

JOU 4930: 11F7 – The Cultural Impact of Video Games

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

Mondays, 3-3:50 p.m., Wednesdays, 3-4:55 p.m. – Weimer 1084 – Spring 2014 – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich

Office: Weimer 2026

Office Hours: 1:15-2:45 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. 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!

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 and major controversies
- 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 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 Mondays from 3-:350 p.m. and Wednesdays from 3-4:55 p.m. in Weimer 1084 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, take a short break on Wednesdays midway through the period.

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.

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, an outline of the day's topics 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 major component of the class, attendance is required and will be taken 12 times throughout the semester via a sign-in sheet. 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. Should you come into class late, it is your responsibility to sign-in. You may miss 2 attendance days (unexcused) throughout the semester.

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.

Assignments

Just as in a role-playing game where you can design your own character and accentuate the attributes or skills that are of interest to you, the assignments in this class are treated like a game: you have the freedom to choose which assignments you want to complete based on your personal interests. All assignments involve understanding course concepts, analysis, and writing, though some assignments might be better suited for your personal interests than others.

For the first half of the semester, you will choose TWO (2) of the following four assignments:

- Two tests
- Five discussion board posts plus responses
- Five blog entries
- One video game analysis

If you like the assignments you chose, you can continue with them for the second half of the semester; once again, choosing 2/4. If, however, you want to change and do different assignments the second half of the semester, that's fine too.

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Attendance (total of 10 days):	100 points
Assignment 1 (first half):	225 points
Assignment 2 (first half):	225 points
Assignment 1 (first half):	225 points
<u>Assignment 2 (first half):</u>	<u>225 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
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

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.

Assignment Descriptions

Remember, you will choose TWO (2) of the following assignments during the first half of the semester, and TWO (2) of the following assignments the second half of the semester (they can be the same each time, or different).

Exams: Each half semester will have 2 exams, 4 total throughout the semester. 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 Discussion posts allow you to engage with the material and think critically about video games. Each half semester, you will complete 5 discussion posts, 10 total throughout the semester. Multiple discussion topics will be available each week; you only need to respond to one. 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.

More information about how to write a good post, and how they will be graded, will be available at the beginning of the course.

In addition to posting each week, you are also required to RESPOND to two other posts. There is no set length for these responses, 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!

Blog Posts In teaching this course in the past, I found that many students want to go into game journalism. UF does not offer a course in game journalism, though, so to get into this profession you'll need some clips to show future employers. The blog, then, will allow you to write about games in a professional manner. Each half semester, 5 blog posts are due, 10 total throughout the semester. For half of the posts, you are free to post on whatever topic you like as long as it's related to video games. For the other half of the posts, I will provide some guidance on what to post about.

Posts should be well-written and contain few, if any, grammatical, spelling, or syntax mistakes. If posts incorporate pictures or videos, proper credit needs to be given. Posts need to include citations, either from the course readings or other outside sources.

More information about creating a quality blog will be available at the beginning of the course.

Video Game Analysis In this course, we will examine many controversial games. Reading about controversial games, though, will only get you so far. A frequent criticism gamers have of the media is that journalists often don't play the games they criticize in their reports.

For this assignment, then, you are required to thoroughly analyze one controversial video game. For this analysis, you must first play through the game, completing as much as possible (ideally beating the game; in the case of open-world games, completing as large a variety of missions or quests as possible). Make notes about what you observe and analyze the controversial portions of the game: what are other people saying about this game? Are their criticisms justified? How does this controversial game compare to other, similar games?

The analysis will be a 10-12 page paper, submitted via e-Learning. More details about paper specifics will be available at the beginning of the course.

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 5 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 **3 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

Monday, January 6: Course Introduction: Why Video Games are Important to Study

Wednesday, January 8: 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

Week 2

Monday, January 13: Discussion of course assignments; The Video Game Crash of 1977; the Golden Age of Arcade Games, 1978 through early 1980s.

Wednesday, January 15: 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 16: Space Invaders
- Vintage Games: Bonus Online Chapter: Defender
- Vintage Games: Chapter 13: Pac-Man
- Vintage Games: Chapter 14: Pole Position

Week 3

Monday, January 20: NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY

Wednesday, January 22: 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 4

Monday, January 27: Third Generation Consoles concluded.

Wednesday, January 29: Fourth Generation Consoles, 1988—1999. The TurboGrafx-16, Mega Drive/Genesis, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and Neo Geo.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 10: John Madden Football
- Vintage Games: Chapter 12: Myst
- Vintage Games: Chapter 15: Sim City

Week 5

Monday, February 3: Handhelds and arcades in the 1990s.

Wednesday, February 5: The creation of the ESRB; discussion on the effectiveness of ratings systems.

