

JOU 4930: 4C78—The Cultural Impact of Video Games

Online syllabus: <http://www.dennisfrohlich.com/videogames/>

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. – CSE E220 – Summer 2014 – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich

Office: Weimer XXXX

Office Hours: 2:00 p.m. to 3:15 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday. Also by appointment (please email me three times that work for you)

Email: Dennis.Frohlich@ufl.edu

Required Text

Barton, M., & Loguidice, B. (2009). *Vintage Games: An Insider Look at the History of Grand Theft Auto, Super Mario, and the Most Influential Games of All Time*. Focal Press.

This book is relatively inexpensive and is an easy read. In lecture, we'll cover broad trends in video games, as well as specific games that have made a significant impact on the industry and culture; however, we don't have time to cover every important game in sufficient detail. The readings from this book will give you a more in-depth look at some of the important games, many you may have played!

Because of the shortened nature of Summer B classes, I won't be assigning every chapter in this book as required reading, though I strongly recommend you read the optional chapters when the class concludes.

Course Objectives and Description

Video games as a mass medium have developed relatively recently and became a pop culture phenomenon in America soon after their inception. While many thought video games were simply a fad, their staying power over the decades has established them as one of the most popular—and profitable—forms of mass communication. Nearly every youth in America plays video games, and every form of screen—from television to computer to cell phone—is able to play games. This course will examine the history of video games in America, with special focus on how video games have affected our culture, particularly when it comes to freedom of expression, changes in technology, and the First Amendment.

Course objectives include:

- Knowing the history of video games and major controversies
- Understanding how video games as a technology and medium have shaped American culture
- Articulating why certain video games and trends have been so controversial

Students do not need any prior knowledge of video games, though it is likely many of you have already spent many hours with video games—and continue to do so in the present. This is NOT

a course about game design, programming, business, or anything associated with the technical production of video games. If you are interested in making video games, though, this course is sure to be useful.

Even if you have no interest in working in the game industry, this course will still be valuable to you as a mass communicator. Video games are here to stay, and many of the ongoing conversations on controversial topics like sex and violence in video games are part of the same stream of dialogue surrounding other mass media.

Class Meetings

The class will meet Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 to 6:15 p.m. in CSE (Computer Science Engineering) room E220 unless otherwise noted.

Lectures and PowerPoints

Class time will be spent primarily in lecture, though there will be ample opportunities for discussion about video games. Students are encouraged to share their opinions and to respect the views of others.

PowerPoints will not be available before or after class lectures. However, an outline of the day's topics will be made available on e-Learning before class begins to assist you in taking notes.

Attendance

Because discussion is a major component of the class, attendance is required and will be taken each class via a sign-in sheet (when attendance is taken will vary from period to period). Each attended class period is worth 10 points; 100 points total. Leaving class after you've signed in does not count as attendance for that day: staying the entire class period is considered attendance, unless other arrangements have been made. You may miss 2 attendance days (unexcused), after which point each additional day absent will result in a 10-point deduction in your final grade.

If you miss class due to illness or any other EXCUSED reason, email me BEFORE class starts. If this is not possible, email me as soon as possible. You are responsible for all material missed. For more information about missing class due to illness, see the section on Special Needs.

Computer Use

This course requires the use of E-Learning and email. Assignments, grades, and discussion boards will be found on e-Learning. Students are responsible for reading announcements and emails from class. If you bring a computer to class, *please use it for class-related activities only* so as not to disturb students around you.

Readings

It is encouraged that you complete all readings before the start of lecture on the day assigned. Readings will not always be discussed fully in class, though the topics from the readings will

illuminate that day's lecture. If you cannot complete all readings before class, be sure to complete readings before each test, as some of the test questions will reference the readings.

For each class period, I've also listed a number of optional readings. You will not be tested over any of this material.

Course Requirements

Exam 1:	200 points
Exam 2:	250 points
5 Discussion Posts:	250 points
10 Discussion Responses:	200 points
<u>Attendance</u>	<u>100 points</u>
Total:	1,000 points

Grading

Your final grade will be determined based on how many total experience points you earn in the class. Each grade is associated with a level and rank.

GRADE	POINTS NEEDED	LEVEL	RANK
Perfect	1,000+	13	Legend
A	920-999	12	Lord/Empress
A-	900-919	11	General
B+	880-899	10	Master
B	820-879	9	Arch Knight
B-	800-819	8	Ravager
C+	780-799	7	Shadow Knight
C	720-779	6	Dragoon
C-	700-719	5	Paladin
D+	680-699	4	Ranger
D	620-679	3	Archer
D-	600-619	2	Fighter
E	0-599	1	Grunt

The grading scale is non-negotiable. A final grade of 879, for instance, is a B. All grades are final unless questions about grades are addressed in writing within **1 weeks** after the grade is posted. If you have concerns about your grades please check with me *sooner* in the semester rather than *later*.

