. At the end of the course, students would have learned that Africa is integral to digital revolutions hence digital technologies can be used critically and innovatively to research, disseminate, and learn about the continent through the lenses of African Digital Humanities.