

Spring 2023  
**ENGLISH 4745/5745: DIGITAL LITERACIES**  
*Thematic Title: Game Studies*  
MWF 10:00 AM-10:50 AM  
Johnston Hall 422

Professor Gerry Canavan  
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Drop-In Office Hours: MWF 11:00 AM-12:00 PM or by appointment

This course (one of the new advanced seminars for English majors) is a survey of the burgeoning academic field of game studies, with special focus on the history and reception of video games. Together we will explore some of the fraught ethical and political debates that have accompanied the rise of video games as multi-billion-dollar popular entertainment. Are video games addictive? Are they bad for children? Are they bad for adults? Are they a waste of time—or, to paraphrase Steven Johnson, do “bad” video games turn out to actually be quite good for you? What is the status of “gaming” in a world where the boundary between work and leisure seems to have become ever more fluid? And how do we consume, create, and interpret different sorts of game texts when gaming has become the most culturally important and most lucrative mass-media market on the planet?

### **LEARNING GOALS**

Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify, discuss, and understand various formal characteristics of games;
- Apply techniques of media analysis to games;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various game and game-related cultural objects have been produced;
- Utilize the emerging interdisciplinary field of “game studies” scholarship;
- Use media study and cultural analysis to develop skills for careful reading and clear writing;
- Read and discuss games on the levels of both form and content.

### **SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND PERSONAL EMERGENCIES**

Everyone at Marquette recognizes that this continues to be an extremely difficult time which may be filled with many different sorts of uncertainty as we move forward with the academic year. Your safety, health, and well-being are our primary concern and we want to be able to support you in any way that we can.

The university also understands that you may be facing personal obstacles that may make it difficult to meet your typical academic goals. Please refer to the Student Resources page on the Marquette COVID-19 Response webpage for information and resources on basic needs such as housing, food, financial aid, and medical and mental health; the webpage also offers information on official University communications, access to technology, and student services. Faculty and staff are also here for you.

If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your situation outside of class, please don't hesitate to talk with me. I want to be a resource for you. You are not alone.

**REQUIRED TEXTS** (books available at the BookMarq on 16<sup>th</sup> Street)

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Video Games* (book)

Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (book)

Frans Mäyrä, *An Introduction to Game Studies* (book)

ZA/UM cultural association, *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* (multiple points of access)

The course will also make use of a number of other sources of games-related media, including film, television, journalism, fan practice, and, of course, video games themselves. Wherever possible we will focus on games that are available for free; some games, however, are only available for a low fee through outlets like Steam or the Nintendo Switch store.

Additional readings and course materials will occasionally be made available via D2L.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

<b>Attendance, Participation, Possible Quizzes</b>	25%
<b>D2L Forum Posts</b>	25%
<b>Final Paper</b> (10-12 pages expected for undergrads; 12-25 pages for graduate students)	
• Prospectus	5%
• Abstract	5%
• Presentation	10%
• Final Paper	30%

Additional details on these assignments can be found as an appendix at the end of this document, as well as under CONTENT on D2L.

Grad students will have slightly different expectations; we can discuss this one-on-one.

**GRADING**

Grades will follow the following rubric:

\* To earn a C, you must clearly restate the meaning or project of a text in your own terms. A C essay may volunteer an original argument, but will likely lack evidence or

analysis of its sources. C essays are clearly written, though they might display some grammatical weakness.

\* To earn a **B**, you must begin to raise important questions about the text under consideration and to use those questions to drive your own interpretive agenda. A B essay typically advances an original argument and provides solid analysis of the text(s) under consideration. B essays are clear, concise, and free of grammatical errors.

\* To earn an **A**, you must construct an essay that does more than simply comment on the work of others; you must forward, counter, or transform what they have to say. An A essay advances an original argument that builds toward a climax and makes a persuasive case for its own significance. A essays are clearly written, and often eloquent.

\* A **D** means that you have not written in clear prose or that you seem to have deeply misunderstood the text. An **F** means that you did not fully or seriously engage the assignment.

\* **A-, B+, B-, C+ (and so on) grades** fall in the gaps between the above categories.

### **UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS**

Your makeup posts and sandbox posts will be graded on an extra-credit / pass / low-pass / fail basis:

- Fulfilling all the requirements of the assignment will earn you full credit;
- Failing to do so will earn you half-credit (at best) or no credit (at worst);
- Going beyond the terms of the assignment in an especially ambitious or creative way can earn you extra credit.

