

New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
Video Games: Culture and Industry

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Office Hours: Mondays 2-3:30pm

MCC-UE 1008
Classroom: MAGNET Rm. 845
2:00 pm – 4:30 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Over the past 30 years, video games have metamorphosed from household novelties and hobbyist toys to one of the most globally recognized forms of popular entertainment. The Entertainment Software Association 2013 Essential Facts report states that 58% of Americans play video games of some form, and 51% of all households own a dedicated console; it's long been acknowledged that major AAA video game releases generate more global revenue than a Hollywood blockbuster. Everyday, the world of video game play and video game production grows more embedded in our cultural, technical and economic lives. Games are no longer marginal entertainment: they are definitive modes of experience in the 21st century.

This class is designed to offer a broad introduction to the phenomenon of video games, focusing primarily on Western U.S. histories and cultural practices. We'll investigate the relationship between play and games, learn (and practice!) intro game design, examine current events around issues of race, gender and inclusivity in the contemporary game scene, study cultural practices as diverse as modding, cheating and goldfarming, and come to better understand the stakes of the rising “indie” game scene. In short, we're here to make games—those simple pleasures we engage with everyday—seem unfamiliar and full of complexity.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- Categorize and evaluate games based on genre, design, historical period, employing vocabulary native to media studies, game studies and game design
- Describe the relationships between play, electronic games, and broader cultural, social and economic forces
- Evaluate shifting trends in game development, between AAA and indie industries, as well as between casual and “hardcore” titles
- Demonstrate familiarity with basic areas of employment in the games industry, including games journalism, preservation, arts practices, and design
- Synthesize visual and textual material related to game studies in order to make informed judgments about the reciprocal relationship between creative and commerce

COURSE READINGS AND GAMES

All articles are available in PDF format on blackboard (in some cases, links are provided in the syllabus for videos, blog entries, or news stories). Students should have read the assignments ahead of time, taken notes/annotated their PDFs, and arrive with copies of the readings easily available in print or laptop. I strongly recommend students print their readings. Cell phones and tablets are not appropriate devices for reviewing readings in class.

One required game must be purchased for this course from the third party site, Steam. Alternatively, you can play this game at the NYU Game Library.

- *Gone Home*, The Fulbright Company, 2013
<http://store.steampowered.com/app/232430/>

ASSIGNMENTS

Game Presentations

Almost all classes will begin with a game presentation. Each student (or assigned group of students, depending on class size) will select a digital game of their preference and prepare a 15 minute presentation that contextualizes the game for the class. Presentations should feature 3-5 minutes of embedded or linked video that highlights standard gameplay, address with the game's history, the genre and context in which it was produced, its distribution and commercial success, and its reception.

Students who miss their day without prior notice and my approval receive a zero for the assignment and cannot make it up.

Writing Assignments

This class has three required writing assignments, each roughly 4-5 pages. These assignments are intended to hone diverse skills for responding critically to games, and to acquaint students with standard genres of writing used in the games industry. These writing assignments are the Board Game Analysis, the Game Scene Event Blog, and the Video Game Review. Assignment sheets can be found on NYU Classes, under the Assignments tab, and are due in print form at the beginning of class.

Midterm

An in-class midterm will be held April 1, to assess your comprehension of the basics of game history and game studies. The test will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay.

Weekly News Report

Following the game presentation, we will discuss current topics and events in the game industry. While I will certainly provide a number of articles to begin our discussion, it is your responsibility to be aware of current trends and news items and bring them to class to contribute to discussion. This is a largely informal discussion, but will add greatly to your participation grade. Some sites to look to for contemporary news and events:

- Gamasutra <http://www.gamasutra.com/>
- Games Industry <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/>
- Joystiq <http://www.joystiq.com/>
- Killscreen <http://killscreendaily.com/>
- Polygon <http://www.polygon.com/>

GRADE EVALUATION

Percentage Breakdown

Participation 10%

Games Presentation 15%

Board Game Analysis 15%

Game Scene Event Blog 20%

Video Game Review 20%

Midterm: 20%

Evaluation Rubric

A= Excellent

This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good

This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average

This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory

This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed

This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A = 94-100

A- = 90-93

B+ = 87-89
B = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D = 60-64
F = 0-59

COURSE POLICIES

Absences, Lateness and Late Assignments

Students are expected to arrive on time for class, and be present for the entirety classes. Because classes begin with a game presentation, and students are graded based on their presentation professionalism, I will not tolerate students coming in late and being disruptive to their presenters. Students who are not in class when the presentations start at the beginning of class should expect to wait outside until the presentation and discussion is done, and will be marked late. Students who arrive late more than 2 times in a semester will lose half a letter grade on their participation grade with each subsequent lateness.

Students are permitted two absences a semester. Absences are yours to do with as you please; I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. After two absences, you may begin to lose up to 5% off your final grade with each subsequent absence.

All assignments must be turned in on time, either in class or to my email inbox by the start of class. Absence is not an excuse for late work. Writing assignments will be docked 5% per day late. Game presentations, Tumblr assignments, and any tests cannot be made up.

Format

Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing.

Laptop Courtesy

I do not disallow laptops in this classroom, although I certainly encourage you to use them sparingly. Recent [research](#) affirms that hand-writing notes produces better retention than typing notes. Furthermore, studies also confirm that one's laptop is a distraction not only to the user, but also to the people around them. For these reasons I highly encourage students take notes by hand and only use computers in the class to refer to readings, articles or the course Tumblr. You should only be using a laptop to facilitate your learning; engaging in off-topic activities on your laptop distracts you, and perhaps more importantly, is distracting to your peers.

