In this course, you will have an opportunity to explore some of the most influential ideas and exciting developments of the 20/21c related to games of all kinds, from board games to video games to sporting contests and everything in between. In the process, you will develop considerable insight into the nature of games both as important cultural phenomenon and burgeoning economic industry.

This course seeks to topple the myth that games are “mere” trivial pursuits or temporary diversions from reality. Rather, games are ways of ordering the world: of making rules out of randomness, of deciding who or what falls “out of bounds.” And just as importantly, games provide a model and a language for making sense of that world order: allowing us to explain the fact that some people are winners and others are losers, or to rationalize and contest social inequalities in the name of “fair play.” To study games is thus not to study some minor cultural artifact but to try to understand the very origins of cultural production, to grapple with the strategic conflicts and dilemma-inducing complexity that has characterized 20/21c social life.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will have demonstrated the ability to:

- Identify and explain key events, ideas, and figures that have influenced the study and design of 20/21c games.
- Analyze and design games in terms of their MDA (mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics) and their historical and cultural context.
- Explain how games are related to other kinds of artistic productions, particularly literature and film.
- Connect the concerns of “virtual” worlds to ongoing debates in contemporary political and cultural life, and come to see themselves as responsible, critical consumers of popular culture.
Required Materials

- All other readings and material on Canvas. You are required to print copies or use a dedicated e-reader to refer to readings in class.
- Access to a PC or Mac that you can install Inform game design software on outside of class (Inform may not run on Chromebooks).

Method of Assessment

Your grade for this course will be determined by how fully and effectively you meet the following requirements:

1. **Participation (10% of your total quarter grade):** presence, energy, effort, contributions to discussion, and occasional homework or in-class activities.
   - **A-level:** Stays focused and highly engaged throughout entire quarter. Actively participates at appropriate times during most classes; responds to or engages with other students’ comments. Comments reflect a deep understanding of assigned text(s) and previous remarks of other students; contributions helpfully advance conversation. Has no unexcused absences.
   - **B-level:** Is present all or nearly all classes, and occasionally participates. Comments are generally relevant and reflect comprehension. Generally engaged, although occasionally may be “tuned out,” distracted by non-class related technology use, side-conversations. Has no more than 1 unexcused absence.
   - **C-level or below:** Is present, but seldom participates. Consistently distracted or “tuned out.” Comments tend to be general or reliant on personal experience rather than course material; may reflect little understanding of either the assignment or previous remarks in seminar. Has multiple absences or is consistently tardy.

II. **Lab Activities and Assignments (15%).** Each week you will participate in an in-class game design tutorial and complete exercises and/or brief homework which will be announced in class and due on Canvas.

III. **Reading Analysis Essays (25%).** You will write a total of three approximately 500-600 word (graduate students: 600-800) formal analyses of assigned critical readings. Essays are due on Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on 1/28, 2/11, and 2/25. You choose which texts you want to write on, but each essay should only focus on one or two readings. Essays should include approximately 250 words that clearly summarize the main argument of the text(s) you choose in your own words (i.e. without quoting the text beyond precise terminology and without simply repeating materials from lecture). The remainder of the essay should analyze the text(s) in a productive manner. Options include: close reading a particular section of the text to unpack its meaning beyond your summary; relating the text to another theoretical text we’ve read; explaining how the reading helps you to answer a question you have about game studies or how it contradicts or complicates how you traditionally think about games; analyzing a section of a game through the lens of the theory. These are formal writing assignments and are evaluated for form and content. Working on these essays should also provide the basis for strong participation in class discussion. A rubric will be available on Canvas. Late essays will not be accepted unless you’ve made arrangements with me well before the duedate.