### **QUIZZES**

I do not like to give reading quizzes; I think they infantilize the college-level scholar. However, this is by necessity a very text-intensive class; if it seems to me that people are not keeping up with the texts, pop quizzes may become necessary despite my philosophical objections. You have been warned.

### **THAT BEING SAID**

This is a course on games (which are meant to be fun!) that is itself intended to be fun. What will make this class most fun, and most useful to you as emerging scholars, is a shared dedication to diving into this experience and getting the most we can get out of it together.

### **FORMAT OF WRITTEN WORK**

Your final paper should be typed in twelve-point font, double-spaced with one-inch margins, saved in a format Microsoft Word can open. Your filename should contain *your name* in it, for example, lastname-finalpaper.docx.

I expect you to *edit* and *proofread* all written work, even forum comments. Drafts that contain excessive typos or grammar mistakes may be returned to the author for correction before I offer comments.

Please give your final paper an original title, and include your name, assignment, and due date in a header on the first page.

**All sources relied upon for the writing of your paper, including the primary text, must be appropriately cited.**

### **PAPER SUBMISSION**

The final paper should be submitted via D2L's Dropbox by class time on the due date, Tuesday, May 9, by 10 AM.

Your other written work (which will primarily take the form of forum posts) will be posted on the D2L forums in the designated "sandbox" forums.

Except in very unusual circumstances, work will not be accepted by email.

### **EXTENSIONS**

Although the work in this course have a sufficiently long timetable to allow you to plan and complete all assignments in a timely manner, I nonetheless recognize that each of you has a unique schedule and that some of the due dates I have selected could occasionally prove problematic for individual students in the course, especially in the context of the pandemic. **If you find that you will need an extension on a particular assignment due to this kind of conflict, please contact me to arrange an alternative due date.** There is no need to concoct an elaborate story to justify this, or to lie to me; simply tell me the truth about what's going on and we can work out an alternative that works for you.

### **TECHNOLOGY IS TERRIBLE: PLAN AHEAD!**

The Internet goes down. Files become corrupted. Computers crash. These are predictable facts of twenty-first century life, not emergencies. For this course, for all your courses, for the rest of your career and your life in this world you need to develop work habits and strategies that take into account the basic, inescapable unreliability of computers. Start your assignments well in advance of the due date; save them often; save backup copies of essential documents, including copies off-site using a service like Carbonite, Dropbox, or Google Drive.

### **ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION**

Class discussion is an essential component of this seminar; class discussion, not lecture, will be the primary means by which we will investigate these texts together. It is crucial that you come to class every day having read the required material and prepared to discuss it.

**Consequently, attendance in this class is mandatory.** You should plan on attending every class. Please talk to me (in advance if possible) if you ever find you will need to miss a class meeting.

The course adheres to Marquette University's attendance policy, which can be found on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#attendance>.

You are allowed **three unexcused absences** over the course of the spring semester. **After that, your class participation will drop by half a letter grade for each additional unexcused absence.** Upon the seventh unexcused absence, you may receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.

**Merely being present in class is insufficient for an “A” in class participation.** Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

### **COVID PROTOCOLS**

Everyone in this class will be expected to follow the current COVID-19 policies in effect on campus, including current guidance on quarantines and on masks.

### **D2L DISCUSSION FORUMS AND SANDBOX POSTS**

This course will make extensive use of the forums on D2L, where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. I will be reading it before every meeting of the course and I ask you do the same. You may choose either to begin a discussion thread on a new topic or to respond to a post composed by one of your classmates.

**Before class on Friday, January 27, every student is required to:**

- (1) upload a picture of their face or some other symbolic image to their profile;
- (2) post a “Choose Your Fighter” self-introduction in the designated forum;
- (3) respond to at least one of the texts we have discussed thus far.

