ANGM 3366
Game Studies I
Spring 2025

ANGM 3366.002 | Game Studies I

Fridays 1 PM to 3:45 PM | ATC 2.101

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Office Hours: By appointment only (Online)

Table of Contents

Cover Image by David Granmougin @ Unsplash.com

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Introduction to Game Studies I

This course is an introduction to critical game studies, including analysis of digital and analog games as cultural artifacts, material technologies, and social practices. 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 of games. 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*

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. **In addition, this course presents the fundamentals of academic writing and research practices in game studies**. As we engage with the field of game studies, you will compose two research 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.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Engage with contemporary discussions about play as a situated cultural practice and games as technologies.
- Practice critiquing games and constructing analyses of game playing by situating these technologies and practices within historical, material, and cultural contexts.
- Develop analytical writing skills for participating in the collective scholarly study of games and play.

Image Source: Clint Bustrillos @ Unsplash.com
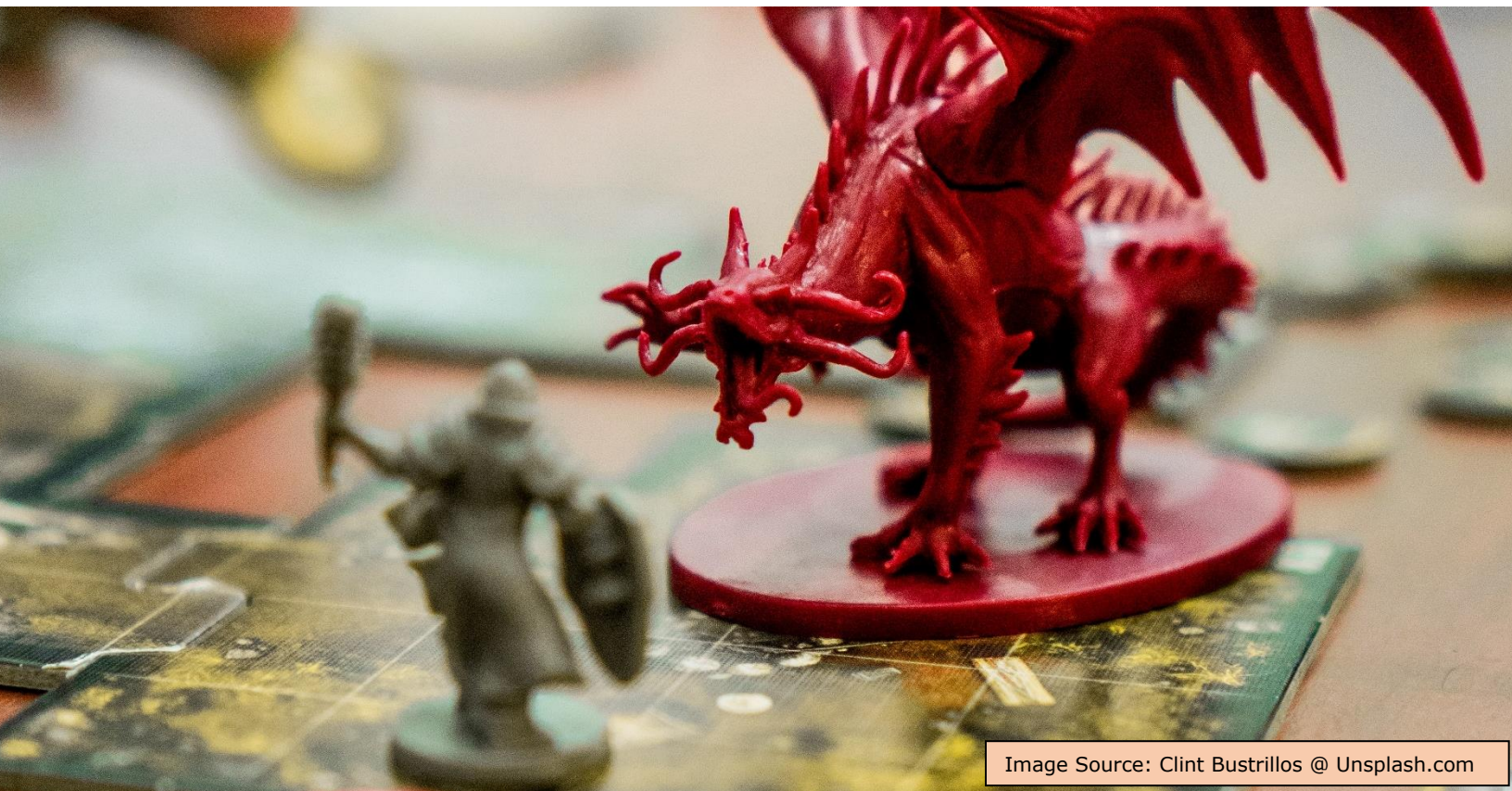
Required Materials

To engage with our course content, **weekly access to a computer and the Internet will be needed**. All assigned materials will be available electronically through eLearning and via our course Box folder.