More information about UF grading policies can be found here:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Make-up Work

Make-up work is not permitted. However, under an extreme circumstance, if you have an excused absence AND the instructor was notified in advance, an exception may be made.

Exams

There will be two exams in the course, which will make up 45% of your grade. Exams will be multiple choice. The exams will be completed at the start of lecture on assigned days. Each exam will have 50 questions. The first exam is worth 200 points; the second is worth 250. The exams are equal length, but the first is worth less so that if my style of testing is jarring to you, it won't negatively affect your grade as much.

More details will be made available as we approach each exam.

Discussion Posts

In this class I want you to engage with the material and think critically about video games. Most weeks you are required to post to the discussion board, five posts total. Multiple discussion topics will be available each week. You are free to respond to any topic you choose. Some discussion topics will have a reading or two that goes along with it, so please read these so that you can respond accurately.

If you want to post more than once, feel free!

Discussion posts need to be at least 300 words long. I expect quality posts, so that means you will be graded on spelling, grammar, your thesis, and your ability to argue your point with evidence. Posts that score the most points will be those that reference specific video games and incorporate multimedia (images, videos, and/or links to related resources). Also, you are encouraged to include references if they are relevant to the discussion.

More information about how to write a good post, and how they will be graded, will be available at the beginning of the course. Posts are due by 11:59 p.m. on Friday each week.

Each post is worth 50 points. I will accept posts up to 24 hours late for half credit.

Discussion Responses

In addition to posting each week, you are also required to respond to two other posts. There is no set length for these posts, but students who post a substantive response (several paragraphs) will receive more points than responses that are only a couple sentences in length. Again, proper writing mechanics are expected.

You are free to respond to more than two posts if you choose!

Responses are also due by 11:59 p.m. on Friday each week. Each response is worth 20 points. I will accept responses up to 24 hours late for half credit.

Extra Credit

Video games are a huge topic area, and no one person can know everything. You can earn extra credit by helping improve this course. You can earn up to **20 extra credit points** using any combination of methods below.

The first way to earn extra credit is by suggesting additional course readings. You can suggest readings for topics we've already discussed, or for topics we've yet to discuss (e.g., if it's week 3 and you find an interesting reading about early video games, you can still submit it). Please submit a copy of the reading, citation information, and/or the URL if it's an online reading. If the reading is interesting and I include it as an **optional reading**, you will earn **5 points**. If the reading is really spectacular and I include it as a **required reading**, you will earn **10 points**. If I don't find your reading interesting or useful, I'll let you know and you are free to submit a different reading.

To earn **10 points**, submit both a reading and a series of discussion prompts. I may use your discussion questions this semester, or may save it for another semester.

Another way to earn **10 points** is to bring a game to class that is relevant for that day's discussion. Talking about games and watching videos of gameplay is one thing, but being able to actually play significant and important games is even better. I have the components needed to hook up consoles and/or a laptop to the projector in the classroom. First, select a game that is appropriate for that day's lecture (check the course calendar). Second, make sure we can easily play about 10 minutes of the game: in other words, if you want to show us a specific scene or portion of a game, make sure the save file quickly loads at the appropriate spot. If you want to bring a game in to show the class, please let me know ahead of time so that I can work it into that day's lecture.

Other extra credit opportunities may be available as the course commences.

Plagiarism

All work completed for this course must respect the intellectual property of others. When using somebody else's copyrighted material, whether words, images, media, or ideas, proper credit must be given. If direct quotations are used, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and properly cited. If copyrighted material is used indirectly, it must still be properly cited!

If in doubt, include a citation. If you have any questions at all, ask your instructors *before* the project is submitted. *Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse!*

Honor Code

UF students are bound by the Honor Pledge which states, "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code."

On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied:

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

If you are aware of academic dishonesty, please notify the instructor or contact the Student Honor Court (352.392.1631) or the Cheating Hotline (352.392.6999).

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/> Students will be notified when evaluations are open, which will be toward the end of the course.

Special Needs

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students will provide documentation of the necessary accommodation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester. This course conforms to all requirements of the ADA and handles with sensitivity all matters related to gender, race, sexual orientation, age, religion or disability. Please alert the instructor if any issues arise.

If you become sick during the course of the semester, or have some major personal crisis going on, please let me know as soon as possible so I can help you work around it. When I was an undergraduate, I was very sick one semester and missed a lot of classes, but my professors were very willing to work with me. So I'm sensitive to these issues and am willing to work with you, but if you don't tell me there's a problem I can't help you.

If you need help, don't hesitate to call the UF Counseling & Wellness Center at 352.392.1575 or the UF Police Department at 352.392.1111.

