ANGM 3366
Game Studies I
Spring 2024

ANGM 3366.002 | Game Studies I

Tuesdays 4 PM to 6:45 PM | ATC 2.918

Cameron Irby

Instructor of Record

cli170000@utdallas.edu

Office Hours:
Tuesdays 1 PM to 3 PM @
ATC 1.709 (SMP Lab)

Hong-An Wu

Faculty Advisor
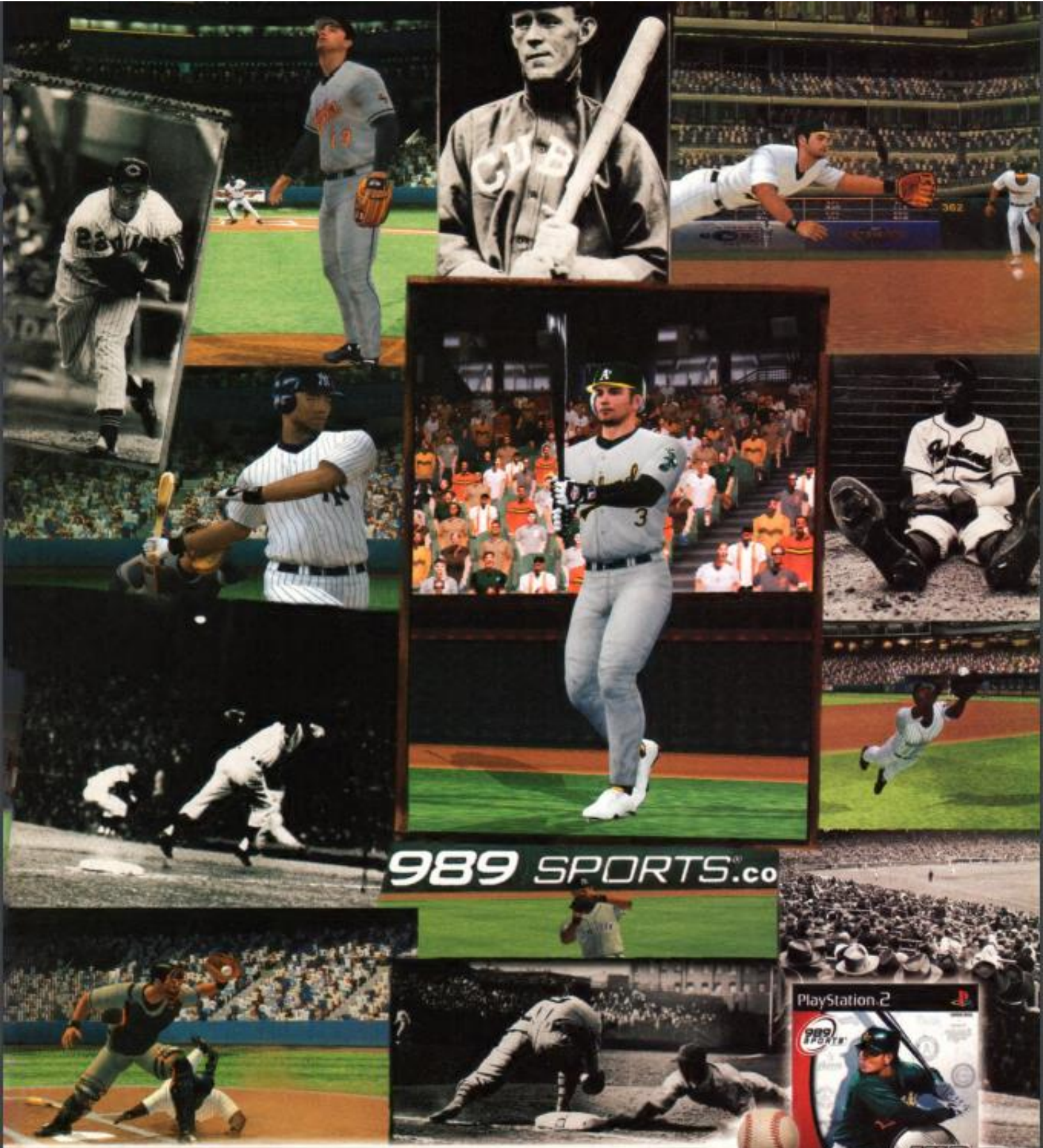
HongAn.Wu@utdallas.edu

Table of Contents

989 SPORTS.co

PlayStation.2

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

MLB 2005

Introduction to Game Studies I

- **Who** makes games, who plays them, and who is left out?
- **What** does it mean to play a game?
- **When** does a game become labor, and who profits?
- **Where** have games impacted our lives, for good and bad?
- **Why** do some gaming spaces encourage toxic behavior?

Game Studies is, as the name implies, "the study of games, the act of playing them, and the players and cultures surrounding them."[1] **This course is an introduction to basic vocabularies, frameworks, and arguments frequently discussed in game studies.** Together, we will explore how established concepts and arguments about games and play can help us examine and reflect upon our experiences as players, spectators, and makers. At the same time, we will consider how our gameplay experiences can contribute to existing understandings about games and play. By extension, we will practice using these concepts and our experiences as building blocks to analyze the historical, material, and cultural contexts of games as technologies of play.

A collection of board and card game pieces; Image by Thomas Buchholz @ Unsplash.com

---

[1] "Game Studies," in *Wikipedia*, April 8, 2023,
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Game_studies&oldid=1148777560.

To do so, each week we will engage with a variety of media to approach and analyze the phenomena of play, analog and digital gaming cultures, games industries, and more through different thematic and critical lenses. Through class discussions, we will reflect on and analyze how our gameplay experiences intertwine with and/or interject in existing arguments in the field of game studies. Based on our discussions throughout the semester, students will compose two essays analyzing a game of one's choice using the techniques introduced and practiced in our course.

