

MITOPENCOURSEWARE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

**Rattle your assumptions with
anthropology**

Make My Gift >



Left: A young Burmese boy has his head shaved by an older monk as part of a Shinbyu ceremony. This ritual novice hood initiation occurs before a boy enters a monastery, as is custom in Myanmar for boys between the ages of 10 and 20. (Courtesy of [Dietmar Temps](#) on Flickr. CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.)

Right: One of the topics discussed during this course is wearable technology. (Image courtesy of [Keoni Cabral](#) on flickr. License CC BY.)

Think of the phrase “challenging course at MIT,” and what might spring to mind?

Probably advanced courses with heady mathematics and intimidating titles like [18.338J Infinite Random Matrix Theory](#), and [8.325 Relativistic Quantum Field Theory III](#).

But MIT has many challenging courses of a different

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kind—courses that rattle your assumptions about what is normal and show you a side of life you never imagined. The [MIT Department of Anthropology](#) offers a full array of courses that fit this bill, pushing students to open their minds and expand their cultural horizons. Recent Anthro publications cover a variety of concerning and thought-provoking topics with curated reading lists. Most courses include links to films and videos as well. Here's what we're talking about:

- [21A.150 Teaching and Learning: Cross-Cultural Perspectives](#)

Going to school is just one form of knowledge transmission and skill transfer. This course looks at social learning, apprenticeship, initiation, rites of passage, the development of identity, along with the traditional Western model of schooling.

- [21A.442J Violence, Human Rights, and Justice](#)

The syllabus sums it up nicely: "This course examines the contemporary problem of political violence and the way that human rights are conceived as a means to protect and promote freedom, peace, and justice for citizens, as well as to restrict the abuses of the state." Do universal human rights overlook the varying needs and values of different cultures? Are there valid justifications for suspending human rights during emergencies? No easy questions here!

- [21A.445J Slavery and Human Trafficking in the 21st Century](#)

While it may be comforting to think that slavery ended in 1865 at the courthouse in Appomattox, slavery and the selling of human beings persist around the world. What factors make this possible? The course explores the



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prevalence of forced sex work, child labor, the illicit trade in organs, debt bondage, and other disturbing topics that we often prefer to tune out.

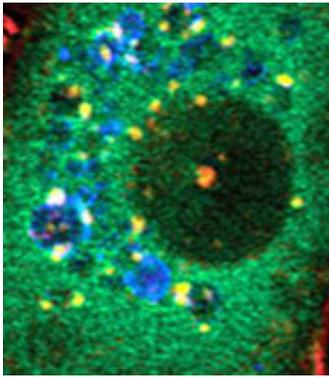
- [21A.500J Technology and Culture](#)

The conference room is double-booked again. Management has been tracking your keystrokes. Your cell phone has already given up your location. But we love technology! This course asks, “Does technology save us work? Improve our health? Ameliorate social inequality?”

- [21A.506 The Business of Politics: A View of Latin America](#)

Political marketing was invented in the United States in the 1930s with the wide acceptance of radio and film in American culture, and it became one of America’s most successful exports. This course looks at its variants in Latin America: “By looking at the debates and expert practices at the core of the business of politics, we will explore how the ‘universal’ concept of democracy is interpreted and reworked as it travels through space and time. Specifically, we will study how different groups experimenting with political marketing in different cultural contexts understand the role of citizens in a democracy.”

New Courses



[2.18 Biomolecular Feedback Systems](#)



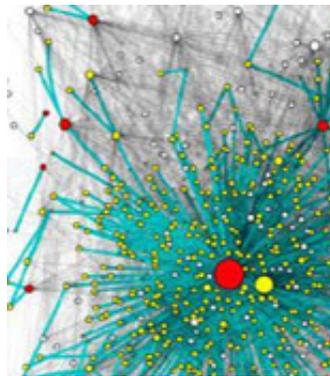
[24.191 Ethics in Your Life: Being, Thinking, Doing \(or Not?\)](#)

- [ESD.S51 Systems Leadership and Management Praxis](#)
- [STS.460 Histories of Information, Communication, and Computing Technologies](#)
- [CMS.616J Games and Culture](#)
- [18.S997 High-dimensional Statistics](#)

Updated Courses



[12.086 Modeling Environmental Complexity](#)



[15.060 Data, Models, and Decisions](#)

- [14.27 Economics and E-Commerce](#)
- [21G.101 Chinese I \(Regular\)](#)

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OCW Educator



Grace Murray Hopper was an American mathematician who helped devise the UNIVAC I keyboard along with COBOL, a computer programming language designed for business use. The history of technology and business is discussed in this course. (Image courtesy of the [Smithsonian Institution](#) on Wikimedia Commons. License CC BY.)

No Experience as a Historian? Don't Let the Past Stop You!