After that, students must make **four short sandbox posts (approximately 300-500 words that move beyond summary)** responding to any of the texts or games we discuss across the remainder of the course. This is approximately one post every three weeks. This does not have to be a formal written post, but can also take the form of a podcast, short video, a work of art or music, a short story or fan fiction, a comic, or more; any response of any sort is fine, provided it is thoughtful and substantial. These can even be done collaboratively. The idea is to respond collectively to the material we are studying together in a way that is not stifling, anxious, or overstructured by academic expectations that cannot really apply to this odd and altered educational context; my hope is to strip away grading strictures that can only be dysfunctional in the current moment and foster

instead more multifaceted, more generous, and hopefully richer intellectual encounters, driven by your interests.

I encourage you to think of your sandbox posts as possible “seeds” for the final project; feel free to begin to develop your thoughts there.

Additional posts and comments, and comments that substantively engage other students’ arguments, will be looked upon very favorably when I calculate your final grade.

### **LAPTOP POLICY**

As Marquette moves towards a paperless learning environment, in-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. becomes ever more important for access to electronic versions of our texts and for notetaking. However, students *must* refrain from non-class-related computer use, including email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. **Please do not abuse this privilege or distract your fellow students.** I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. Except in unusual cases of personal emergency, cleared with me at the start of class, no use of cell phones will be permitted during class time; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

### **EMAIL**

Students in this class are required to check their official Marquette email account—whatever account D2L sends its emails to—at least once a day, in case there are any last-minute announcements or disruptions.

I endeavor to respond to all emails within 24 hours, usually much less—but please do not send me urgent emails regarding your assignments on the night before they are due and expect an immediate reply.

### **CONFERENCES**

All students are asked to meet with me in a short one-on-one conference at my office at least once during the semester to discuss the course and your work within it.

Please know I am very happy to meet with you individually to discuss work-in-progress in excess of this requirement, as many times as you like. Simply come to my weekly drop-in office hours, or see or email me to set up an appointment.

### **FLEXIBILITY**

If it will benefit the class, changes may be made to the above.

### **WRITING CENTER**

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Center, located in Raynor Library Room 240, at any stage of the writing process.

Please visit the Writing Center website to find out how to schedule an appointment and to access the studio’s online resources.

## ACCOMODATIONS

Students with disabilities who believe they may require accommodations in this course should contact me early in the semester so your learning needs can be appropriately met.

I am of course more than happy to work with you to make sure you are successful in this course and to make this course most accessible for you. However, without documentation, I am limited in what I am able to do. Therefore, in order for me to help you most effectively, I need you to be proactive in contacting Marquette University's Office of Disability Services (located on the fifth floor of the 707 Building).

ODS can be reached by phone at (414) 288-1645 or by email at [ods@marquette.edu](mailto:ods@marquette.edu).

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are expected to abide by the academic honesty policy outlined in your undergraduate bulletin. I urge you all to examine this material and consult me with any questions you may have about plagiarism or academic integrity *before* it becomes an issue.

Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism. **Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course.** No exceptions or special dispensations will be made.

Marquette students now sign an Honor Pledge, which states:

- *I recognize the importance of personal integrity in all aspects of life and work.*
- *I commit myself to truthfulness, honor, and responsibility, by which I earn the respect of others.*
- *I support the development of good character, and commit myself to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity as an important aspect of personal integrity.*
- *My commitment obliges me to conduct myself according to the Marquette University Honor Code.*

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://www.marquette.edu/provost/academic-integrity.php>.

On a personal level, I (like everyone) hate being lied to. Please, do not feel you need to concoct elaborate stories. Simply be honest with me about whatever is going on and we will work it out.

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

We all enter this classroom with preexisting political, ethical, philosophical, and intellectual commitments. You are all required to engage the material—but you are absolutely *not* required to agree either with any of the writers we will discuss, or with me, in whole or in part.

## **RESPECT**

This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome here.

Failure to treat other students with the respect they deserve will **severely** negatively impact your class participation grade.

## **KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN!**

I want this class to be a meaningful and valuable experience for you, both in its own terms and in service of the development of your larger college experience. If you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns about the way things are going, my door is always open.

## **HOW WE WILL PLAY**

As I mentioned above, this is intended to be a fun course in which we study fun things. How we get there is up to you. The games I've selected to be our initial focus are intended to illustrate particular points about how and why we play games; they also have the advantage of being widely available for free over the Internet or for a low price on the distribution network Steam. If you wish to play these games alone, that's great; if you want to meet up in groups and play together, that's also great. If you don't want to play at all, and simply want to study the games from a distance as aesthetic objects—or if a game that starts out fun becomes drudgery and you don't want to keep going—you can supplement your study in other ways by visiting wikis and fan sites, watching YouTube videos, reading or watching online play-throughs, listening to podcasts, etc. I'm open to whatever mode of engagement with these texts you like; the key thing for me is simply that you engage.

