

Fall/Spring: Fundamentals of Game Studies

Instructor Contact

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Course Information

Course Name: Fundamentals of Game Studies

Credit Hours: 3

Semester/Year: XXXXXX

Location: XXXXXX

Course Description

The scholarship around video games (Game Studies) is a relatively young discipline which has already generated massive quantities of interest in scholarship. With games that range from simple to intricate and silly to serious, it is little surprise that the discipline has garnered so much scholarly attention. This course serves as an introduction to one small area of that conversation. Throughout the semester, we will be examining some of the basic concepts of Game Studies scholarship. The purpose of this course is ultimately to pose an argument about the kinds of things we can do with video games and the kinds of conversations we can have about the medium. We will discuss numerous threads about games; however, this course will still only scratch the surface of the subject.

Course Objectives

The principle objective of this course is to form a fundamental understanding of scholarship in games. Additionally, students are expected to expand upon the core principles of game studies with their own research. This will all culminate in a scholarly project of the student's own design focusing on a scholarly thread within the field. By the end of the semester students are expected to possess a working knowledge on the basics of game studies including (but by no means limited to):

- Textuality in Games
- Ludology V. Narratology
- Agency and Identity
- Genre
- Procedural Rhetoric
- Literacy and Learning

These principles represent tools that a successful student will be able to use to say something interesting about games.

Required Texts and Materials

Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. MIT Press, 2010.
 Flanagan, Mary & Helen Nissenbaum. *Values at Play in Digital Games*. MIT Press, 2014.
 Gee, James Paul. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
 Mukherjee, Souvik. *Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
 Supplemental readings which will be posed to Webcourses

Course Policies

Missed Assignments/Make-Ups/Extra Credit

Late work: Any late work will receive a zero. Exceptions will be made only with a university approved excuse and will be handled on a case-by-case basis. There will be no extra credit given.

Grading: Your grade is broken down as follows:

Discussion Board Posts:	15%
Mini Assignments 1, 2, 3:	15% (5+5+5)
Participation in Class:	10%
Final Project:	40%
Project Presentation (Final Exam):	20%

Grading Scale:

A : 100-93%	-Getting an A in this class is not a simple matter of <i>just doing the assignments</i> . You are
A- : 92.9-90%	being asked to think critically about the scholarship surrounding games, and you
B+: 89.9-87%	should be doing work with that material. To be clear, reading, annotating, and
B : 86.9-84%	understanding the scholarship is a solid step one (C territory). Applying it to games or
B- : 83.9-80%	gaming in a useful way is a great step two (into the B range). In order to truly succeed
C+: 79.9-77%	in this class (talking about moving into the vaunted echelon of the A), you need to make
C : 76.9-74%	a case for what the connections you draw mean. How do you expect another scholar to
C- : 73.9-70%	do something useful with what you say? This holds true for reading reflections, the
D+: 69.9-67%	mini assignments, and the final project.

D : 66.9-64%

D-: 63.9-60%

F : 59.9-00%

Attendance/Participation Policy

Your participation is extremely important to this class being a success. While there is not a grade just for showing up, there is one for contributions that you make to the discussion in class. To help facilitate this, you are being asked to do discussion posts in Webcourses **before** class time (also for a grade). You probably will not fail this course for not doing these activities, but do you really want to shave a full letter grade off your total score? Doing well in the participation department is simple: read what is assigned, post your reflections to the discussion board before class, and throw a hand up during class.

Discussion Groups

Each student will be placed in a discussion group (D1, D2, D3, D4) at the end of the first week of class. Keep your discussion group in mind when looking at the weekly schedule because it indicates to which reading you will **respond** in your reading reflection. **Yes**, you are expected to read everything. You are expected to come to class ready to talk about everything. However, these discussion groups mean that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the class is going a little bit deeper into every single text. It is my hope that this will lead to rich discussions in class about every single reading.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be subject to appropriate referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule for further information. I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, don't cheat by giving answers to others or taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not ask me to change (or expect me to change) your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact the professor at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations. No accommodations will be provided until the student has met

with the professor to request accommodations. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Ferrell Commons, 7F, Room 185, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Copyright

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Third-Party Software and FERPA

During this course, you might have the opportunity to use public online services and/or software applications sometimes called third-party software such as a blog or wiki. While some of these could be required assignments, you need not make any personally identifying information on a public site. Do not post or provide any private information about yourself or your classmates. Where appropriate you may use a pseudonym or nickname. Some written assignments posted publicly may require personal reflection/comments, but the assignments will not require you to disclose any personally identity-sensitive information. If you have any concerns about this, please contact your instructor.

Modules

The Webcourses shell for this course will be divided into five Modules, which you should follow over the course of the semester. Modules 2-4 will each contain a mini assignment.

