

OFFICIAL GAME MANUAL

v 2.0 • March 30, 2015

ENGLISH 486/586. SERIOUS PLAY: GAMES AS THEORY AND CULTURE

Spring 2015
MW 10:00a – 11:50a
Deady Hall 301
<http://www.canvas.uoregon.edu>

Gamemaster (GM)
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Office Hours: Mon 12–1p; Wed 12–2p

Course Description

Chess. Sudoku. World of Warcraft. Battleship. Candy Crush. Basketball. Roulette. These are all things we call games – but what exactly do they have in common? This course introduces students to the fundamentals of games as cultural phenomena. Beginning with a seemingly obvious question which has frustrated generations of scholars and theorists – what *is* a game? – we will go on to examine games in terms of function, purpose, mechanics, design, and audience. Students will learn how to talk about games and then how to put that knowledge to work in designing their own games. This course satisfies the Department's Theory requirement and may satisfy an elective requirement for the New Media & Culture Certificate.

Learning Aims & Outcomes

In a local sense, this course will help you understand what games are, how and why they work, and why they are so central to human life. But more broadly, you will learn how to take seriously – i.e. critically -- seemingly “frivolous” or minor phenomenon which have historically remained beyond the purview of scholarly interest. You will learn how to “read” games using literary, computing, and filmic frameworks, and hence to develop and practice your close-reading and analytical skills. In creating your final project, you will draw on numerous skills, including design, collaboration, programming, speaking, and writing.

Format

This course is not only about games; it is designed *as* a game, one which resembles a combination of a parlor game (like poker), a sports game, and a multi-player role playing game (MRPG) like *World of Warcraft*. This will allow you not only to constantly be thinking about how and why games work, but will hopefully give the course some momentum and pleasure all its own.

Game Objective [*and modes of acquisition*]

The object of the game is to immerse yourself in the strange new world before you and to level up your character by collecting badges, learning spells, unlocking new locations, undertaking quests, interacting with other players, and discovering special tools and objects. By the end of this course, players will be experienced at:

- **Deploying Words of Power**, i.e. developing and using a unique ludic critical vocabulary (aka “Words of Power”) [*iClicker Quizzes, Midterm, Arena Matches, DIY Game Project, Discussion*]
- **Beating Quests**, i.e. analyzing and “close reading” games as literary, technological, and historical objects [*Arena Matches, Midterm, DIY GP, Discussion*]
- **Unlocking Locations**, i.e. recognizing and contextualizing the basic debates, methodologies, historical and aesthetic trends, and frameworks in games and game scholarship, and their relation to other forms of media (specifically literature, computer programs, graphic design, and film) [*Weekly Arenas, iClicker Quizzes, DIY GP, Discussion*]
- **Crafting**, i.e. designing a simple game which incorporates and synthesizes all previous knowledge [*DIY GP*]

System Requirements

1. Spellbooks

- *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology* (ISBN 0819428469). Available at the Duck Store and through Amazon.com, etc. Make sure you choose the correct edition; Kindle/ebook OK
- Required readings available at The Canvas (CV) as PDF files. Please print out/download and bring to class.

2. Controller

- iClicker 2. Available at the Duck Store (or buy a used version from other students). **You must obtain and bring your iClicker by the third class meeting.** Earlier versions of iClicker are acceptable, as long as they are shown to be compatible during the first week. iClicker GO! (Web App) is not an acceptable substitute yet; it’s too buggy.

How to Play

The game has a total of 5 *Levels* of increasing difficulty. Each level is broken into *Stages* (topics). There are a total of 19 *Waves* (“class meetings”).

In order to unlock each stage and be eligible to play, players must:

1. Have carefully read and understood the required Spells and Words of Power. These requirements are described in the *Game Map* in Appendix 1 of this Manual.
2. Have completed, to the best of their ability, any required *Arena Matches* or *Side Quests* as described in the *Game Map*.
3. Bring their spellbook and controller.

Most Waves will begin with a *Skirmish* (a.k.a. iClicker quiz) which will test your mastery of the day’s *Spells* (Required Readings); *Words of Power* (vocabulary terms); and other relevant items.

Skirmishes will usually be followed by a *cut-scene* (lecture), which will introduce players to the *items* to be collected that day and/or the quest or objective to be undertaken. Gameplay will usually begin with a discussion of the results from the *Arena Matches*; it might also involve collaborative team tasks, *Mini Games*, etc.

