

ENGLISH 486/586
GAMES: NEW MEDIA & CULTURE

Winter 2017 | Mon & Wed 12:00 - 1:50 pm | Knight Library Room 42



Saturday Morning Breakfast

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.

Professor Tara Fickle

Office

372 PLC (3rd floor)

Office Hours

MW 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Contact

To ensure receipt and a quicker response, please contact me through Canvas message (“Inbox”), rather than through e-mail.

Learning Objectives

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

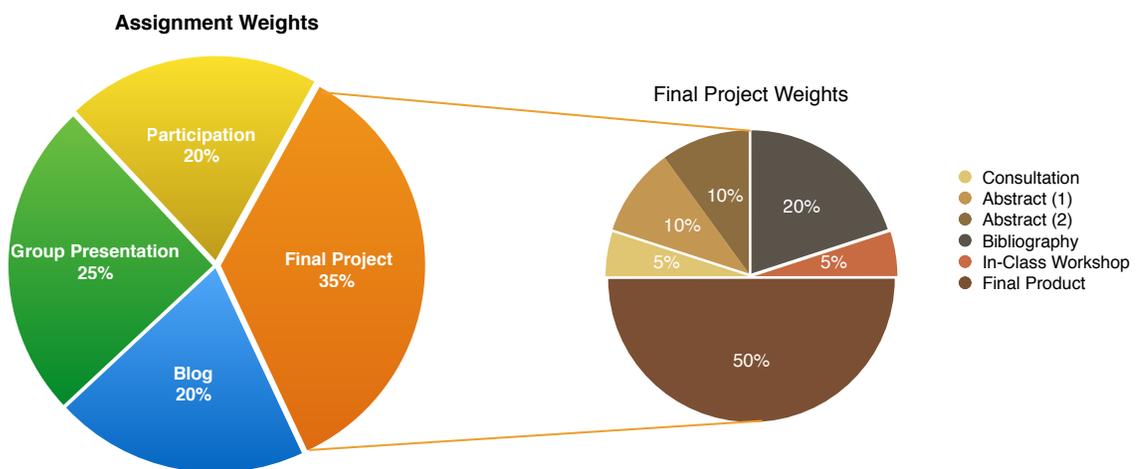
- Identify and explain key events, ideas, and figures that have influenced the study and design of 20/21c games.
- Analyze games in terms of their MDA (mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics) and their historical and cultural context.
- Explain how games are related to other kinds of artistic productions, 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

- Course Reader (for sale at UO Duck Store)
- Games: Instructions and download links available on Canvas. See “Gameplay blog” in Assignments section for more details.

Assignments

Assignment	Due	% Of grade
Gameplay Blog	4 times during quarter	20%
Group Presentation	Varies (sign-up week 1)	25%
Participation	Weekly	20%
Final Project		35%
Consultation	Weeks 2 & 3 (sign-up week 1)	(5%)
Abstract (1)	Week 6	(10%)
Abstract (2)	Week 8	(10%)
Annotated Bibliography	Week 6	(20%)
In-class Workshop	Week 10	(5%)
Final Product	Week 11	(50%)



Gameplay blog/reflection: The best way to learn about games is not just to read about them, but also to play them. Thus, beginning Week 3, beyond reading assigned critical texts, students are expected to log at least 3 hours per week (spanning at least 3 separate play sessions per week) playing specific assigned games outside of class and maintaining a play blog on Canvas that briefly reflects on each session. Blogs will be graded four times throughout the course for completeness and quality.

Group Presentation & Discussion Leadership: Students will work in groups of 2-3 to present on one day’s assigned reading to the class and facilitate discussion (grad student groups only: if there are multiple readings that day, you can choose one or present on all of them). Presentations should last 15-20 minutes. The first 5 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. 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 1 on Canvas. You must present on the scheduled day. No make-ups are allowed.

Participation & In-Class Activities: As this is an upper-level seminar class, you are expected to actively contribute to in-class discussions. This includes having read or played the material in advance of the class and making informed comments, bringing questions to class, offering constructive criticism of classroom presentations, completing in-class activities, and connecting themes discussed in class with contemporary events. Participation will be graded weekly in order to provide consistent feedback on your progress. Lateness, absences, or distracting/distracted behavior can also lower your participation. While weekly participation grades, once entered by the professor, are final, improvement over the quarter will be taken into account.