Module 1: Perspectives on Video Games

Module 2: Games as Texts

Module 3: Genre and Games

Module 4: Rhetorical Approaches

Module 5: Intersections

Weekly Schedule: Fundamentals of Game Studies

Date	Topic	What to Read <i>Before Class</i>	What's Due
Week 1			
	<p>Perspectives on Video Games:</p> <p>Art, Rhetoric, Genres, and More!</p>	<p>Ebert, "Video Games Can Never Be Art" http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art</p> <p>McKernan, "The Morality of Play" (Webcourses)</p>	<p>Financial Aid Activity: "What I Hope to Get from This Class" due on Webcourses due by the end of the week.</p>
Week 2			
	<p>Games as Texts:</p> <p>Narratology/Ludology and Authenticity/Validity</p>	<p>Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (Webcourses) D1</p> <p>Juul, "A Certain Level of Abstraction" (Webcourses) D2</p> <p>Brackin, "Authenticity Versus Validity" (Webcourses) D3</p> <p>Elson et. Al, "More than Stories with Buttons" (Webcourses) D4</p>	
Week 3			
	<p>Games as Texts 2:</p> <p>Story and Play</p>	<p>Mukhrjee, <i>Video Games and Storytelling</i> Ch1-5 D1-4</p>	
Week 4			
	<p>Games as Texts 3:</p> <p>Agency and Identity</p>	<p>Mukhrjee, <i>Video Games and Storytelling</i> Ch6-8 D1-3</p> <p>Harrell, "Agency Play" (Webcourses) D4</p>	
Week 5			
	<p>Genre and Games:</p> <p>Definitions and Evolution</p>	<p>Clearwater, "What Defines Video Game Genre?" (Webcourses) D1,D2</p> <p>Arsenault "Video Game Genre, Evolution, and Innovation" (Webcourses)D3,D4</p>	<p>Mini-Assignment 1 due by the end of the week</p>
Week 6			
	<p>Genre and Games 2:</p> <p>Classification and Critique</p>	<p>Aarseth, Smedstad, and Sunnanå, "A Multidimensional Typology of Games" (Webcourses) D1,D2</p> <p>Apperley "Genre and Game Studies" (Webcourses)D3,D4</p>	

Week 7			
	Rhetorical Approaches: Learning and Application	Gee, "Stories Probes, and Games" (Webcourses) D1-4 Gee, <i>What Video Games Have to Teach Us</i> Ch1-4 D1-4	Mini-Assignment 2 due by the end of the week
Week 8			
	Rhetorical Approaches 2: Learning and Application 2	Gee, <i>What Video Games Have to Teach Us</i> Ch 5-8 D1-4	
Week 9			
	Rhetorical Approaches 3: Procedural Rhetoric	Bogost, <i>Persuasive Games</i> Ch1-4 D2-4 Davisson and Gehm, "Gaming Citizenship" (Webcourses) D1	
Week 10			
	Rhetorical Approaches 4: Procedural Rhetoric 2	Bogost, <i>Persuasive Games</i> Ch5-8 D1, D2, D4 Harper, "Rules Rhetoric and Genre" (Webcourses) D3	
Week 11			
	Rhetorical Approaches 5: Values and Stakes	Bogost, <i>Persuasive Games</i> Ch9 D2 Flanagan and Nissenbaum, <i>Values at Play</i> Ch1-7 D1, D3, D4	
Week 12			
	Rhetorical Approaches 6: Values and Stakes 2	Flanagan and Nissenbaum, <i>Values at Play</i> Ch8-9 D1-3 Schulzke, "The Critical Power of Virtual Dystopias" (Webcourses) D4	
Week 13			
	Let's Talk about Games!: Bring materials to work on your projects while I conference with you individually.	No readings	Mini-Assignment 3 due by the end of the week
Week 14			
	Intersections: What we do with Games	Jagoda, "Gamification" (Webcourses) D1, D2 Foster, "Wii're Here for a Good Time" (Webcourses) D3, D4	
Week 15			

	<p>Let's Talk about Games 2!:</p> <p>Final check-in for projects/group peer review of projects in process .</p>	<p>No readings, but have some progress on your projects so that you can get meaningful feedback from your peers.</p>	
Week 16			
	<p>Final Exam:</p> <p>Project Presentations</p>	<p>No Readings</p>	<p>Final project due by class time. Be ready to present when your name is called.</p>

Mini Assignments

Below, you will see instructions for the three mini assignments. The goal of these activities is to get you thinking about the key topics in the class and to encourage you to explore your own ideas about the intersection of games and rhetoric. These assignments are short, so economy of language is key. The formal requirements for each of these assignments is intentionally open ended. Take some chances in your thinking.

Mini Assignment 1 (Games as Texts): Pose an argument about textuality in games in 650-750 words.

The focus of this mini assignment is to discuss some aspect of the medium of video games as a text. There are a number of avenues that you can take with this. Are you interested in the effect that a game has on the player? Maybe you have something to add to the Narratology/Ludology debate. Are you concerned with choice or identity? These are all fine ways to go.

Mini Assignment 2 (Genre and Games): Argue for what we can do with genre in 450-550 words.

Your responsibility in this mini assignment is to build on the the discussion of video game genres. The authors from class do not always agree with each other. There is definitely some interesting stuff there. Perhaps there is a particular framework that you want to try out. Maybe you want to comment on the interplay between genre studies scholars and the genre conversation in games studies. Sounds good.