Spells & Words of Power

Players advance through the game by learning, using, and mastering spells, which allow them to solve puzzles, complete quests, and deduce meaning from the game. These spells are often long and complex; they usually contain several Words of Power which must be memorized and accurately pronounced in order to deploy these spells during each stage, and particularly to succeed during skirmishes and complete side quests. During some stages, particularly early ones, the Gamemaster may provide *Hints* on The Canvas to help you.

Most Words of Power can only be unlocked after passing earlier stages or completing quests. In the early stages, unlocked Words of Power appear by midnight each Friday on The Canvas (Modules).

Quests & Objectives

1. Arena Matches. At the beginning of the game, players will select two *Champions*, one from the *Material* category, and one from the *Technological* (see Appendix II of this Manual). These champions will meet 5 times during the game in a series of highly anticipated Arena matches. When the gates are raised, the champions will each be subjected to a series of trials, involving Spells and Words of Power. The player will carefully observe how each champion responds, and write up a 2-3 page (double spaced) account of the trials to be published at The Canvas by 5:00p on the date specified. More information will be provided prior to the first Match.

My Champions

Material: _____

Technological: _____

2. Raids. At the end of some levels, players will form guilds of 4-5 players and compete against the other guilds to raid a newly discovered treasure horde. The raids will be fast-paced and challenging, usually requiring the solving of a difficult puzzle or succeeding in a head-to-head skirmish. Whichever group wins will take the entire treasure horde and divvy it up among the players; each player will receive a valuable bonus to be applied to their final score.

3. Final Quest (DIY Game Project). The Final Quest will test all of the knowledge you have acquired, requiring you to team up with your guild and develop a game of your own. All guild members will contribute in developing and executing the concept. The quest will be evaluated by both the GM and other guilds according to originality, design principles, replay value, clarity of instructions, and other elements to be discussed. Detailed instructions will be unlocked after you complete Level 3.

Scoring

You begin the game at Level 1. In order to Level Up, you must acquire experience points. Level Twelve is the highest level you can achieve.

Level	Experience Points (XP)	Final Letter Grade
Level 12	370	A+
Level 11	340	A
Level 10	310	A-
Level 9	280	B+
Level 8	250	B
Level 7	220	B-
Level 6	190	C+
Level 5	160	C
Level 4	120	C-
Level 3	100	D+
Level 2	70	D
Level 1	0	F

Experience Points (XP)

Experience points are earned in a variety of ways.

Activity	XP Possible per Activity	Max XP Possible
<i>Generic</i>		
Skirmishes (10 best)	5	50
Arena Matches (5)	20	100
Boss Fight (Midterm)	75	75
Final Quest	120	120
<i>Additional</i>		
Raids (4)	+2	+8
<i>Badges*</i>		
Master Interlocutor (10)	+0.5 to +1	+5 to +10
Hero for the Day (8)	+1	+8
White Rabbit	-0.25	varies

* *Badges* are awarded for exceptional (or exceptionally abysmal) player performance.

- Master Interlocutor (Gold = +1 XP, Silver = +0.5 XP); awarded ~10 times
- Hero for the Day (+ 0.25 XP); awarded 8 times
- White Rabbit (Late, -.25 XP), awarded as often as necessary

Scoring: As in all games, winning isn't the same as getting a perfect scores; in fact, perfect scores are pretty much impossible, requiring hundreds of hours of dedicated effort. Keep the difference in mind; remember what you're playing for.

The Gamemaster (GM)

The Gamemaster (GM, a.k.a. “The Professor”) is the person who guides you through the game, assigns points, develops quests, oversees raids, etc. The GM is available for private consultation 3 hours a week (“Office Hours”). These are intended to facilitate discussion regarding any aspect of the course or its policies; you are strongly encouraged to come at least once during the quarter, or to schedule an alternate time if you have a recurring schedule conflict.

The GM checks her e-mail frequently, but not constantly — and rarely on the weekends — so allow 24 hours for a response during the week (48 hours during weeks when papers or projects are due). Please maintain professional etiquette in your e-mail communication with the GM, and make sure to put the course title in the subject line. If you have a serious matter to discuss with the GM, arrange to meet her in her office.

If you miss a wave, you should contact another player to get debriefed.