A note on the intention and position of this course in your overall learning trajectory as games scholars and creators: **This course is intended to be a companion to Game Design I, as practicing dissecting and analyzing play (as situated cultural practice) and games (as technologies) will feed into your ability to become responsible, attentive, and intentional game designers.** At the same time, experience creating games will provide you with the ability to better perceive the logic of specific design choices made within the games discussed throughout this course. While it is not necessary to take both courses simultaneously, they nevertheless complement one another.

Together, we will learn…

- …about contemporary discussions about game playing as situated cultural practices from various thematic and theoretical approaches.
- …how to practice critiquing games and constructing analyses of game playing by situating these technologies and practices within historical, material, and cultural contexts.
- …to develop analytical writing skills for participating in the collective scholarly study of games and play.

Course Expectations

- **We come to class to learn from one another**; therefore, your active presence is expected and is expressed by being familiar with the assigned materials and participating in class discussions.

- **We have limited opportunities to meet, discuss, and work together**; therefore, your timely completion of all course assignments is expected, and your attendance is highly treasured.

- **We cannot learn from those who are unwilling to engage with the ideas of others**; therefore, your willingness to learn must be demonstrated by being open to new ideas that challenge your assumptions and by earnest, careful, and generous engagements with those who respond in kind.

A Nintendo 2DS; Image credit: Denise Jans @ Unsplash.com

- **We will be a community of scholars, artists, and curious minds.** To facilitate a learning community for us to work together, I've included the following community agreement for our course to guide our interactions. This agreement was adapted and revised from the Yesterweb's social etiquette guidelines and is open to our collective revision as our course unfolds. [2]