IV. **Group Presentation & Discussion Leadership (20%).** Students will work in groups of approximately 3 to present on one day’s assigned reading to the class and facilitate discussion. Presentations should last 15-20 minutes. The first 10 minutes of the presentation should provide a focused and detailed summary of the reading’s argument and main points. During the next 5-10 minutes, you can bring in any material you think would help the class engage further with the text. i.e. you might briefly put the text in conversation with another theoretical essay that we’ve read that it either
draws from or contradicts. Or you might apply the author’s argument to one of the games we’ve played/created. You should conclude your presentation by posing 2 or 3 specific questions you would like the class to address in discussion. Your group will then facilitate class discussion (and respond to any questions/comments) for ~15-20 minutes. You are welcome to use the projector, chalkboard, etc. I encourage you to begin work on your presentations early and am happy to discuss them with you in office hours beforehand. Students will sign up during Week 2 on Canvas. You must present on the scheduled day. No make-ups are allowed.

V. DIY Text Adventure Game, Proposal, and Written Rationale (30%).
For your final project, you will work in groups of four to six to create an original text-based video game (also called Interactive Fiction) through Inform, an open-source game design program. Though this might seem like a daunting task—creating a video game!—you will learn the skills during the in-class labs and neither expensive hardware nor prior coding experience are required. Though the games created in Inform mostly resemble interactive fiction by way of hyperlinked, non-linear, choose-your-own-adventure narratives, users can also create more complex games involving conditional logic and traditional video game mechanics. A brief proposal will be due on 2/27. Final projects will be play-tested on the last day of class. The final game and an 800-1000 word written rationale and critical analysis of your game will be due Tuesday, 3/20.

Buyer Beware

- **Late papers will not be accepted without a valid medical excuse.**
- **Attendance is mandatory.** Unexcused absences and recurring tardiness will result in a lowered grade, at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence or every 3 tardies. No further warnings will be given.
- In the event of illness, an unanticipated family commitment, or other approved University business (such as participation in a sporting event), some absences may be considered unexcused. **Excused absences generally require some form of official documentation** (for example, a doctor’s note, a letter from your coach, and so on), but I’ll make this determination on a case-by-case basis if documentation is unavailable. Courteous students will contact me about their unavoidable absences, either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question.
- **There will be no second chances on written assignments.** You need to make it your best work the first time around. If you are concerned that you will underperform on a particular assignment, you need to come and see me beforehand; afterwards is too late.
- **Always bring a text to class. Students without a text will be marked as absent: unexcused for the day in question.** You can’t even pretend to be interested if you don’t have the text in front of you.

Finally, if you have any questions about any of the above, feel free to ask. That is why I am here.

Additional Course Policies

*Academic Integrity*
All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Conduct Code. 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 a student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center to verify their eligibility.

**Inclement Weather or Class Cancellations**

I will e-mail you if class is cancelled for any reason.

**Laptop Policy**

The use of personal laptops on non-lab days is STRONGLY discouraged except by documented necessity. Cellular phones and other mobile devices should be powered off.

**Schedule**

* = Required reading for graduate students only. Available on Canvas.
† = PDF available on Canvas. Please bring to class (print out or on tablet/laptop)

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<td>1</td>
<td>Tu 1/9/18</td>
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<td>2</td>
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|   | Th 1/18 | Sign up for Group Presentations on Canvas  
Review Caillois (above)  
Play “Wumpus 2.0” (link on Canvas), trying out each of the 5 difficulty levels. Take notes on experience and be prepared to share thoughts (informally, aloud) with class. |
| 3 | Tu 1/23 | Lab Day: Twine |
|   |   | Read Zork Manual & Play Zork (30min minimum). Take notes on experience and be prepared to share thoughts (informally, aloud) with class.  
Read Schell, “Story” Chapter  
* Montfort, Twisty Little Passages (Excerpt) |
|   | Th 1/25 | Group Roles Assigned  
Frasca, “Ludology meets Narratology: Similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative”  
Play “This is how you will die.” Take notes on experience and be prepared to share thoughts (informally, aloud) with class.  
Submit preferences for final project group role  
*Juul, “Games telling stories?”  
**Reading Analysis Essay #1 due by Sun 1/28 11:59pm** |
<p>| 4 | Tu 1/30 | Lab: Quest Gamebook |
|   |   | Lab Prep Reading/Assignment |</p>
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| Page 5 of 6 | 1/15/18 |