In keeping with the student-centered ambition of this course, we will build the later weeks of the class together using games you are particularly interested in studying, be they video games or board games or party games or sports or some other sort of game. This will be one of our collective tasks in the initial weeks of the course.

## **DISCO FRIDAYS!**

When I've previously taught this course as a first-year seminar, I have tended to approach it as a survey class that bounced off multiple genres and microgames each week. Because this course is a seminar for advanced undergraduates and graduate students, I thought it would be best for us to have a core text that we explored in depth. In my wisdom (?), I have selected for this purpose the game *Disco Elysium*, published by the ZA/UM cultural association in 2019 to wide acclaim and expanded as *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* in 2021. *Disco Elysium: The Final Cut* has been released on multiple platforms, including Windows, macOS, PlayStation 4 and PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch, and Xbox; it is my hope that everyone in the room will be able to play the game via one of these platforms, though it can also be experienced vicariously in the other modes described above as well.

Beginning in February and running through April, most Fridays in the course are “Disco Fridays,” meaning we will be discussing the next segment of *Disco Elysium* on those

days. You are not expected to have played any part of *Disco Elysium* before our initial discussion devoted to the character creation screen and getting out of your hotel room on Friday, February 3—though if you are replaying the game this term, that’s fun too.

**We will endeavor to discuss the game in the designated day-by-day segments, and not advance past the “spoiler line” for any given Disco Friday.** Since this temporal format begins to break down around Day 4 or Day 5 even within the game itself, we will discuss the entire endgame and the game as a whole in the weeks after Spring Break.

In terms of **content warnings**, I do want to mention that the game is a murder mystery and contains some disturbing material, including some sequences involving sexual violence, racism, addiction, and suicide. The way you play the game impacts the ways you will both encounter and interpret this material, but I did want to issue a generalized content warning at the start for anyone who worries they might be upset by the game. I'm very happy to discuss this more one-on-one if that would be beneficial.

Finally, a note on the game mechanism: the game uses a “skill check” mechanism to see whether you succeed or fail at a given task. I want to impress upon you that very often failure is the more fun outcome, and in at least a couple cases I can think of it only “failing” the check allows you to succeed in the task. Additionally, at least a few checks are rigged, such that you can only succeed at them at a particular moment in gameplay (and there's also at least a couple checks that are rigged to fail no matter how you attempt them). Nearly all skill checks in the game can be repeated; the ones that can't are labeled in red so you know they are one-time-only.

**The point is that you don't need to obsess about whether your character is passing their skill checks.** Play the game without worrying about this! Your character is a walking disaster who messes up or destroys nearly everything he touches and that's part of what is good about the game.

### **MAGES & MURDERDADS PODCAST**

In 2021 the “Mages & Murderdads” podcast did a miniseries on *Disco Elysium* that you may find interesting; among other things, it follows the day-by-day format we use for our Disco Fridays. The miniseries happens over episodes 65-74.

<https://rangedtouch.com/category/magesandmurderdads/>

### **FOLLOW FAME: FRIENDS AND ALUMNI/AE OF MARQUETTE ENGLISH**

*On Facebook (page):* [www.facebook.com/marquettefame](http://www.facebook.com/marquettefame)

*On Facebook (group):* [www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194](http://www.facebook.com/groups/496438583889194)

(search for “Undergraduate English at Marquette”)

*On Twitter:* @MarquetteENGL

*On Instagram:* @marquette\_english

I will also be inviting you to English community events periodically during the spring semester. I hope you can attend!