  - Engage in good faith.
    - To engage in "good faith" means to assume that others have sincere, honest, and respectful intentions.
  - Engage in constructive conflict.
    - Conflict is necessary for growth. It can be uncomfortable, but it also fuels change. However, there is **constructive** and **destructive** conflict. We can only engage in constructive conflict when **all** parties engage in good-faith discussions.
  - Be mindful of participating in a shared, public space.
    - We should not make our own voices louder than others, being careful not to take up more than our own share of space.
  - Take care of yourself.
    - Few things are worth more than your own well-being. Make sure to nourish yourself with good food and rest frequently.
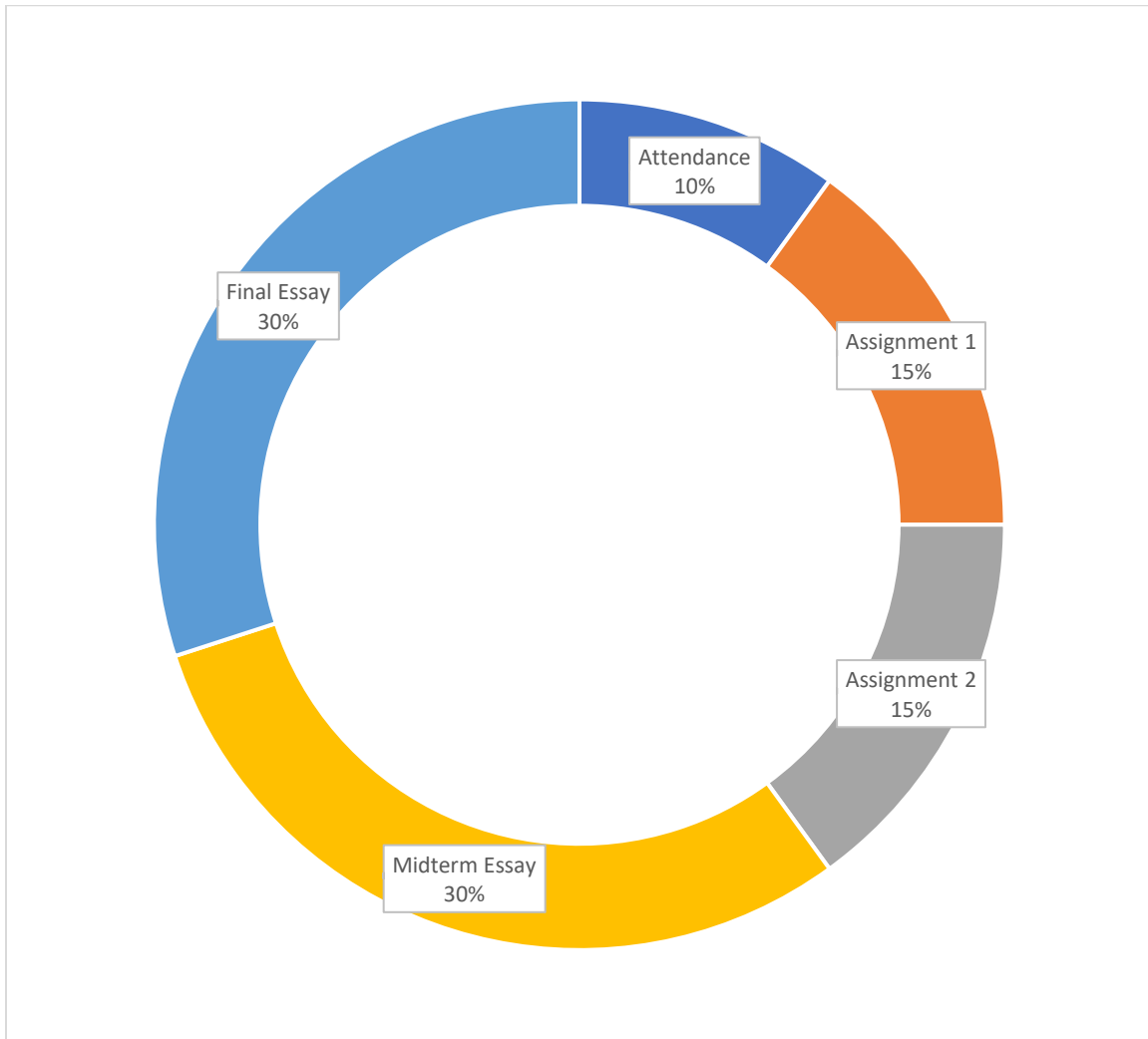
---