Fellow Player 1

Name:

E-mail:

Fellow Player 2

Name:

E-mail:

Additional System Requirements

Attendance and participation. Class attendance and participation is mandatory. This does not simply mean you are physically present, but that you:

- Arrive on time (repeated tardiness will constitute absences)
- Have completed all of the required reading before class begins
- Bring your iClicker as well as the assigned text
- Listen attentively to whomever has the floor and respond to, develop, and/or question their ideas
- Are not on your phone, laptop, etc. engaged in non-class activities (if this becomes a recurring issue, you may be asked to refrain from using technology during class)

***Note: If you anticipate needing to miss either of the last two class meetings, you may not wish to take this class.**

Please come speak to the GM early in the quarter if you anticipate having difficulties with participation or attendance, or need special accommodations. If you need to miss class for any reason, you must e-mail the GM at least 12 hours in advance. A doctor’s note or other proof may be requested. More than one unexcused absence will automatically result in a lowered participation grade; more than five unexcused absences will result in automatic failure. *This is your only warning.*

Late Policy. Late arena matches lose 2 points every 24 hours after the due date, with first deduction taken at 5:01p on due date. Late final quests lose 5 points per 24 hours late; however, **No work of any kind will be accepted after Sun 6/7 11:59p.** No incompletes will be given except in documented emergencies.

Academic Integrity

All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Conduct Code (<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct.aspx>). Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Accessible Education














In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Recommended Study Habits and University Resources

University accreditation standards require at least 2 hours of work outside of class for each credit earned. This means that you are expected to dedicate 8 hours/week of *outside of class* work. This will usually mean reading the assigned texts, but will also include time spent completing assignments, writing papers, and working on RTTP projects. Numerous campus resources are available which you should avail yourself of if you desire assistance with academic or extra-academic issues. For a full list, please see the Blackboard document “University Resources.”











APPENDIX I. Game Map

LEGEND

 = Spell*  = Words of Power Difficulty Level (hours of preparation required)  = Easy (2 hours)   = Normal (4 hours)    = Challenging (6 hours)  = Objective  = Quest or Task  = Raid  = In-Game Quest (i.e. in-class activity)  = Online material (Canvas)**


* Spell is due that day. Unless otherwise noted, all spells are in the *Game Design Reader Anthology*.



** Online spells are found under Canvas > Modules.

LEVEL 1	<i>What are Games (and how do we talk about them)?</i>
Stage 0	Mon 3/30
Stage 1	Wed 4/1
<p> Discover the Definition of Play.</p> <p> <i>Homo Ludens</i>, Play, Seriousness, Disinterestedness, Ritual, Magic Circle</p> <p> Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” (1955)</p> <p> Who will be Hero for the Day?</p>	
Stage 2	Mon 4/6
<p> Uncover the relationship between Game and Play.</p> <p> Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power. (see )</p> <p> Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play: The Classification of Games” (1962)</p> <p> Who will be Hero for the Day?</p> <p> Arena Match #1 at The Canvas: Ends Tuesday, April 7, 5:00pm</p>	
Stage 3	Wed 4/8

 RAID!

? Collect all the Basic Elements of a Game.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Brenda Braithwaite, “Ch 1: The Basics” in *Challenges for Game Designers* 

 “Understanding Games” Episodes 1-4 

 Arena Match #2 at The Canvas: Ends **Saturday, April 11, 5:00pm**


LEVEL 2	<i>How do Games Work?</i>
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Stage 1



Mon 4/13

? Unlock the Math behind Games.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 William Poundstone, “Game Theory” (1992)

 Who will be Hero for the Day?

 New Ally Acquired! Tristan Ursell (guest speaker)


!! Warning: Difficulty Increase Ahead !!

Stage 2



Wed 4/15

? Locked.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Erving Goffman, “Fun in Games” in *Encounters* (1961) 

 Who will be Hero for the Day?

 Arena Match #3 at The Canvas: Ends Saturday, April 18, 5:00pm (PST)


Stage 3



Mon 4/20

 RAID!

? Find out where Games and Stories meet.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” (2004)

 Jesper Juul, “Games Telling Stories?” (2001) 

Wed 4/22: Save Point: No Class

🏆 Arena Match #4 at The Canvas: Ends Saturday, April 25, 5:00pm (PST)

LEVEL 3

Why do games work?

Stage 1



Mon 4/27

? Locate the drug called Rules.

🔥 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

📄 Jean Baudrillard, “The Passion for Rules” (1979) 📖

👤 Cut-Scene: “Web Junkies” (in-class)

Stage 2



Wed 4/29

? Find the one they call TOM.