**SEMESTER AT A GLANCE**

<b>WEEK</b>	<b>DATES</b>	<b>MONDAY</b>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>DISCO FRIDAYS!</b>
1	1/18, 1/20	<b>MLK DAY NO CLASS</b>	<b>FIRST DAY OF CLASS</b>	Game: <i>The Stanley Parable</i>
2	1/23, 1/25, 1/27	ART	MEANING	<i>Game/Film: Black Mirror: Bandersnatch</i> (in-class viewing)
3	1/30, 2/1 2/3	DESIGN	FILM	<i>DISCO ELYSIUM:</i> CHARACTER CREATION SCREEN AND GETTING OUT OF YOUR HOTEL ROOM (in class)
4	2/6, 2/8, 2,10	ROLEPLAY	CRITIQUE	<i>DE: DAY 1</i>
5	2/13,2/15,2/17	HABIT	ADDICTION	<i>DE: DAY 1 (replay)</i>
6	2/20,2/22,2/24	VIOLENCE	EMPIRE	<i>DE: DAY 2</i>
7	2/27,3/1,3/3	SIMULATION	IDEOLOGY	<i>DE: DAY 3</i>
8	3/6,3/8,3/10	DECEPTION	WORK	<i>DE: DAY 4</i>
3/13,3/15,3/17		<b>SPRING BREAK NO CLASS</b>		
9	3/20,3/22,3/24	ENDGAME 1	ENDGAME 2	ENDGAME 3
10	3/27,3/29,3/31	<i>DE</i> CRITICISM	<i>DE</i> CRITICISM	<i>DE</i> CRITICISM
11	4/3,4/5,4/7	<i>Disco Elysium 2</i> discussion	<b>paper/project workshop</b>	<b>EASTER NO CLASS</b>
12	4/10,4/12,4/14	<b>EASTER NO CLASS</b>	SPECIAL TOPICS	SPECIAL TOPICS
13	4/17,4/19, 4/21	SPECIAL TOPICS	SPECIAL TOPICS	SPECIAL TOPICS
14	4/24,4/26,4/28	FLOW	RESISTANCE	<b>presentations</b>
15	5/1,5/3,5/5	<b>presentations</b>	<b>presentations</b>	<b>presentations</b>
<b>FINAL DUE</b>	<b>TUESDAY 5/9 AT 10 AM</b>			

### WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE

*Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class as they become necessary.*  
Students should come to class prepared to discuss the listed texts or chapters.

W	Jan 18	START	<b>FIRST DAY OF CLASS</b>
F	Jan 20	NARRATIVE	Game: <i>The Stanley Parable</i> Corey Mohler, <i>Existential Comics</i> : “Candyland and the Nature of the Absurd” Interview with Davey Wreden, Creator of <i>The Stanley Parable</i>
M	Jan 23	ART	Game: <i>Doom</i> Roger Ebert, “Doom,” “Critics vs. Games on Doom,” “Why Did The Chicken Cross the Genders,” “Video Games Can Never Be Art” Ian Bogost, “Art”
W	Jan 25	MEANING	Game: <i>Journey</i> Mäyrä, “What Is Game Studies?” and “Meaning in Games”
F	Jan 27	CHOICE	Game/Film: <i>Black Mirror: Bandersnatch</i> (in-class viewing)
M	Jan 30	DESIGN	Game/Film: <i>Black Mirror: Bandersnatch</i> (in-class viewing and discussion)  Nele Van de Mosselaer and Stefano Gualeni, “The Implied Designer and the Experience of Gameworlds”
W	Feb 1	FILM	Galloway, “Gamic Action, Four Moments”
F	Feb 3	DISCO!	<i>DE</i> : CHARACTER CREATION SCREEN AND GETTING OUT OF YOUR HOTEL ROOM
M	Feb 6	ROLEPLAY	Game: <i>Dungeons and Dragons</i>  Vox.com, “Dungeons and Dragons, Explained” Aaron Trammell, “From Where Do Dungeons Come?” Aaron Trammell, “Misogyny and the Female Body in Dungeons and Dragons”
W	Feb 8	CRITIQUE	Game: <i>The Legend of Zelda: The Breath of the Wild</i>  Gerry Canavan, “The Legend of Zelda in the Anthropocene”
F	Feb 10	DISCO!	<i>DE</i> : Day 1