[2] https://yesterweb.org/#social-etiquette

Grading Policy

Your final grade for this class will be based on the following:

Attendance 10%

Assignment 1 15%

Assignment 2 15%

Midterm Essay 30%

Final Essay 30%

This class uses the standard grading metric for all assignments (100-90 = A, 89-80 = B, etc.).

All assignments and essays must be submitted by the due date, but I will accept any late submissions within a **48-hour grace period**. I may contact you if your work is missing or corrupted, but for the best results, please let me know if you believe your work will be late. After this grace period, no further submissions will be accepted.

Absence Policy

As we have seen in the past few years, things happen. Sometimes multiple assignments are due on the same day, and sometimes an international pandemic warps our perception of space and time.

As an acknowledgment of the chaos of the day-to-day, every participant (including myself) has **two days** that they may use for no-questions-asked absences.

Should exceptional circumstances arise (such as illness, family crisis, or travel), please email me to discuss ways to make up for lost time or to make alternative arrangements.

Source: Super Mario Bros.

Accommodations

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation for this class, you are encouraged to register with the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC). Students who have questions about receiving accommodations, or those who have, or think they may have, a disability (mobility, sensory, health, psychological, learning, etc.) are invited to contact ARC for a confidential discussion. The ARC is in the Administration Building, Room 2.224.

The website is https://accessability.utdallas.edu/.

They can be contacted by phone at 972-883-2098 or by email at studentaccess@utdallas.edu.

Navi from The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

If you do not have formal accommodation but have needs that the course is failing to meet as currently designed, please set up a meeting with me to discuss how I can support your learning style. Do not hesitate to reach out to me directly to discuss any difficulties beyond those supported by the ARC that might hinder your full participation in our course, and we can work out an individualized plan to support your learning in this course. For additional student resources to support your learning, please visit https://www.utdallas.edu/campus-life/student-services-support/.

UTD Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus, which includes information on student conduct and discipline, copyright, and withdrawals. If the policy information you are looking for is not present in this syllabus, please go to http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies for these policies.

Academic Integrity

I value your academic integrity, and I desire for you to gain the skills necessary for success through honest means. However, academic dishonesty—intentional or accidental—can result in a failing grade. Please review and abide by the academic integrity guidelines set by the University of Texas at Dallas: https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/integrity/.

A Non-Player Character from World of Warcraft

Schedule

Note: This schedule is not final and may change as necessary to meet the needs of the class.

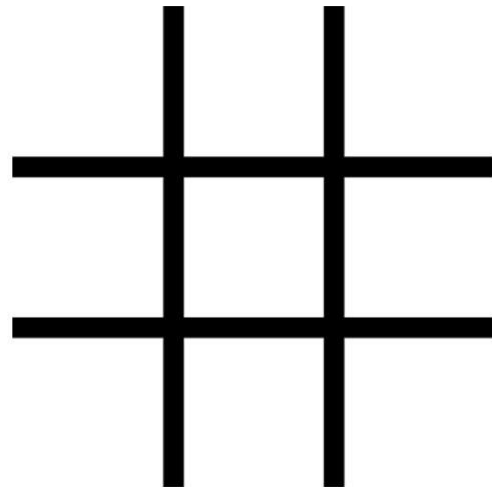## Week 1 (January 16) – Welcome! (Class Cancelled)

Play:

These classic games. If you've never played sudoku, try to get the numbers from 1 through 9 to align vertically, horizontally, and within the 9 larger boundaries without repeating.

As for tic-tac-toe, be sure to find an opponent! Use the rest of this page if you need more space.