Tentative Course Schedule

NOTE Online readings will be posted to the course website

Week 1

Lecture 1, July 1: Course Introduction: Why Video Games are Important; the First Video Games, 1950s—1960s: *Spacewar!* by Steve Russell, and *Pong* by Ralph Baer. Arcades and First Generation Consoles, 1971—1977. The Maganvox Odyssey, Coleco Telstar, and the Atari Home-version of Pong.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Bonus Online Chapter: Spacewar!
- Vintage Games: Bonus Online Chapter: Pong

Lecture 2, July 3: The Video Game Crash of 1977; the Golden Age of Arcade Games, 1978 through early 1980s; Second Generation Consoles, 1976—1983. The Fairchild Channel F, Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Odyssey2, Intellivision, ColecoVision, and Bally Astrocade. The Video Game Crash of 1983.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 13: Pac-Man
- Vintage Games: Chapter 14: Pole Position
- Vintage Games: Chapter 16: Space Invaders

DUE: Discussion Post 1, Discussion Responses 1 and 2 by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 4.

Week 2

Lecture 3, July 8: Early computer games; early handheld games; Third Generation Consoles, 1983—1992. The Nintendo Entertainment System, Sega Master System, and Atari 7800.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 11: King's Quest
- Vintage Games: Chapter 23: Ultima
- Vintage Games: Chapter 25: Zork

Lecture 4, July 10: Fourth Generation Consoles, 1988—1999. The TurboGrafx-16, Mega Drive/Genesis, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and Neo Geo; handhelds in the 1990s; arcades in the 1990s.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 10: John Madden Football
- Vintage Games: Chapter 17: Street Fighter II
- Vintage Games: Chapter 20: Tetris

DUE: Discussion Post 2, Discussion Responses 3 and 4 by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 11.

Week 3

Lecture 5, July 15: Computer games in the 1990s; the creation of the ESRB; discussion on the effectiveness of ratings systems.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 4: Diablo
- Vintage Games: Chapter 6: Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty
- Vintage Games: Chapter 12: Myst

Lecture 6, July 17: EXAM 1; Fifth Generation Consoles, 1993—2006. The Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Virtual Boy, and Atari Jaguar. Sixth Generation Consoles, 1998—2013. The Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Nintendo GameCube, and Microsoft Xbox.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 7: Final Fantasy VII
- Vintage Games: Chapter 18: Super Mario 64/Tomb Raider

DUE: Discussion Post 3, Discussion Responses 5 and 6 by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 18.

Week 4

Lecture 7, July 22: Seventh Generation Consoles, 2004-present. Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Nintendo Wii. Eighth Generation Consoles, 2011-present. Nintendo Wii-U, Sony PlayStation4, Nintendo 3DS, Sony PlayStation Vita, Xbox One. Current issues in gaming.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 9: Grand Theft Auto III
- Vintage Games: Chapter 22: The Sims

Lecture 8, July 24: Violence in video games: Common views on violence; famous violent games; the case of Columbine; violence and aggression research.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 5: Doom
- Anderson, C. A., Shibuya, A., Ihori, N., Swing, E. L., Bushman, B. J., Sakamoto, A., Rothstein, H. R., & Saleem, M. (2010). Violent video game effects on aggression, empathy, and prosocial behavior in Eastern and Western countries: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(2), 151-173. (Article for download on e-learning).
- Ferguson, C. J. (2007). The good, the bad and the ugly: A meta-analytic review of positive and negative effects of violent video games. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 78, 309-316. (Article for download on e-learning).

DUE: Discussion Post 4, Discussion Responses 7 and 8 by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 25.

Week 5

Lecture 9, July 29: Gender and sexuality: body images of video game characters; sexual content in games; gender roles of video game characters.

Required Readings

- Sex in games, five years after "Hot Coffee". How the Grand Theft Auto scandal changed videogames and the state of digital intimacy, with thoughts from the developers of God of War and Heavy Rain.
- Lara Croft and the reinvention of game heroes. How Tomb Raider changed games, and why its leading lady still matters.

Lecture 10, July 31: Video game addiction; portrayals of race in video games; portrayals of LGBT characters.

Required Readings

- The psychology of: free-to-play
- Gaming (ad)diction: Discourse, identity, time and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth.
- Moving forward on race in games: BioWare Montreal designer Manveer Heir interview.

DUE: Discussion Post 5, Discussion Responses 9 and 10 by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, August 1.

Week 6

Lecture 11, August 5: Educational video games; Online gaming communities; harassment in online communities.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 24: Ultima Online
- Sexual harassment in the world of video gaming
- Homophobia and harassment in the online gaming age: Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered gamers face an uphill battle.
- Annetta, L. A. (2008). Video games in education: Why they should be used and how they are being used. *Theory Into Practice*, 47, 229-239.

Lecture 12, August 7: EXAM 2.