In order to create an environment in which we engage one another and learn how to give each other our attention, laptops will not be permitted to be open during certain class times, most specifically game presentations, class discussion, and any time we have a guest speaker. Cell phones or other electronic devices should be stowed away during class.

Email Policy

Responding to students via email is a courtesy I extend to you, and I promise to get back to any student within 48 hours (so please note: your “night before” email may not get answered in time). However, the best way to get my time and attention is to visit my office hours. Office hours are *yours*; please use them. I do not discuss grades or class performance over email; please see my office hours.

Grade Appeals

Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity

The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim

from a book, an article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; report from other's oral work; paraphrase or restate someone else's facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

- Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
- Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged.
- Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.
- Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.
- Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions

When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.

The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

STUDENT RESOURCES

- Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#), 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-

- 4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.
- Writing Center: 411 Lafayette, 3rd Floor. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

January 28 – Welcome and Introduction to the Course

February 4 – What is Play? // BOARD GAME ANALYSIS ASSIGNED

- Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. “Chapter 9: The Magic Circle.” *Rules of Play*.
- Huizinga, Johan. “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon.” From *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. 1950. Republished in *The Game Design Reader*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. 1 – 18.

February 11 –Early Video Game History // GAME SCENE EVENT BLOG ASSIGNED

- Kocurek, Carly. “Coin-Drop Capitalism: Economic Lessons from the Video Game Arcade.” *Before the Crash*. Ed. Mark J. P. Wolf. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. 189-208
- Lowood, Henry. “Video Games in Computer Space: The Complex History of Pong.” *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*. July-Sept 2009.
- Nooney, Laine. “The Odd History of the First Erotic Computer Game.” *The Atlantic*. December 2, 2014:
<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/12/the-odd-history-of-the-first-erotic-computer-game/383114/>

February 18 –Game Genres and Post-Crash Video Game History

- Wolf, Mark J. P., “Genre and the Video Game.” *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. Eds. Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. 193-204.
- TBD

February 25 – Basics of Game Design // Guest Speaker: TBD

- Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Chapters 3, 5, 6. pp. 30-37; 48-69.

March 4 – In-Class Game Jam // BOARD GAME ANALYSIS DUE

March 11 – Class Canceled for Work on Game Scene Event Blog

March 18 – Spring Break

March 25 – The Great Debate: Ludology vs. Narratology

- Juul, Jesper. “Games Telling Stories?” *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. Eds. Joost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005. 219 – 226.
- Murray, Janet. Chapters 3 and 7. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
- [Game Play] *Gone Home* (REQUIRED GAME), Cardboard Computer, 2013.

April 1 – Midterm // GAME REVIEW ASSIGNED

April 8 – AAAs and Industry Blockbusters: Making and Consuming Games

- Entertainment Software Association. *2014 Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry: Sales, Demographic and Usage Data*. Available: http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2014.pdf
- Consalvo, Mia. “Crunched by Passion: Women Game Developers and Workplace Challenges.” *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.
- Williams, Dmitri. “Structure and competition in the US home video game industry.” *International Journal on Media Management*. 4.1 (2002): 41-54.

April 15 – How Games Fit into Life: Access, Gender and Game Culture // GAME SCENE EVENT BLOG DUE

- Jenkins, Henry. “Complete Freedom of Movement: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces.” *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 330 – 363.
- Syme, Rachel. “Notes on Kim” *New York Review of Video Games*. <https://medium.com/matter/kim-kardashian-hollywood-was-the-most-important-video-game-of-2014-cab6ec581df1>
- Nooney, Laine. “A Pedestal, A Table, A Love Letter: Archaeologies of Gender in Video Game History.” *Game Studies*. 13(2). Available: <http://gamestudies.org/1302/articles/nooney>
- [Gameplay] *Kim Kardashian Hollywood*, Glu Games Inc. 2014

April 22 – Indie Gaming as Art and Economics: Digital Distribution, Long Tails, and Making Games for the Rest of Us

- Juul, Jesper. *A Casual Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010. 1 – 20.
- Anderson, Chris. “The Long Tail.” *Wired*. October 2004. Available at: <http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html> [archive of text from article; read all 5 pages, and reference images in sidebar].
- Edery, David. “The Long Tail of Digital Games.” *SpreadableMedia.org*. Available: <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/edery/#.VAijA8VdXfI>
- Ellison, Cara. “Anna Anthropy and the Twine revolution.” *The Guardian*. April 10, 2013. Available:

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2013/apr/10/anna-anthropy-twine-revolution>

- Alexander, Leigh. "Gamers' Don't Have to Be Your Audience: Gamers Are Over." *Gamasutra*. August 28, 2014. Available: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/224400/Gamers_dont_have_to_be_your_audience_Gamers_are_over.php

April 29 – E-sports and Spectatorship // Guest Speaker: Simon Ferrari

- Hickey, Dave. "The Heresy of Zone Defense." 1995.
- Hutchins, Brett. "Signs of meta-change in second modernity: the growth of e-sport and the World Cyber Games." *New Media & Society*. 10.6 (2008): 851-869.
- Taylor, T. L., and Emma Witkowski. "This is how we play it: what a mega-LAN can teach us about games." *Proceedings of the fifth international conference on the foundations of digital games*. ACM, 2010.
- Dunning, Eric. "The dynamics of modern sport: notes on achievement-striving and the social significance of sport." *Quest for excitement: Sport and leisure in the civilizing process*. (1986): 205-23.

May 6 – Last Day/Game Review Discussions