5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

Sudoku

Tic-Tac-Toe

Week 2 (January 23) – Welcome to the Playground

Read:

The Syllabus (Doing great so far!)

"Play Is" from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart
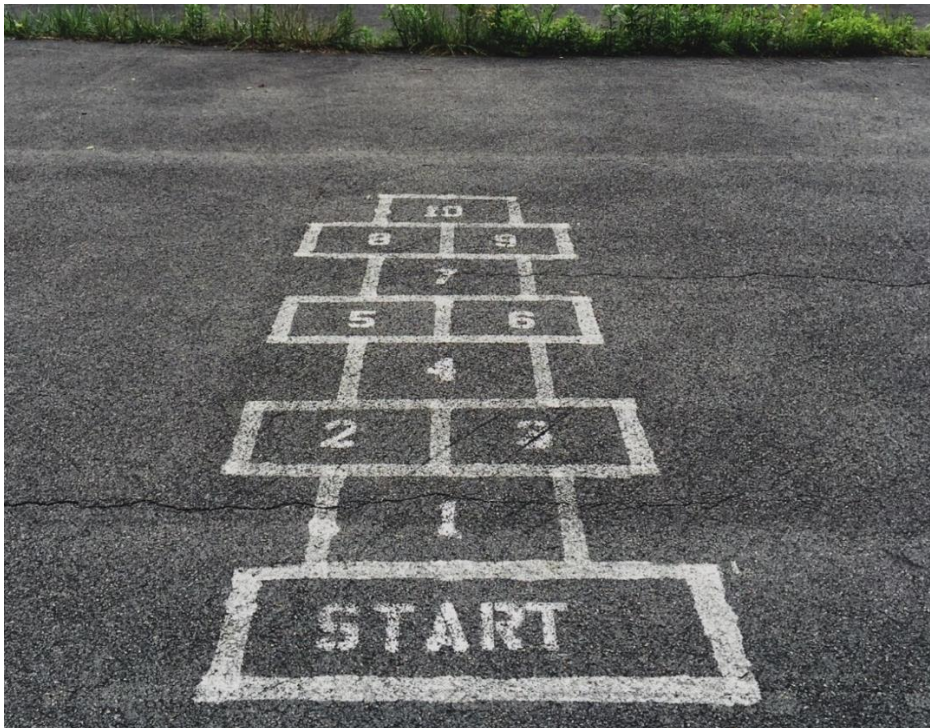
"Playgrounds" from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart

Play:

Tag, Hopscotch, Pretend, Jump rope, Marbles, Jacks, Hide & Seek

Consider:

What is game studies? Why should we study games and play? How does play relate to games and culture? Where does one play, and how does context and design shape how people play?

A hopscotch board; image credit: Jon Tyson @ Unsplash.com

Week 3 (January 30) – Defining Games

Read:

"There is No Magic Circle" - Mia Consalvo

Play:

Game Definitions by Molleindustria

The Game by [REDACTED]

Consider:

How do we define games? What distinguishes "games" from "real life"? What methods do we have for analyzing and critiquing both digital and analog games?

Game Definitions

Week 4 (February 6) – Games with Values

Read:

"Groundwork for Value in Games" from *Values at Play in Digital Games* - Mary Flanagan & Helen Nissenbaum

"Game Elements: The Language of Values" from *Values at Play in Digital Games* - Mary Flanagan & Helen Nissenbaum

Play:

Will You Press the Button?