There are many ways to investigate history, many lenses through which to look at the past: political, demographical, military, cultural, technological—the list goes on and on. Typically, instructors who teach courses on historiography assign students a writing assignment that enables students to familiarize themselves with one method or another—what are the main schools of thought, who has propounded them, what the core issues are.

But for her class, [21H.991 Theories and Methods in](#)

the Study of History, Professor Anne McCants decided that this kind of assignment, which works well for students pursuing careers as professional historians, might not make sense for her students, who were mostly first-year graduate students in the Doctoral Program in History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology and Society, and who were mainly interested in domains other than history. If 21H.991 was going to be the only history course they would take, McCants wanted it to be a vibrant experience. So instead of assigning the typical historiographical essay, she invited students to dive in and make history the old fashioned way—by doing research with original materials:

“I wanted my students to have a chance to think about a real problem and to actually try their hand at solving it with archival materials that they themselves had identified.”

Professor McCants discusses this assignment in the Instructor Insights of the course’s This Course at MIT page. She admits there are risks associated with asking students to engage in open-ended research:

“Several students may never manage to identify a problem, or an archive to address their problem, or they might fail to understand what the literature has already said about their problem so that it becomes a trivial exercise.”

But she has found that the payoff is more than worth it. By meeting or communicating regularly with students, she was able to guide them all toward productive and interesting projects that they could complete in the allotted time.

Professor McCants discusses other aspects of her teaching, like exposing students to the various professional standards espoused by historical journals and making use of guest speakers, in her

Instructor Insights.

One of the first participants in OCW's Educator program, she also shares [Instructor Insights](#) for her course [21H.134J Medieval Economic History in Comparative Perspective](#).

Highlights for High School



Image courtesy of Graham Ramsay. Used with permission.

Is your Italian vocab limited to ordering a *cappuccino* at your local coffee shop? Is frozen pizza the closest you get to Italian home-cooking?

If so, you might be interested in the OCW course [Speak Italian With Your Mouth Full](#) by Dr. Paola Rebusco. This innovative class combines learning Italian language and Italian cooking! Students spent the first hour of class studying Italian grammar and vocabulary, and the second hour learning how to cook delicious Italian dishes, like eggplant parmesan and tiramisu.

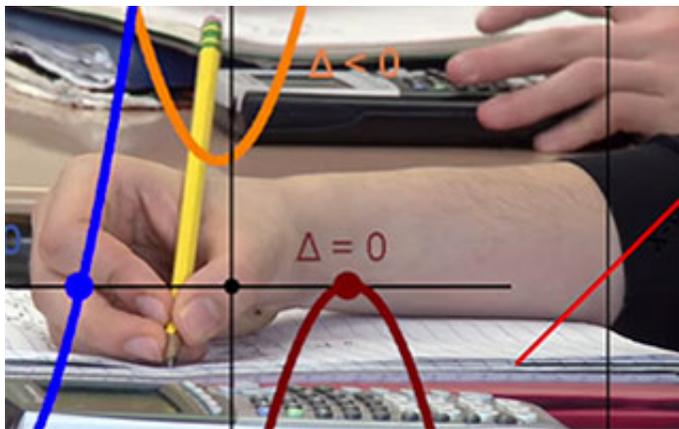
In addition to 13 language and cooking lessons, educators will be interested in the [This Course at MIT](#)

section to gain insights on how Dr. Rebusco developed the course, used technology, and the benefits of teaching language and cooking together.

Plus we created a special section that allows you to quickly access all of the [recipes](#) in one place.

Additional language courses in Spanish, French, Portuguese, German, Chinese, and Japanese on the Highlights for High School site can be found under the header [Global Languages](#).

MITx News



All new course [Calculus 1B: Integration](#) (18.01.2) starts December 1st, the second in our three-part calculus series. This course, in combination with Part 1, covers the AP* Calculus AB curriculum, or in combination with Parts 1 and 3, covers the AP* Calculus BC curriculum.

Students can use the course as supplemental material for their own high school courses, as a way to get access to this course if their schools don't offer it, or as preparatory material for the AP* exam. Teachers can use it to improve their own classroom

teaching, assign it to students as extra help, or to brush up on calculus skills themselves.

But beyond high school, the integral is vital in engineering design, scientific analysis, probability and statistics, so learners at any level can utilize this course. And, OCW has a variety of calculus and other math materials to help you prepare or keep going afterward.

Calculus 1B is the last MITx course launching in 2015, but not to worry – MITx has a great selection of both new and returning courses starting in early January 2016 and throughout the winter and spring. Get a sneak peak and start registering now at <https://www.edx.org/school/mitx>, where new courses will be added throughout the month.

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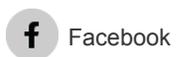
Image courtesy of Bijaya.

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