M	Feb 13	HABIT	<p><i>Game: Tetris</i></p> <p>Bogost, “Habituation”  Chris Higgins, “Playing to Lose”  Sam Anderson, “Just One More Game...”  Film excerpts: <i>The Ecstasy of Order</i></p>
W	Feb 15	ADDICTION	<p><i>Game: Candy Crush, League of Legends, Hearthstone, Marvel Snap!, etc.</i></p> <p>Ramin Shokrizade, “The Top F2P Monetization Tricks”  June Thomas, “Sugar Coma”  Julia Lepetit and Andrew Bridgman, “The Most Realistic Game Ever”  Ian Bogost, “Rage Against the Machines” and Cow Clicker</p>
F	Feb 17	DISCO!	DE: Day 1 (replay)
M	Feb 20	VIOLENCE	<p><i>Game: Doom revisited, Call of Duty, etc.</i></p> <p>Galloway, “Origins of the First Person Shooter” and “Social Realism”  Ludus Novus, “Why So Few Violent Games?”</p>
W	Feb 22	EMPIRE	<p>Bogost, “Titillation”  Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witthford, and Greig de Peuter, “Designing Militarized Masculinity: Violence, Gender, and the Bias of Game Experience”  Mathieu Triclot, Raphaël Verchère, “Video Game Violence: A Philosophical Conversation with Mathieu Triclot”</p>
F	Feb 24	DISCO!	DE: Day 2
M	Feb 27	SIMULATION	<p><i>Game: Sid Meier’s Civilization, etc.</i></p> <p>Galloway, “Allegories of Control”  Kacper Pobłocki, “Becoming-State: The Bio-Cultural Imperialism of Sid Meier’s <i>Civilization</i>”</p>
W	Mar 1	IDEOLOGY	<p><i>Game: SimCity, etc.</i></p> <p>Ava Kofman, “Les Simerables”  Mike Sterry, “The Totalitarian Buddhist Who Beat Sim City”</p>
F	Mar 3	DISCO!	DE: Day 3

M	Mar 6	DECEPTION	<i>Game: Werewolf, etc.</i>  Nathan Cutietta, “A Mental Model Approach to Deception in Single Player Games”
W	Mar 8	WORK	Mäyrä, “Preparing for a Game Studies Project”
F	Mar 10	DISCO!	<i>DE: Day 4</i>
<b>M-F</b>	<b>Mar 13-17</b>	<b>PAUSE</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
M	Mar 20	ENDGAME 1	<i>Disco Elysium</i> endgame discussion
W	Mar 22	ENDGAME 2	<i>Disco Elysium</i> endgame discussion
F	Mar 24	ENDGAME 3	<i>Disco Elysium</i> endgame discussion
M	Mar 27	CRITICISM	<i>Disco Elysium</i> criticism
W	Mar 29	CRITICISM	<i>Disco Elysium</i> criticism
F	Mar 31	CRITICISM	<i>Disco Elysium</i> criticism
M	Apr 3	SEQUEL	<i>Disco Elysium 2</i> discussion
W	Apr 5	WORKSHOP	paper/project workshop (in class)
<b>F</b>	<b>Apr 7</b>	<b>DEATH</b>	<b>EASTER BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
<b>M</b>	<b>Apr 10</b>	<b>RESPAWN</b>	<b>EASTER BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
M-F	Apr 12-21	DLC	<i>We will choose the special topics for this part of the class together.</i>
M	Apr 24	FLOW	Stephen Johnson, <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (excerpt) Jane McGonigal, <i>Reality Is Broken</i> (excerpt) Braxton Soderman, <i>Against Flow</i> (excerpt)
W	Apr 26	RESIST	<i>Countergames: molleindustria.org</i>  Galloway, “Countergaming”
F	Apr 28	TUTORIAL	GRAD STUDENT PRESENTATIONS
M-F	May 1- May 5	LEVEL UP	UNDERGRAD PRESENTATIONS
F	May 9	GAME OVER	FINAL PAPER/PROJECT DUE ON D2L BY 10 AM

### **Additional Reading**

Students interested in diving deeper into game studies might be interested in some of the following texts as possible starting points:

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*

Richard Grusin, *Remediation*

Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Greif de Peuter, *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*

Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*

Ralph Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*

Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, *The Video Game Theory Reader* and *The Video Game Theory Reader 2*

Alenda Chang, *Playing Nature: Ecology in Video Games*

Cameron Kunzelman, *The World Is Born from Zero*

Stephanie Boluk and Patrick LeMieux, *Metagaming*

There is also a growing variety of games criticism available on the web, ranging from popular writing at sites like Kotaku and Polygon, to academic journals like *Game Studies* and *Games and Culture*, to even podcasts like *Game Studies Study Buddies*. I'm very happy to give additional recommendations especially as the final project comes into focus.