- Vintage Games: Chapter 17: Street Fighter II
- Vintage Games: Chapter 20: Tetris

Week 6

Monday, February 10: Computer games in the 1990s.

Wednesday, February 12: Fifth Generation Consoles, 1993—2006. The Sega Saturn, Sony PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Virtual Boy, and Atari Jaguar.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 4: Diablo
- Vintage Games: Chapter 6: Dune II: The Building of a Dynasty
- Vintage Games: Chapter 7: Final Fantasy VII
- Vintage Games: Chapter 18: Super Mario 64/Tomb Raider

Week 7

Monday, February 17: Sixth Generation Consoles, 1998—2013. The Sega Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Nintendo GameCube, and Microsoft Xbox.

Wednesday, February 19: 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
- 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.

Week 8

Monday, February 24: Violence in video games: Violence in video games: Common views on violence; famous violent games; the case of Columbine; violence and aggression research; violence in other media.

Wednesday, February 26: Violence in video games continued.

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 9

MARCH 1-8: SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS

Week 10

Monday, March 10: Video games and the military.

Wednesday, March 12: Body image and hypersexualized video game characters; sexual content in games.

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.

Week 11

Monday, March 17: Gender stereotypes in video games.

Wednesday, March 19: Gender stereotypes continued; sexual harassment in the video game community.

Required Readings

- 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.

Week 12

Monday, March 24: Video game addiction.

Wednesday, March 26: Fitness, obesity, and video games.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 3: Dance Dance Revolution
- Gaming (ad)diction: Discourse, identity, time and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth. Scholarly article, one perspective on gaming addiction.

Week 13

Monday, March 31: Portrayals of race in video games, LGBT characters, and other minorities.

Wednesday, April 2: Portrayals of minorities concluded.

Required Readings

- Moving forward on race in games: BioWare Montreal designer Manveer Heir interview.

Week 14

Monday, April 7: Educational video games; video games for health.

Wednesday, April 9: Educational video games concluded.

Required Readings

- To be determined.

Week 15

Monday, April 14: Online gaming communities; harassment in online communities.

Wednesday, April 16: Online gaming communities concluded.

Required Readings

- Vintage Games: Chapter 24: Ultima Online

Week 16

Monday, April 21: Video games in the news media; detecting bias in video game coverage.

Monday, April 23: Video games in the news media concluded.

Required Readings

- To be determined.

Assignment Schedule

Even though you are some flexibility about which assignments you pursue in this class, the due dates are relatively consistent from assignment to assignment. Depending on which assignments you choose to complete, you might end up with two assignments due on the same day. Don't stress about this! Don't wait until the due date to try and complete two assignments. I suggest instead that you work on one assignment early and turn it in sooner; that way, you don't have to worry about two assignments coming due at once.

DUE DATE	Exam	Discussion Board	Blog Posts	Video Game Analysis
Week 1	NO ASSIGNMENTS DUE			
Week 2	Let me know via e-Learning by Sunday, January 19 at 11:59 p.m. which two assignments you will complete for the first half of the semester.			
Week 3		Post 1 due: Jan 23 Responses 1 due: Jan 26	Blog 1 due: Jan 23	
Week 4		Post 2 due: Jan 30 Responses 2 due: Feb 2	Blog 2 due: Jan 30	Submit via e-Learning your topic idea: Jan 30
Week 5	Exam 1: Feb 5	Post 3 due: Feb 6 Responses 3 due: Feb 9	Blog 3 due: Feb 6	
Week 6		Post 4 due: Feb 13 Responses 4 due: Feb 16	Blog 4 due: Feb 13	
Week 7		Post 5 due: Feb 20 Responses due: Feb 23	Blog 5 due: Feb 20	
Week 8	Exam 2: Feb 26			Analysis due: Feb 28
Week 9	SPRING BREAK! PLAY SOME GAMES!			
Week 10	Let me know via e-Learning by Sunday, March 16 at 11:59 p.m. which two assignments you will complete for the second half of the semester.			
Week 11		Post 6 due: Mar 20 Responses 6 due: Mar 23	Blog 6 due: Mar 20	
Week 12	Exam 3: Mar 26	Post 7 due: Mar 27 Responses 7 due: Mar 30	Blog 7 due: Mar 27	Submit via e-Learning your topic idea: Mar 27
Week 13		Post 8 due: Apr 3 Responses 8 due: Apr 6	Blog 8 due: Apr 3	
Week 14		Post 9 due: Apr 10 Responses 9 due: Apr 13	Blog 9 due: Apr 10	
Week 15		Post 10 due: Apr 17 Responses 10 due: Apr 20	Blog 10 due: Apr 17	
Week 16	Exam 4: Apr 23			Analysis due: Apr 23