This syllabus contains a schedule to keep you informed of all assigned materials, due dates, and other resources. It is also a living document that will be adjusted and revised as necessary to take into account student needs, weather, and local events. Therefore, make sure that you are reading **the most up-to-date version of the syllabus** by checking eLearning.

You will also be expected to use **word processing software** to compose your research essays, such as Microsoft Word, Google Docs, or Apache OpenOffice. Use whichever software you are most comfortable with, but you must be able to export your work in a file format compatible with Turnitin, such as DOC & DOCX, HTML, TXT, RTF, PDF, and ODT.

Finally, **no materials are required for purchase for this course**. Computers and Internet access are available via the UTD Library at no cost. There is a plethora of games available via itch.io and other websites that are free to download or play. Google Docs and Apache OpenOffice are both free to use. Any purchases made as part of your academic journey in this course are exclusively your own and will not be reimbursed.

Wario Land II

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.

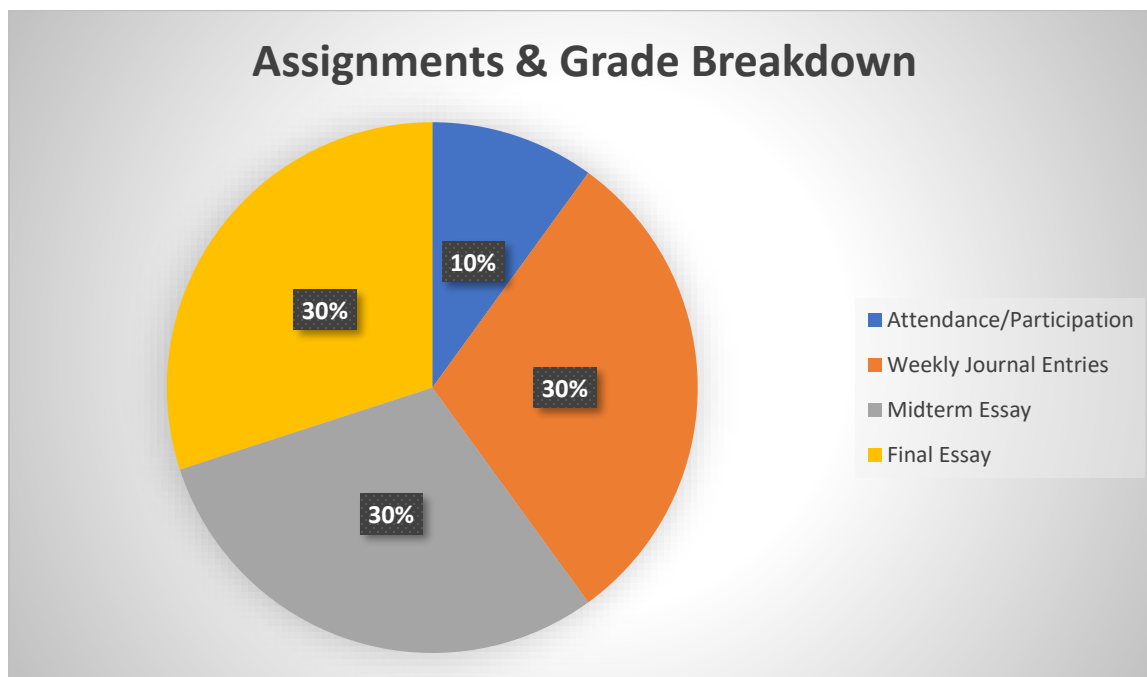A Nintendo 2DS; Image credit: Denise Jans @ Unsplash.com

- **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 is adapted and revised from the Yesterweb's social etiquette guidelines and is open to our collective revision as our course unfolds. [1]

  o Engage in good faith.
    - To engage in "good faith" means to assume that others have sincere, honest, and respectful intentions.

  o Engage in constructive conflict.
    - Conflict is necessary for growth. It can be uncomfortable, but it also fuels change. However, there is a difference between **constructive** and destructive conflict. We can only engage in constructive conflict when **all** parties engage in good-faith discussions.

  o Be mindful of participating in a shared, public space.
    - Some students can feel overwhelmed when the conversation is run by a handful of people. Be careful not to take up more space than necessary.

  o Take care of yourself.
    - Few things are worth more than your own well-being. Make sure to nourish yourself with good food, drink plenty of water, and rest frequently.