🔥 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

📄 Alan Leslie, “Pretense & Representation: Origins of ‘Theory of Mind’” (1987) 📖

👤 Who will be Hero for the Day?



Mon 5/4: Boss Fight (Midterm)

LEVEL 4

How are Games Made (and who makes them?)

Stage 1



Wed 5/6

? Break open the Game Molecule.

🔥 Iterative Design

📄 Braithwaite, “Ch 2: Game Design Atoms” in *Challenges for Game Designers* 📖

👤 Who will be Hero for the Day?

🏆 Arena Match #5 at The Canvas: Ends Saturday, May 9, 5:00pm (PST)


Stage 2





Mon 5/11

🏆 RAID!

? Locked.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Braithwaite, “Ch 3: Puzzle Design” 

 Cut-Scene: “Indie Games” (in-class)


LEVEL 5	Who are games <i>for</i> ?
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Stage 1



Wed 5/13

 Locked.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Michelle Nephew, “Playing with Identity: Unconscious Desire and Role-Playing Games” (2003) 

 Who will be Hero for the Day?


 Final Quest Proposal due to The Canvas by Saturday, May 16, 5:00p.

Stage 2





Mon 5/18

 Locked.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Who will be Hero for the Day?


 Helen Kennedy, “Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?” (2002) 



Stage 3




Wed 5/20

 Locked.

 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

 Adrienne Shaw, “Putting the Gay in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Video Games” (2009) 

 Cut-Scene: Juul & Halberstam, “The Queer Art of Failure” (in-class)



Mon 5/25: Memorial Day; No Class



Stage 4



Wed 5/27

 RAID!

? Locked.

🔒 Pass the previous Stage to Unlock the Words of Power.

📄 Gonzalo Frasca, “Videogames of the Oppressed” 🖥️

👥 New Ally Acquired! Linzi Juliano (guest speaker)

👥 Possible Side Quest: Newgroundgames – “You are Disabled”

Stage 4

Mon 6/1 & Wed 6/3

👥 Final Quest (Final Project Presentations)

📄 Final Quest Documentation: due Fri 6/5 by 11:59p to Canvas.









⊗ No work will be accepted after Sun 6/7 11:59p ⊗

APPENDIX II. Arena Matches

RULES

- Each Player will choose 2 Champions, 1 Material and 1 Technological. Once chosen, those champions will represent the Player through the entirety of the game.
- Selection will take place during Wave 1; Players may change their selections in-class, but final decisions must be made by 4/6. **All selections must be approved by the GM; changes made after 4/6 cost 10XP.**
- Before the first match begins (4/8), Players must have met and become familiar with their Champions, by spending a minimum of **1 hour** with each.
- No two Players may choose the same Champion.
- All Material Champions must enter the Arena in their physical, material form (i.e. solitaire must be played with a physical card deck, not online). All Technological Champions must be **played** rather than simply viewed (i.e. not by watching Youtube videos)
- If your Champion requires allies, you must be able to convene all of them for a minimum of 1 hour before each Arena Match.

Requirements

-  Allies (i.e. Multiple real people)
-  May require Purchase
- DIY** May be made at home
-  Deck of Cards
-  Computer
-  Console & Game
-  Internet Connection
-  Tablet or Smartphone
-  May require Windows

Likely Locations

- SNES** <http://www.letsplaysnes.com/>
-  App Store
-  Google, “Play _____ Online”
-  Thrift Store
(St. Vincent de Pauls, Goodwill, Rite Aid)

MATERIAL CHAMPIONS (Non-comprehensive list)

Region 1: Tactilia (Board) | \$ DIY

- Chess
- Checkers
- Battleship
- Clue
- Life
- Sorry!

Region 2: Athletica (Team Sports) |

This region is not recommended unless you are already part of a team

Region 3: Dealyrium (52-card deck) |

- Poker
- Bridge
- Hearts

Region 4: Rappingi (Card-based or other RPG) | \$

- Dungeons & Dragons
- Magic: The Gathering
- Pokemon

TECHNOLOGICAL CHAMPIONS (Non-comprehensive list)

Region 1: Tabula Intelligentsia (Smartphone or Tablet) | \$

- Angry Birds
- Candy Crush
- Threes or 2048
- Triple Town
- Farmville
- Zombie Café