Moral Machine

Start:
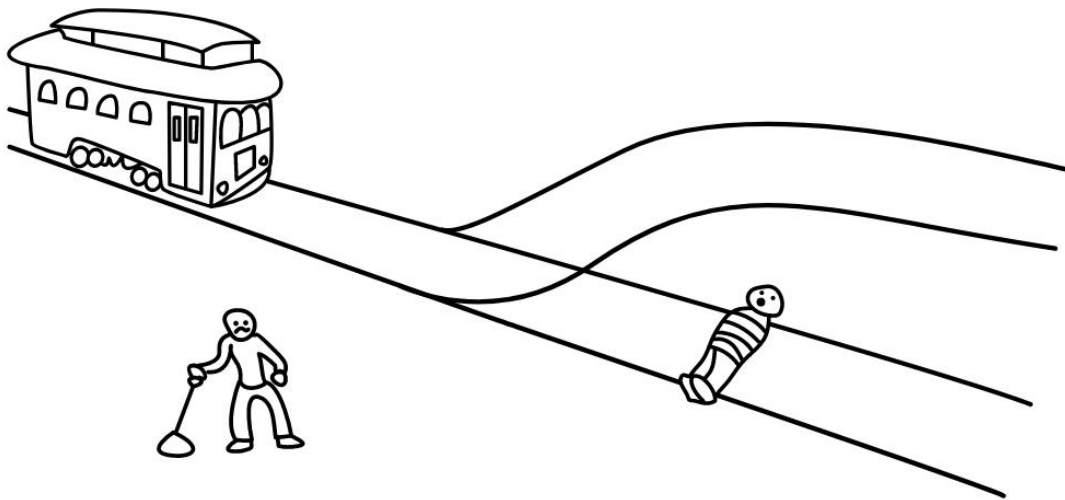
Assignment 1 – Identifying Game Elements

Consider:

How do games operate as technologies? How do games as technologies become inscribed with cultural values?

Oh no! A trolley is heading towards one guy. You can pull the lever to divert it to the other track, but then your Amazon package will be late. What do you do?

Pull the lever | Do nothing

Absurd Trolley Problems – *Neal.Fun*

Week 5 (February 13) – Games with Politics

Read:

"Why *Monopoly* Monopolises Popular Culture Board Games"
-- Lisa J. Hackett & Jo Coghlan
"The Board Games That Ask You to Reenact Colonialism"
-- Luke Winkie

Play (choose one):

Monopoly

Settlers of Catan

Consider:

How do games as technologies convey their politics? How do different game elements work together to create meaning?

Monopoly for Millennials

Week 6 (February 20) – Critical Play

Read:

"Introduction to Critical Play" from
Critical Play: Radical Game Design - Mary Flanagan

Experience (one or more):

"Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II Peaceful Victory" – GoldVision

dead-in-iraq – Joseph DeLappe

Barbie Liberation Organization

Consider:

What does it mean to play critically? How does critical play upend implicit cultural norms and explicit game rules?

Goldvision playing Grand Theft Auto V

Week 7 (February 27) – Critical Games & Midterm Prep

Read:

"No Fun: Queer Affect and the Disruptive Potential of Video Games that Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt" from *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* - Bo Ruberg

Play (one or more):

Cosmic Latte – Pearse Anderson

Hair Nah – Momo Pixel

Spent by McKinney & Urban Ministries of Durham

Together We Write Private Cathedrals – Rufus Roswell

Due:

Assignment 1 – Identifying Game Elements

Bring:

A rough outline, a couple of paragraphs, or a draft of your essay.

Consider:

Should games always be "fun," and why do some insist on it? How can games work to critique and bring to light cultural issues?

Hair Nah

Week 8 (March 5) – Midterms (No Class)

The Midterm will be available for submission until
11:55 PM on March 5th.
See eLearning for the rubric and prompts.

(Top Row) Black Lotus from Magic the Gathering*,*
Charizard from Pokémon Trading Card Game;
(Bottom Row) Gabumon from Digimon: Digi-Battle Card Game, *Kuriboh from* Yu-Gi-Oh!

Week 9 (March 12) – Spring Break

Play:

Whatever you want. Perhaps try something on itch.io or a game of your own creation?

Consider:

What games have made an impact on your own life? What draws you toward a new game or brings you back to an old favorite?