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

Grading & Assignments

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 **24-hour grace period** to account for personal issues and technical difficulties. 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 even in the case of technical malfunctions.

Assignments & Grade Breakdown

- 10% Attendance/Participation
- 30% Weekly Journal Entries
- 30% Midterm Essay
- 30% Final Essay

Assignment Breakdown

Attendance/Participation: 10 points possible.

- As this course meets once a week, any absences will deduct a point from your overall attendance grade. Everyone is expected to arrive on time and stay to the end of the class. Failure to do so will negatively impact this grade.
- However, I will excuse two absences by default, no questions asked. I also accept doctor's notes for illness.

<u>Weekly Journal Entry</u>: 3 points each, 30 points possible.

- Every week, we will read texts, watch videos, and/or play games that guide us into a collective reflection and discussion of games and play through different thematic lenses. To reach our learning objectives, we have to be in dialog and practice our capacity to examine media critically.
- Thus, to help contribute to our weekly discussions, I ask that you submit a 250–500-word reflection that explores the topics, themes, readings, and games assigned. In addition, these journals should recount a play experience you've had that connects with our readings. To help, I have included a series of optional question prompts.
  - An example would be describing your experience with *Pokémon Platinum* during the Pokémon case study lesson, tying it to Jason Bainbridge's article on the franchise's musings on the environment.
- As we will be meeting on Fridays, all journals will be due at the start of class. If you forget to do so, remember that you still have the grace period to make up your work.
- There will be a total of twelve entries due, but you may forgo two of these as needed (similar to absence policy). Any additional missed entries will be deducted from your total score for this assignment.

3D Pinball Space Cadet

<u>Midterm & Final Essay</u>: 30 points each.

- The purpose of these assignments is for you to practice applying the concepts you've learned throughout the first and second halves of the course to analyze a game of your choice and its play as situated historical, material, and cultural encounters.
- In composing your essay, please properly cite at least two of the primary texts assigned for reading and discussed in class. You may be required to look up external sources. When appropriate, please try to use your own words to paraphrase the author's arguments, and do not quote at length. In addition, please make clear the prompt that you're responding to and make sure to address all of the questions in the prompt. Furthermore, the paper should be between 1200-1500 words and written in accordance with the Chicago, APA, or MLA formats.
- More information will be available on eLearning.
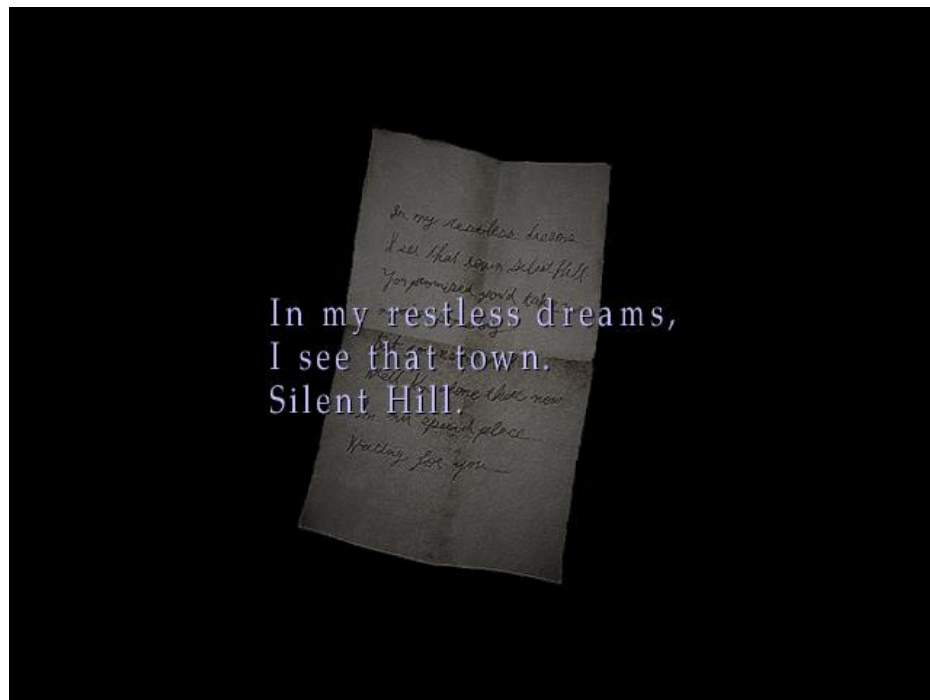
Silent Hill 2

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/.