Region 2: Memporgia (MMORPGs) | \$

- World of Warcraft

Region 3: Neo Consolatorium (Recent Console or PC, FPS) | \$

- Grand Theft Auto
- Call of Duty
- Halo
- Doom

Region 4: Arcadia (Older Console or Arcade) | SNES

- Pac-Man
- Tetris
- Super Mario Brothers 1
- Super Mario Brothers 2
- Super Mario Brothers 3
- Super Mario World
- The Legend of Zelda
- Galaga

Region 5: Questia (Older PC, Adventure or Simulation) |

- King's Quest (any)
- Black Cauldron
- Zork
- Myst
- Sim City

PLAYER'S CHOICE

You may choose as your champions any games that fit the following criteria:

- **No more than 5 Technological champions may be chosen from a single region;** check other Players' choices first, and consult GameMaster with questions.
- You may not choose a champion from the **same or similar family name** chosen as another Player's champion (i.e. if Pac-Man is already taken, you cannot choose Ms. Pac-Man; same with Monopoly and Monopoly Jr., or Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter, and Tekken). An exception may be made if a Player can demonstrate significant differences to the GM (i.e. Mario Kart v. Super Mario World) **prior to the first match.**
- Your champion must have clear **game** elements (as opposed to being an interactive movie, a **toy or puzzle**, or a **competitive sport** such as swimming)
- Your technological champion may not be an adapted version of a material champion, **including sports** (i.e. online chess, FIFA, video golf, video poker, video pinball, etc.).
- Your champion must be the product of an **established** family; it cannot be, for example, an amateur flash game or user-invented board game, but must have been produced and released by an established game company (ask the GM if you are unsure)
- You may not choose a **free version** of a technological game unless it has all the same capacities of the pay version (or, in the case of level-based games, at least 10 unique levels)
- If your Material champion is associated with significant costs (>\$10), notify the GM ASAP to inquire about reimbursement. No technological champions qualify for reimbursement.

Arena Matches

Match #1 • “History of Legends” • Ends Tuesday, April 7, 5:00p.

The group who stages the Arena fights at the Canvas want you to put together a little pamphlet about your Champions, to drum up some excitement about the upcoming matches. Research the history of each of your champs and write their back stories, about 1-2 double spaced-pages on each. You should start by Googling each champ, and from there, learn as much as you can: about where they came from, who made them and when, what they look like, what names they’ve gone by, that kind of thing. You should also include some basic information about how they work: What are they made of? What are the rules they live by? What does a Player need to be able to play them? Feel free to intersperse some screenshots or images; remember, this is supposed to be for an audience, so make sure you write in lay terms and that the final product isn’t a mess of spelling errors and comma splices. Of course, everything has to be on the up-and-up at The Canvas, so make sure you include a list of citations at the end, and that it’s clear what your sources were. When you’re done, head over to The Canvas and hand over the final product; they only accept PDFs and DOCs, so make sure you’ve got the right format. And remember: to make it to the presses, your stuff’s got to be in by 5:00p on April 7.

Match #2 • You v. Caillois • Ends Saturday, April 11, 5:00p.

You’ve finally gotten the roster for Saturday’s match; turns out Roger Caillois is in town, and he wants a chance in the ring with each of your champs in turn. Caillois’ got just one weapon – his Tongue – but he sure knows how to use it. When the gates open, you’re gonna see that the floor has been divided into four quadrants: *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. Then you’ll hear Caillois’s booming voice: “CLASSIFY YOURSELF, COWARD!” Your champ’s gotta figure out which quadrant(s) best describes them – and be able to explain why, quickly and clearly, before time is up. If they’re still alive after that, the quadrant will be erased and replaced with a long line: ---- with the words *paidia* and *ludus* written on either end. Now your champ’s gotta run along the line and stop right at the part of the spectrum which best describes them; and, to finish the match, they’ve once again got to explain why, quickly and clearly.

Your job is to prep your champs as best you can by giving each one a little script, so they know exactly what to do when Caillois unleashes his Tongue. Everyone knows your champs are a little strange – they speak about themselves in the Third Person, for one – so make sure your script is written that way, too. You can probably find a sample script some other Player wrote last time Caillois came around; check The Canvas Modules.

Match #3 • Challenger To be Announced • Ends Saturday, April 18, 5:00p.

Match #4 • Challenger To be Announced • Ends Saturday, April 25, 5:00p.

Match #5 • Challenger To be Announced • Ends Saturday, May 9, 5:00p.