One of my many characters from The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Week 10 (March 19) - Hegemony

Read:

"The Hegemony of Play" from *Proceedings of the 2007 Digital Games Research Association Conference* –
Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, & Celia Pearce

"Video Games as Ideological Projects" from *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox Live* – Kishonna L. Gray

Start:

Assignment 2 – Beyond Games

Consider:
Why and how do gaming spaces become toxic? For whom are they uninhabitable, and how could they be made hospitable?

Caution: Lesson Contents May Be Radioactive;
Image by Dan Meyers via Unsplash

Week 11 (March 26) – Representing Players

Read:

"Diversity without defense: Reframing arguments for diversity in games" - Adrienne Shaw

"He Could Be a Bunny Rabbit for All I Care! How We Connect with Characters and Avatars" from *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* – Adrienne Shaw

Bring:

A representation of you in a game. Create one if you need to.

Consider:

What does it mean to be "represented" in a game? Why do some people deeply connect or identify with certain games and not others? How do games construct their audiences?

The Sims 4

Week 12 (April 2) - Meritocracy

Read:

"Coding Meritocracy: Norms of Game Design and Narrative" from *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture is the Worst* - Chris Paul
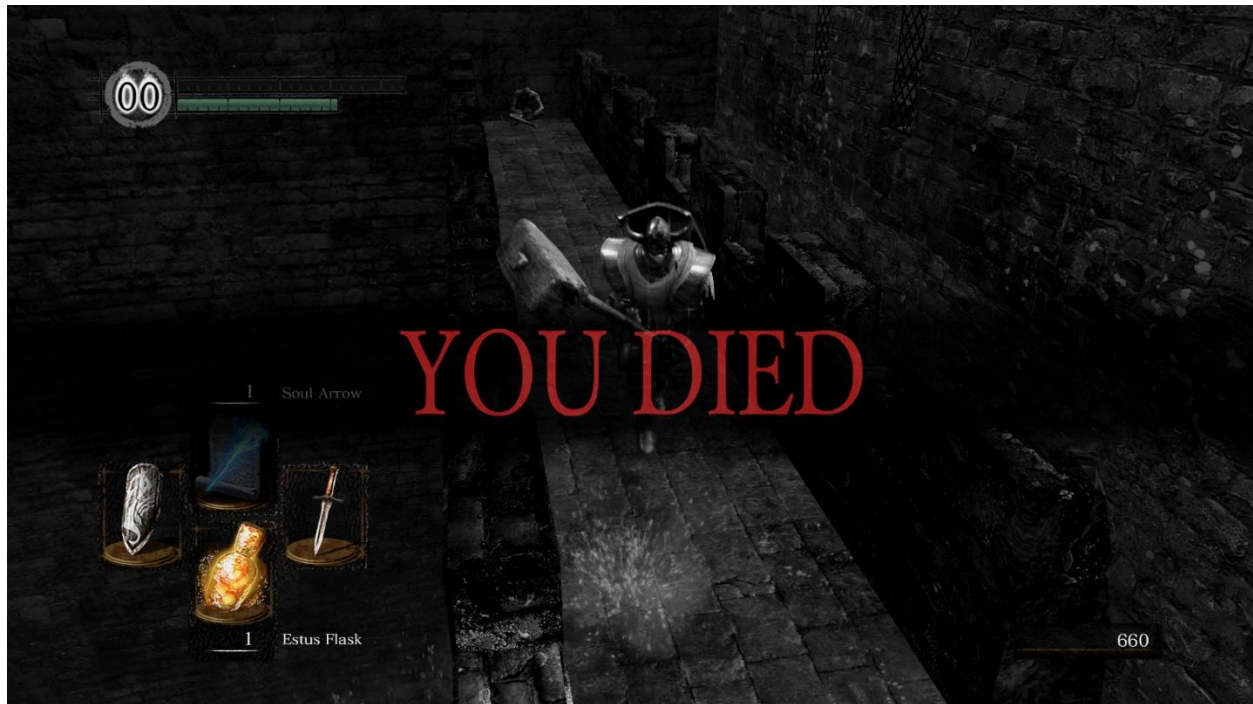
"Games to Fail With" from *Playing with Feelings: Video Games and Affect -* Audrey Anable

Experience:

Selections from "Games to Fail With"

Consider:

What is meritocracy? How do games promote meritocracy, and why? What alternatives ways of play exist?