## ENGLISH 4754/5754 ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

**D2L “Sandbox” Posts**

- Mandatory Posts—due 1/27
- Free Post 1
- Free Post 2
- Free Post 3
- Free Post 4
- Extra Credit Posts

*These public discussion forum posts are intended to articulate some concrete, critical response to some element of the work under discussion on a given day of the course. They should be approximately 300-500 words long, and may overlap with your contributions to class discussion and/or your final project. Additional posts will count towards extra credit.*

**Final Project Prospectus** (due for in-class workshop after Spring Break)

The prospectus is a half-page anticipation of the major thrust of your final project as you anticipate it taking shape. Generally speaking, it should lay out the aspect of gaming that you plan to discuss, and articulate a *central claim* which clearly and succinctly describes your planned intervention into game studies.

**Presentation** (last week of classes)

**Final Project** (due to D2L Dropbox by Tuesday, May 9, by 10 AM)

**OPTION #1** A traditional 10-to-12-page academic paper (roughly 3000 words) on some aspect of game studies as we have been studying it all semester.

**OPTION #2** A creative project related to games, gaming, or game studies, roughly the labor equivalent of a 10-to-12-page academic paper. This can include the creation of your own game, in whatever medium and format you like, as well as various modes of creative writing about games.

**OPTION #3** A curational also roughly the labor equivalent of a 10-to-12 page academic paper. This can include such things as a documentary podcast/YouTube explainer about a particular game.

**Abstract** (also due to D2L Dropbox by Tuesday, May 9, by 10 AM)

I cannot stress enough how open I am to your personal interests and approaches; I am genuinely open to any topic, any method, and any form that seems urgent and interesting to you (provided of course that it is the intellectual-labor equivalent of a 10-to-12-page scholarly paper, more or less). I sincerely want this paper to be something you are excited about and enjoy writing, *not* an unpleasant chore. I can't wait to read them.



## EXTENDED FINAL PAPER GUIDELINES

Fully 50% of your grade in this class derives from your final paper. In this respect this course is being organized much more like a graduate seminar than a conventional undergraduate class—which necessarily puts the impetus on you to manage your time effectively to produce a successful research paper. To help, I’ve attempted to break up the process into a set of discrete tasks that populate the second half of the semester:

**Pitch:** When You’re Ready!

**Prospectus Workshop:** after Spring Break

**Presentations:** last week of class

**Final Paper Due to Me and Abstract on D2L:** Tuesday, May 9, by 10 AM

As detailed on the syllabus, you have two general options for your paper:

You have three general options for your final project:

**OPTION #1** A traditional 10-to-12-page academic paper (roughly 3000 words) on some aspect of game studies as we have been studying it all semester.

**OPTION #2** A creative project related to games, gaming, or game studies, roughly the labor equivalent of a 10-to-12-page academic paper. This can include the creation of your own game, in whatever medium and format you like, as well as various modes of creative writing about games.

**OPTION #3** A curational also roughly the labor equivalent of a 10-to-12-page academic paper. This can include such things as a documentary podcast/YouTube explainer about a particular game.

- The “pitch” stage of the paper can start as small as a one-sentence email; it simply means running your idea by me in whatever form seems most helpful to you (a conference, an email, an after-class discussion, etc.) I ask you to do so when you feel ready; my hope is that everyone have begun to think about what they want to write about by early March.
- The **prospectus** is a half-page to full-page anticipation of the major thrust of your argument as you anticipate it taking shape. It has three parts:
  - a paragraph or two laying out the game or text you plan to discuss;
  - a paragraph articulating a *central claim* which clearly and succinctly describes your planned intervention into game studies;
  - a short prose description and/or short bibliography that lays out the archive of evidence on which you will rely to prove your central claim.

For the creative option, the prospectus will be more like a blueprint of what you hope to create.

You should think of your paper as a pointed answer to a controversial question about game studies, taking a position on some aspect of gaming and its place in culture (a) that you think is interesting and important (b) with which it would be possible to disagree.

We will talk about this aspect of the assignment much more in class, but you should also think about *media-specific analysis* as you plan your project, especially if your work is critical or curatorial; you will want to engage a game *as a game*, not as a degraded form of literature or film, which means you will want to be sure to talk about the playing experience and the production economy alongside the plot and the cinematics.

