

JOU 4930: The Cultural Impact of Video Games

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

Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. – Turlington L005 – Summer B – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich

Office: Weimer G040

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—are 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 and the First Amendment.

Course objectives include:

- Knowing the history of video games
- Understanding how video games 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 have interest 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 Turlington Hall room L005 unless otherwise noted. I do plan on using all of the class time available to us, so don't expect to be let out of class early. We will, though, have a short break midway through each class period.

Lectures and PowerPoints

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

This is a media-intensive course, so many videos will be shown in class of important video games and concepts. Because each lecture contains so many videos, full PowerPoints will not be available before class, as I don't want you to distract those around you by watching class videos while I'm showing them. However, stripped down versions of the PPTs will be made available on E-Learning before class begins to assist you in taking notes.

After class, media PPTs will also be available, which will primarily contain videos and links discussed in class, as well as videos we didn't get a chance to watch in case you are interested in learning more about specific games.

Attendance

Because discussion is a 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). Should you come into class late, it is your responsibility to sign-in. You may miss one day (unexcused). Unexcused absences after this will result in a 2.5% reduction in your final grade (25 points). There is no limit to how many unexcused absences you can have.

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.

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.

Readings

It is encouraged that you complete all readings before the start of lecture on the day assigned. Readings will not 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. I realize that a six-week summer class is very short, and you will probably struggle to find time to even do the required readings. That said, the course website will be available long after the class concludes, so if you find this subject matter interesting, bookmark the reading page and check out these optional readings when you have more time to devote to them.

Course Requirements

Exam 1:	300 points
Exam 2:	300 points
Six Discussion Posts:	200 points
<u>12 Discussion Responses:</u>	<u>200 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. If you are into RPGs, each grade is associated with a level and rank.

GRADE	POINTS NEEDED	LEVEL	RANK
A	920-1,000	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 week** 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/Exams

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 60% of your grade. Exams will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. The tests are not simply multiple choice, like many classes use, as I want you to know more than just simple facts like when the Atari 2600 was released, or who the creator of Super Mario is. Because much of the course will focus on the cultural effects of video games, I want you to show me that you understand *why* and *how* video games have influenced American culture.

The multiple choice section will be completed at the start of lecture on assigned days. The written portion will be conducted through e-Learning, as most students prefer to type essay responses than write them by hand. On the day of the exam, you will be given 24 hours to complete the written portion.

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. Each week you are required to post to the discussion board, six posts total. Because there are so many people in the class, 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,

incorporate multimedia (images, videos, and/or links to related resources). Also, you are encouraged to include references if they are relevant to the discussion.

We will not be writing a formal paper in this course, per se, but think of these six discussion posts as smaller papers.

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 midnight on Friday each week. Late posts will not be accepted.

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.

Responses will be due by midnight on Sunday each week. Since everybody's post is due by Friday, that gives you two extra days to respond to posts.

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

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 **30 extra credit points** this way 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 **7 points**. If I don't find your reading interesting, 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.

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).

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 Readings will be posted to the course website

Week 1

Lecture 1, July 2: 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
- Vintage Games: Chapter 16: Space Invaders

Lecture 2, July 4: NO CLASS. Independence Day

Week 2

Lecture 3, July 9: 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

Lecture 4, July 11: 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: Quest for the Crown
- Vintage Games: Chapter 19: Super Mario Bros.
- Vintage Games: Chapter 21: The Legend of Zelda
- Vintage Games: Chapter 23: Ultima
- Vintage Games: Chapter 25: Zork

Week 3

Lecture 5, July 16: Fourth Generation Consoles, 1988—1999. The TurboGrafx-16, Mega Drive/Genesis, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and Neo Geo; portables and arcades in the 1990s; and the creation of the ESRB.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 10: John Madden Football
- Vintage Games: Chapter 12: Myst
- Vintage Games: Chapter 15: Sim City
- Vintage Games: Chapter 17: Street Fighter II

Lecture 6, July 18: EXAM 1, First 40 minutes of class. Topics to be discussed after the exam: Fifth Generation Consoles, 1993—2006. The Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Virtual Boy, and Atari Jaguar; computers in the 1990s.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 4: Diablo
- Vintage Games: Chapter 7: Final Fantasy VII
- Vintage Games: Chapter 18: Super Mario 64/Tomb Raider
- Vintage Games: Chapter 24: Ultima Online

Week 4

Lecture 7, July 23: Sixth Generation Consoles, 1998—2013. The Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Nintendo GameCube, and Microsoft Xbox. 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.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 9: Grand Theft Auto III
- Vintage Games: Chapter 22: The Sims
- Nintendo's handheld legacy: From Game & Watch to DSi. A look at how Nintendo came to dominate the handheld market, written in 2009. By all accounts, they continue to dominate, though they face increasing competition from mobile games.
- A revealing look at the economics behind mobile games, especially free-to-play games: The fall of Angry Birds.

Lecture 8, July 25: Violence in video games: Common views on violence; famous violent games; the case of Columbine; violence and aggression research; violence in other media; video games and the military.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 5: Doom
- The agony and the Exidy: A history of video game violence and the legacy of Death Race. Scholarly article.
- 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). This scholar believes that the evidence for aggressive effects after playing violent video games, and reviews literature in support of this argument.
- 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). Ferguson offers a contrarian view to Anderson, citing numerous problems with violence video game research.

Week 5

Lecture 9, July 30: 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.
- Lara Croft: Feminist icon or cyberbimbo? On the limits of textual analysis This reading is a little denser than what we've been reading in this course, but I'm confident you can handle it.

Lecture 10, August 1: The Dark Side of Video Games: Addiction, fitness and obesity, portrayals of race in video games, LGBT characters in video games.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 3: Dance Dance Revolution
- Moving forward on race in games: BioWare Montreal designer Manveer Heir interview.

- Gaming (ad)diction: Discourse, identity, time and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth. Scholarly article, one perspective on gaming addiction.

Week 6

Lecture 11, August 6: EXAM 2, First 40 minutes of class. Topics to be discussed after the exam: Video games in the news media. Using video games for education.

Lecture 12, August 8: NO CLASS. I will be attending an academic conference.