Final Project: This course will culminate in a final research project, in which students either apply a critical theory to a game they've selected at the beginning of the quarter, or analyze a course-related topic of their choice. The project will develop and assess students' ability to synthesize, apply, and write about course material.

Students have several options for the form their final project will take:

1. A traditional research paper (8-10pp u/g; 15-20pp grad)
2. An online essay/academic blog post directed at a broader audience, in the style of the essays on First Person Scholar (2000 words)
3. A short "edutainment" video, in the style of Extra Credits (5-7 minutes)

Alternative project ideas may be considered, but will require a short written proposal and instructor approval by the end of Week 4. Detailed guidelines and explanations of each option are available on Canvas.

To prepare for the final project, each student will complete and receive feedback on the following:

Initial consultation: During Week 1, students will sign up on Canvas for a 15-minute meeting with Professor Fickle to discuss possible final project topics. Meetings will take place during Weeks 1-3 in Professor Fickle's office (372 PLC) during office hours. It is each student's responsibility to sign-up for a meeting slot by the deadline or to notify Professor Fickle if a legitimate time conflict exists. Students do not need to bring any written material to the meeting; however, they are encouraged to brainstorm areas of interest or potential topics beforehand. This assignment is graded for participation only; however, to receive full credit, students must arrive on time to their scheduled meeting; late arrivals receive 50%, no-shows 0%.

Abstract (2 Drafts): In Week 6, students will submit a 250-300-word abstract of their final project, to ensure that they have selected an appropriate topic, have an early start, and to ensure feedback so that they can earn a better mark on the final product. This initial draft should be more advanced than an "I hope to look at..." style of summary, but rather should offer a preview of the argument you will be making and identification of the sources you will potentially be drawing from. During Week 8, following professor feedback, students will submit a second draft of their abstract; this should be much more polished and detailed than the first draft. Note: Second drafts which are identical (or nearly so) to the first can receive no higher than a C. Expectations for the abstract and annotated bibliography (see below) will be discussed in detail in class.

Annotated Bibliography: In Week 6, along with a first draft of the abstract, students will submit a list of at least 15 reference items pertaining to the topic of their final project. At least 10 of these materials must be drawn from academic journal articles, chapters in edited academic books, or academic articles published on the Web. Note: book titles and assigned course readings are not accepted. You should include the pertinent bibliographic information for the reference: title, author, year of publication, etc in MLA citation style. You should also highlight what you see as the five most promising references, indicating with a sentence or two why you think they might be important.

Many students have difficulty finding good sources, which are the backbone of good term papers. This assignment will follow an in-class session in Week 5 on how to find academic sources, explaining how they differ from non-academic sources, and the basics of abstract writing. At this point, you do not have to read beyond the paper abstracts for your citations. However, by beginning your reading early, you will have a head start on your term paper. Once I have your reference list, I may recommend other relevant sources for you to check out.

In-class Workshop: On the final day of class (3/15/17), students will bring in a sample of their final project to be workshopped in small groups composed of students working on similar formats/topics. Workshops will be graded for participation and preparation only.

Course Policies

Late Work: Late work loses 1/3 grade (i.e. B to B-) every 24 hours after the due date, with the first deduction taken 1 hour after the deadline.

Absences & Tardiness: Attendance will be taken at the beginning of most classes; multiple absences will negatively affect your final grade, as will consistent tardiness. If you miss class, you should contact a classmate to get notes.

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 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: The professor will e-mail you if class is cancelled for any reason. You should also check the UO homepage for updated information on class cancellations.

Schedule

* = Required reading for graduate students only. Available on Canvas.