Mini Assignment 3 (Rhetorical Approaches): Make an argument with rhetorical stakes in 750-850 words.

In this last mini assignment, you will be using one of the approaches which we studied in class. These scholars make cases for what we can do with games and how we can think about games. It is therefore your job to move that discussion forward. This can take the form of advancing a position that one of these authors take or outright rejecting their stance. There are three separate books in this module, so it would likely be wise to pick one as your core source (to avoid just summarizing). This is perhaps the easiest mini assignment in which to lose your voice. Make sure to say something!

Things to Remember for all three Mini Assignments:

- In each of these mini assignments, you need to engage with the key concepts from the module.
- You will be citing authors from the appropriate module.
- You are encouraged to do some outside research on these.
- In each Mini Assignment, you can write about a game, group of games, or aspect of games.
- There are some possible directions outlined in each mini assignment, but if you have an idea that is not on the assignment sheet, run with it.
- It is your job to add something to the discussion. Do not just rehash what's been said.
- Your argument should be interesting and defensible.
- You have a 100 word window for the length and are expected to write with that constraint in mind. The point is to say something interesting in a tight space.
- You are expected to use proper MLA format in these assignments. Video games absolutely need to be cited.

Final Project and Presentation

Over the course of the semester, you should be thinking about what you want to say for your final project. This will be the culmination of the hard work and investigation which you have done and will take the form of 3,000 words of content and a seven-minute presentation. Below are three steps to beginning your work followed by specifics for the project and presentation.

Step One: Select a Subject

In order to say something interesting, you need to select a subject that you feel has some substance. Is there a theme in games that you want to focus on? Maybe there is a particular game that demonstrates rhetorical promise? Do you think that there is a trend in games culture that warrants some attention? The point is to find an issue that lends itself to discussion with respect to the field of game studies. It is perfectly permissible (even encouraged) to use the groundwork from one of your mini assignments as a starting place.

Step Two: Choose an Approach

You know what you want to talk about. Now, you need to figure out how you want to have that conversation. The topics covered in this class are all fair game. To recap those topics are:

- Narratology/Ludology
- Authenticity
- Story
- Forms of Play
- Agency
- Identity
- Genre and Classification
- Literacy and Learning
- Procedural Rhetoric
- Values at Play
- Gamification

The advantage to this approach is that a little bit of your background reading is already done. However, if you really want to talk about issues that were not covered in class, that is fine too, provided that you have a chat with me about your ideas. The simple fact is that even though there is a lot packed into this semester, it would be impossible to meaningfully talk about everything. Some sample topics that I'd be happy to talk to you about would be:

- Identification/Engagement
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Race
- Electronic Literature/Interactive Fiction
- Roleplaying

Regardless of the approach that you choose, you will need to do further research on the topic. This project is designed to expand your understanding of the intersection of the field.

Step Three: Get the Approach Talking to the Subject

Ideally, you will have chosen an approach in Step Two that naturally lends itself to having a discussion about Step One. With this in mind, what is there to say? What is interesting? Once you identify an interesting phenomenon, dig into it. What is at stake here? What can we learn based on the connections which you are drawing? The point of this project is not mere synthesis. In addition to telling your audience about your research, you have to tell us what kinds of new knowledge there is as a result of your investigation. It would be extremely wise to spend some time workshopping these ideas. Share them with your peers in class. Bring your game plan to the Writing Center before you have a final draft. Shoot me an email or visit me during office hours.

How to Do the Project:

Probably the easiest way to tackle the actual project is to write a standard academic paper. If you choose this route, all the standard trappings of MLA formatting apply. Please note that you are being asked to write 3,000 words of *content*. A Works Cited Page is not content. (You still absolutely need to have one but you should not include that when you are getting your word count). If, however, you want to go the multimodal route, that is perfectly fine. Some non-paper ways to handle this project include (but are not limited to): WordPress, Google Sites, Prezi, and Twine. The length requirement is still the same for these options, and they will likely require more work on your part. However, doing that extra work now can do wonders to spruce up any portfolios that you may be doing for the job hunt or grad school applications.

How to Do the Presentation:

On the day of the final, you will be presenting on your research to the rest of the class. You have seven minutes to give that presentation. While working on your presentation, consider the following: A 3,000 word paper is in the neighborhood of ten pages. This would take about twenty minutes to read aloud. You have seven minutes. It would be extremely unwise to stand at the front of the class and read your paper to us. Instead, develop a presentation that highlights the important material from your research and explain to us why that material matters. Visuals go a long way with this. If you chose to write a paper, a PowerPoint or Prezi would be a good way to handle the presentation. If you chose to do one of the multimodal options for the project, by all means show us that in your presentation. However, do not simply read to us. Highlight important sections and present your material in a way that allows the audience to get the purpose and findings of your work in seven minutes.

Nuts and Bolts

- 3,000 words of content/7-minute presentation
- Proper MLA formatting throughout
- If you use it, cite it (this includes images)
- Due on the day of the final at the beginning of class