You Died - Dark Souls

Week 13 (April 9) – Playbor (Play + Labor)

Read:

"Precarious playbour: Modders and the digital games industry" - Julian Kücklich
https://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/

"Game Testers as Precarious Second-Class Citizens: Degradation of Fun, Instrumentalization of Play" from *A Precarious Game: The Illusion of Dream Jobs in the Video Game Industry* – Ergin Bulut

Experience:

Game Workers Unite: https://www.gameworkersunite.org/

Consider: What is "playbor," and who benefits from it? Why do many games ask players to work instead of play? How do games become "professional" in both their making and their playing?

Roblox

Week 14 (April 16) – Accessibility

Read:

"With Thumbs In Mind" from *A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames* - Brendan Keogh

"Game Interfaces as Disabling Infrastructures" – David Parisi

Experience:

The Able Gamers Charity

Can I Play That? - Dagersystem

Consider:

How do games train us to play them? How do games construct an ideal player? How do players—especially those for whom many leisure pursuits are inaccessible—participate in gaming culture? What happens when a game is no longer available to play?

Captions and a Sign Interpreter in Forza Horizon 5

Week 15 (April 23) – Education & Peer Review

Read:

"*Minecraft* and the Building Blocks of Creative Individuality" from *The Digital Is Kid Stuff* – Josef Nguyen

Experience:

Minecraft: Education Edition:
https://education.minecraft.net/en-us

The Uncensored Library by Reporters Without Borders:
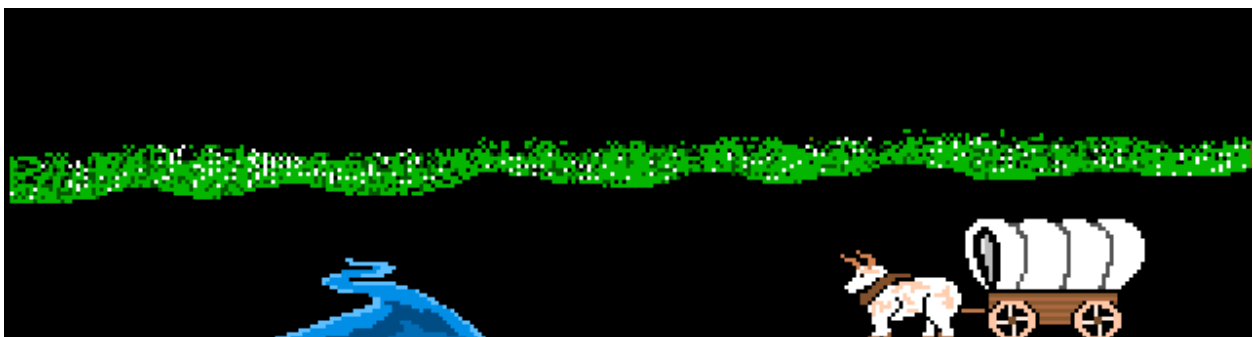https://www.uncensoredlibrary.com/en

Due:

Assignment 2 – Beyond Games

Bring:

A rough draft of your final essay (Any%).

Consider:
What are we learning when we play games? How are games always already educational? What knowledge do we consider "valuable," and how do we communicate this through games?

The Oregon Trail

Week 16 (April 30) – Free Day (No Class)

Read:

Your Research.

Play:

Your Game.

Consider:

Calling your classmates to help them or to work in the same room to remind one another of what you have learned.

Lady Dimitrescu from Resident Evil 8: Village

Week 17 (May 7) – Finals Due (No Class)

The final paper may be submitted at any time before 11:55 PM on May 7th.

Remember: Submitting something is better than nothing.