† = PDF available on Canvas. Please bring to class (print out or on tablet/laptop)

			Topic	Reading/Games Due
1	M	1/9/17	Introduction	Sign up for Group Presentation & Final Project Consultation
	W	1/11/17	Analog Origins	De Peuter (2005). "Origins of an Industry: Cold Warriors, Hackers, and Suits, 1960-1984" in <i>Digital Play: The interaction of technology, culture, and marketing</i> , 84-108. *Grad only*: "Introduction" (2014) in <i>The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications</i> , 1-12.
2	M	1/16/17	No class - MLK Holiday; Start playing <i>Civilization</i>	
	W	1/18/17	Ludic Epistemology	Sutton-Smith (1997). <i>The ambiguity of play</i> , 1-17. *Bogost (2008). "The Rhetoric of Video Games" in <i>The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning</i> , 117-140.
3	M	1/23/17	What is a Game?	Huizinga (1950). "Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon," 1-25. *Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play & Fantasy"
	W	1/25/17	Game Bits & Pieces	† Excerpt from Brathwaite, Brenda, and Ian Schreiber. <i>Challenges for Game Designers</i> , 2009. (Read marked sections only) Suits, Bernard. "What Is a Game?" <i>Philosophy of Science</i> . 34.2 (1967): 148-156. Caillois (1961). "Definition of Play; Classification of Games," 122-155.
<i>Civilization</i> Play Blog due Sunday 1/29/17 @ 11:59p				
4	M	1/30/17	Theory & Practice	Galloway (2006). "Gaming Action, Four Moments," 1-38. Start playing <i>Zork</i>
	W	2/1/17	Non-linearity & Ludology	Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths," <i>Labyrinths</i> , pp. 19-29. Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology." In <i>The Video Game Theory Reader</i> . Edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron. Routledge, 2003, pp. 221-37. *Aarseth, E. J. "Doors And Perception: Fiction vs. Simulation in Games." 11pp.

			Topic	Reading/Games Due
5	M	2/6/17	Narrative Architecture	Jenkins (2006). "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," 14pp. *Murray (1998). "From Additive to Expressive Form," 36pp.
	W	2/8/17	Lab Research Session	Bring list of possible final project keywords - game title, topics, etc.
				Zork Play Blog due Sunday 2/12 @ 11:59p
6	M	2/13/17		Guest lecture: Reading TBA Start playing <i>World of Warcraft (WoW)</i>
	W	2/15/17	The Digital Divide	Williams et al. (2009). "The Virtual Census: Representations of Gender, Race and Age in Video Games." <i>New Media and Society</i> 11: 815-34. *Adrienne Shaw, "Do You Identify as a Gamer?" 16pp.
				Abstract (First Draft) & Biblio due Fri 2/17 @ 11:59p
7	M	2/20/17	Avatarial Identity	† Bartle, Richard. "Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDS." <i>Journal of MUD Research</i> 1 (1996). 20pp.
	W	2/22/17	Performing Personhood	Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." <i>Theatre Journal</i> , vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, 519-531. *Boellstorff (2008). "Personhood" in <i>Coming of Age in Second Life</i> , 118-150.
				World of Warcraft Play Blog due Sunday 2/26 @ 11:59p
8	M	2/27/17	Race Games	Tanner Higgin, "Blackless Fantasy: The Disappearance of Race in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games," <i>Games and Culture</i> 4(1), January 2009, 3-26. Start playing <i>Pokemon GO</i>
	W	3/1/17	Stigma of the "Girl Gamer"	T.L. Taylor, "Where the Women Are," <i>Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture</i> , Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, 93-124
				Abstract (Final Draft) due Fri 3/3 @ 11:59p
9	M	3/6/17	Augmenting Reality	Electronic Frontiers: Branding the 'Nintendo Generation' 1985-1990" in Kline et al., 109-127. Hunicke et al. "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research."
	W	3/8/17	Gamification	Rey (2014). "Gamification and Post-Fordist Capitalism." 277-295. *Csíkszentmihályi (1990). "Work as Flow" in <i>Flow : The psychology of optimal experience</i> (1st ed.). New York: Harper & Row.
				Pokemon GO Play Blog due Sunday

			Topic	Reading/Games Due
10	M	3/13/17	Virtual Economies	<p>Watch Nakamura Video: "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: Internet Games, Social Inequality, and Racist Talk as Griefing" (Canvas)</p> <p>† Dibble, Julian. "The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer." The New York Times Magazine. 17 June 2007.</p> <p>† Nardi and Kow (2010). "Digital Imaginaries: How we know what we (think we) know about Chinese gold farming."</p>
	W	3/15/17	In class Workshopping: Bring hard copy samples of your final project & submit to Canvas by 3/15/17 @ 11:59p	

Final Projects due to Canvas by Tuesday March 21, 2017 @ 11:59p.