I am also of course very happy to discuss your papers-in-progress with you at any stage of the writing process, from pitch to finished product.

- We will **workshop** the prospectuses in class after Spring Break. You will share your own prospectus and provide substantive comments on two other students' prospectuses, suggesting places where you think they might refine, expand, or reconsider their argument. (Of course it's also okay to praise them!)
- Everyone will present their project in an approximately 10-15 minute presentation (including Q&A) the last week of classes.
- Your final **10-to-12-page** paper is due to me on **Tuesday, May 9, by 10 AM**. Alongside this you should also prepare a short, paragraph-length abstract describing your research conclusions and post this in the dedicated thread on the course blog.

The Duke University Writing Studio has a helpful page on how to write an abstract, which you can find here:

[http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/abstract.original.pdf](http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/abstract.original.pdf)

Again, please don't hesitate to contact me for whatever guidance I can provide at any stage of the writing process. I'm really looking forward to reading these.

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*Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.*

—Kenneth Burke, “The Philosophy of Literary Form”



ENGLISH 4745/5745  
 Prof. Gerry Canavan

**Game Studies**

Revised post-Spring-Break schedule

DAY	DATE	READING
M	3/20	<i>Disco Elysium—Day Four (“Political Vision Quests”)</i>
W	3/22	<u>DATING SIMULATOR AND TECHNO-INTIMACY</u> Patrick W. Galbraith, "Bishōjo Games: ‘Techno-Intimacy’ and the Virtually Human in Japan" [Web]
F	3/24	<i>Disco Elysium—Day Five and Beyond (through “The Tribunal”)</i>
M	3/27	Paolo Bory, “Deep New: The Shifting Narratives of Artificial Intelligence from Deep Blue to AlphaGo” [Web] Emily Willingham, “AI’s Victories in Go Inspire Better Human Game Playing” [Web]
W	3/29	<u>DISCO ELYSIUM AND GENRE</u> Carl Freedman, “Marxism, Cinema and Some Dialectics of Science Film and Film Noir” [D2L]
F	3/31	<i>Disco Elysium—whole game!</i>
M	4/3	<u>DISCO ELYSIUM AND PHILOSOPHY</u> Jeremy Signor, “Disco Elysium and Finding the Beauty in a Cynical World” [Web] Jon Lancaster, “Spinning and Grooving to Disco Nihilism in <i>Disco Elysium</i> ” [Web] Laurence Russell, “The Incredible, Absurd World of <i>Disco Elysium: The Final Cut</i> ” [Web]
W	4/5	<b>PAPER WORKSHOPS—NO CLASS</b> <i>Meet with your groups to discuss your paper prospectuses.</i>
F	4/7	<b>EASTER BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
M	4/10	<b>EASTER BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
W	4/12	<i>The Last of Us, Part One—prologue (in class)</i>
F	4/14	Amy Green, “The Reconstruction of Morality and the Evolution of Naturalism in <i>The Last of Us</i> ” [Web] Karoline A. Anderson, “Moral Distress in <i>The Last of Us</i> : Moral Agency, Character Realism, and Navigating Fixed Gaming Narratives” [Web]
M	4/17	<i>The Last of Us, “Long Long Time” (TV episode—in class)</i>
W	4/19	Ian Bogost, “Television Is Better Without Video Games” [Web]

F	4/21	Stephen Johnson, 'Go. Just take him.': PTSD and the Player-Character Relationship in <i>The Last of Us Part II</i> " [Web]
M	4/24	<u>FLOW</u> MAIN READING: Braxton Soderman, <i>Against Flow</i> (excerpt) [D2L]  ALSO INTERESTING, BUT OPTIONAL: Stephen Johnson, <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (excerpt) [D2L] Jane McGonigal, <i>Reality Is Broken</i> (excerpt) [D2L]
W	4/26	<u>COUNTERGAMES</u> molleindustria.org [Web] Galloway, "Countergaming" [D2L]
F	4/28	PRESENTATIONS (grad students)
M	5/1	PRESENTATIONS
W	5/3	PRESENTATIONS
F	5/5	PRESENTATIONS
<b>FINAL</b>		<b>FINAL DUE TUESDAY 5/9 AT 10 AM</b>