

Fall 2016  
**HONORS 1953H-911**  
**HONORS PROGRAM FIRST YEAR SEMINAR**

Thematic Title: *Video Game Culture*

F 2:00-3:15 PM

Cudahy Hall 108

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Office Phone: 414-288-6860

Office Hours: MWF 11:30 AM-12:30 PM or by appointment

This course is a survey of the burgeoning academic field of game studies, with a focus on the history and reception of video games. Each week we will explore one 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 good for you? We will also consider pop culture treatment of video games and gaming culture in film, literature, and journalism, as well as in recent documentaries like *The King of Kong*.

### **LEARNING GOALS**

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

- Identify, discuss, and understand various formal characteristics of video games;
- Apply techniques of media analysis to video games;
- Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which various game and game-related 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 video games on the levels of both form and content.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

All readings in the course are provided via D2L.

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 I have selected games that are available for free; some games, however, are only available for a small fee through Steam.

Information on how to access all material for coming weeks of the course will be available on D2L.

## GRADES AND EXPECTATIONS

This is a pass/fail course, which means your work will be evaluated outside the usual disciplinary framework of graded assignments. But this fact, and the fact that our chosen object of study is video games, should not be misunderstood to mean that our collective project is somehow frivolous or unimportant. The lack of grades is an exciting and rare opportunity for us to work and learn together in a more egalitarian context than the typical college classroom—*not* an excuse for you to blow this class off or fail to take it seriously.

## 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.

## ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class discussion is the key 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 absolutely 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 **two absences** over the course of the fall semester. **Upon the third unexcused absence, you will receive a WA (Withdrawn—Excessive Absences) for the semester.**

**Merely being present in class is insufficient to earn a passing grade.** Each student is expected to *participate in* and *contribute to* our discussions. Just being in the room is not enough.

## D2L FORUMS

In addition to class discussion, the other major evaluative component of this course is the forum at <http://d2l.mu.edu/>. In addition to being a place where you can find electronic copies of the syllabus and other course handouts, D2L will be a place where you can express your response to the material before class begins and where we can continue our discussions after class is over.

The D2L forums are an excellent place for people who may feel inhibited by in-class discussion to share their opinions with the class. You may choose either to begin a thread on a new topic or to respond to a thread already begun by one of your classmates.

**Before class next Friday, every student is required to upload a picture of their face to their D2L profile, and post a short, 250-word response to *The Stanley Parable*.**

After that, students should write **one short post approximately every other week** across the remainder of the course. **(Six posts total is the minimum expectation.)** These posts should be completed either by 11 AM before one of the class discussions devoted to that text or by 11 AM before the following class. Additional posts beyond the requirement, and posts that respond substantively to other students' arguments, are strongly encouraged.

## 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.

## LAPTOP POLICY

In-class use of laptops, Kindles, iPads, etc. is permitted 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. I reserve the right to ban individual technological devices if this becomes a problem. No use of cell phones will be permitted during class time except for emergencies or on rare occasions for legitimate class purposes; please turn off your ringers and put them out of sight.

## FLEXIBILITY

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

## 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.

Full details of Marquette's academic integrity policy are available on the Internet at <http://bulletin.marquette.edu/undergrad/academicregulations/#academichonestypolicy>.

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.

## 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 focus are intended to illustrate particular points about how and why we play video 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, etc. I'm open to whatever mode of engagement with these texts you like; the key thing for me is simply that you do engage and come prepared to discuss the text in *detail* each week.

## PRELIMINARY 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.

	DATE	KEYWORD	TEXTS
F	Sep 2	START	FIRST DAY OF CLASS
F	Sep 9	PLAY	Game: <i>The Stanley Parable</i>  Corey Mohler, <i>Existential Comics</i> : “Candyland and the Nature of the Absurd” (comic) HOPR 2953 (Spring 2015), “Interview with Davey Wreden”
F	Sep 16	ART	Game: <i>Journey</i>  Roger Ebert, “Doom,” “Critics vs. Games on Doom,” “Why Did The Chicken Cross the Genders,” “Video Games Can Never Be Art”
F	Sep 23	CRITIQUE	Game: <i>Braid</i>  Patrick Jagoda, “Fabulously Procedural: Braid, Historical Processing, and the Videogame Sensorium”

F	Sep 30	VIOLENCE	<p>Game: <i>Moirai</i> Short: “Duty Calls”</p> <p>Michael Rougeu, “Making Moirai” Ludus Novus, “Why So Few Violent Games?”</p>
F	Oct 7	IDEOLOGY	<p>Game: <i>SimCity</i></p> <p>Ava Kofman, “Les Simerables” Mike Sterry, “The Totalitarian Buddhist Who Beat SimCity” Emanuel Maiberg, “Is SimCity Homelessness a Bug or a Feature?”</p>
F	Oct 14	CAPITALISM	<p>Game: <i>Pokémon Go</i></p> <p>Sam Kriss, “Resist Pokémon Go” Katherine Cross, “Augmented Reality Games Like <i>Pokémon Go</i> Need a Code of Ethics—Now”</p>
<b>F</b>	<b>Oct 21</b>	<b>PAUSE</b>	<b>FALL BREAK—NO CLASS</b>
F	Oct 28	COGNITION	<p>Game: <i>Tetris</i></p> <p>Stephen Johnson, <i>Everything Bad Is Good for You</i> (excerpt) Jane McGonigal, <i>Reality Is Broken</i> (excerpt) Ian Bogost, “Habituation”</p>
F	Nov 4	OBSESSION	MOVIE— <i>THE KING OF KONG</i>
F	Nov 11	ADDICTION	<p>Game: <i>Candy Crush</i></p> <p>Ian Bogost, “Rage Against the Machines” and <i>Cow Clicker</i> June Thomas, “Sugar Coma” Ramin Shokrizade, “The Top F2P Monetization Tricks” Julia Lepetit and Andrew Bridgman, “The Most Realistic Game Ever” (comic)</p>
F	Nov 18	COUNTERGAMING AND ANTIGAMING	<p>Games: molleindustria.org</p> <p>Alexander Galloway, <i>Gaming</i>: “Counter gaming”</p>

**ADDITIONAL READING**

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

Ian Bogost, *How to Do Things with Video Games*

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

*Game Studies Journal* ([www.gamestudies.org](http://www.gamestudies.org))

Richard Grusin, *Remediation*

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

Frans Mayra, *An Introduction to Game Studies*

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*

**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*: @MarquetteFAME

Mark your calendars! On Tuesday, November 1 at 5 PM in Marquette Hall 105, FAME will host a “Creative Careers” Panel, featuring Marquette alumni, with a reception to follow. This is a great opportunity for our students to learn more about how to get/create that break to get started in various creative careers.

I will also be inviting you to events in the pop culture and pizza series I run periodically during the semester. I hope you can attend!