World of Warcraft

A Note on Course Content

Given our course's approach to games and play as situated practices in historical, cultural, and political contexts, the assigned materials and class discussions will necessarily engage with emotionally and intellectually challenging content. Specifically, many assigned materials will touch upon, either implicitly or explicitly, ongoing intersectional oppressions, such as misogyny and sexism, ableism, classism, racism, homo- and transphobia, and more. If you have concerns about encountering anything specific in the course material and would like me to provide warnings, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via email and/or before/after class. I will flag any requested content for you in advance. If you foresee that there is content that will prohibit your full embodied engagement and would like to make alternative arrangements on course participation, please don't hesitate to reach out to me as well.

Ultimately, my hope is to facilitate a hospitable learning community for us to learn as individuals and as a collective. Towards that end, I ask to be in dialog with you to know how to best support your learning.
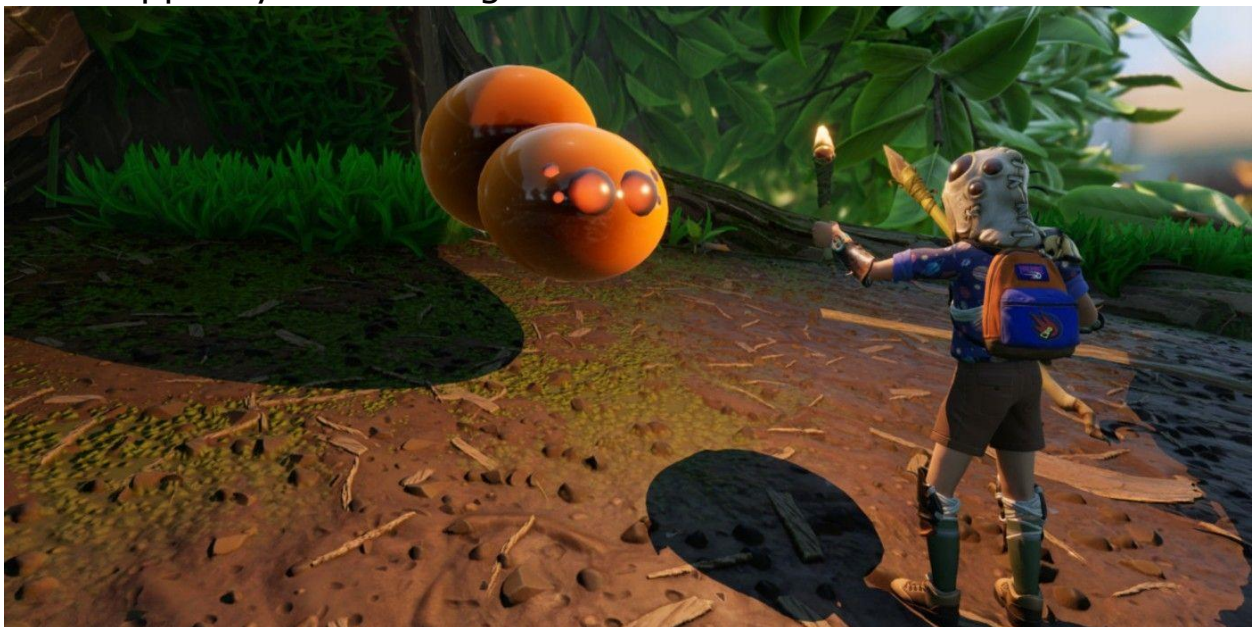
Grounded, with "Arachnophobia Mode" enabled
at maximum settings

YOUR TIME HAS COME, WARRIOR OF LIGHT!

When evil poisoned the land, mankind was infected by oppression and despair.
The only hope of revival rests with four warriors of light that will risk everything
to free the world from darkness and suffering. The time has come to use magic,
draw swords and swing morningstars to save the world from the sinister enemy.

OUT 3rd DECEMBER

FINAL FANTASY I & II: DAWN OF SOULS.
Only on Game Boy Advance.

GAME BOY ADVANCE SP
www.nintendo.co.uk

Schedule

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

Week 1 (January 24) – Welcome!
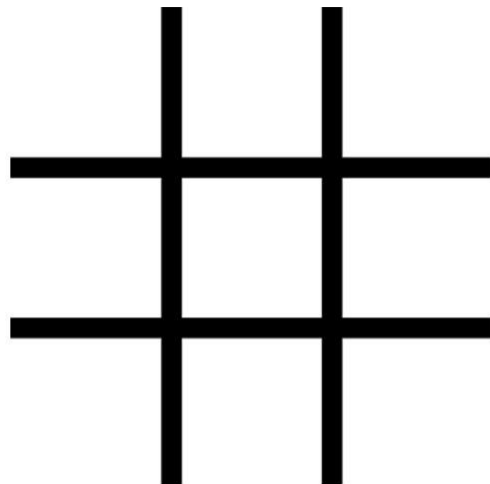
Read: The Syllabus (Great job so far!)

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 31) – Welcome to the Playground

Read:

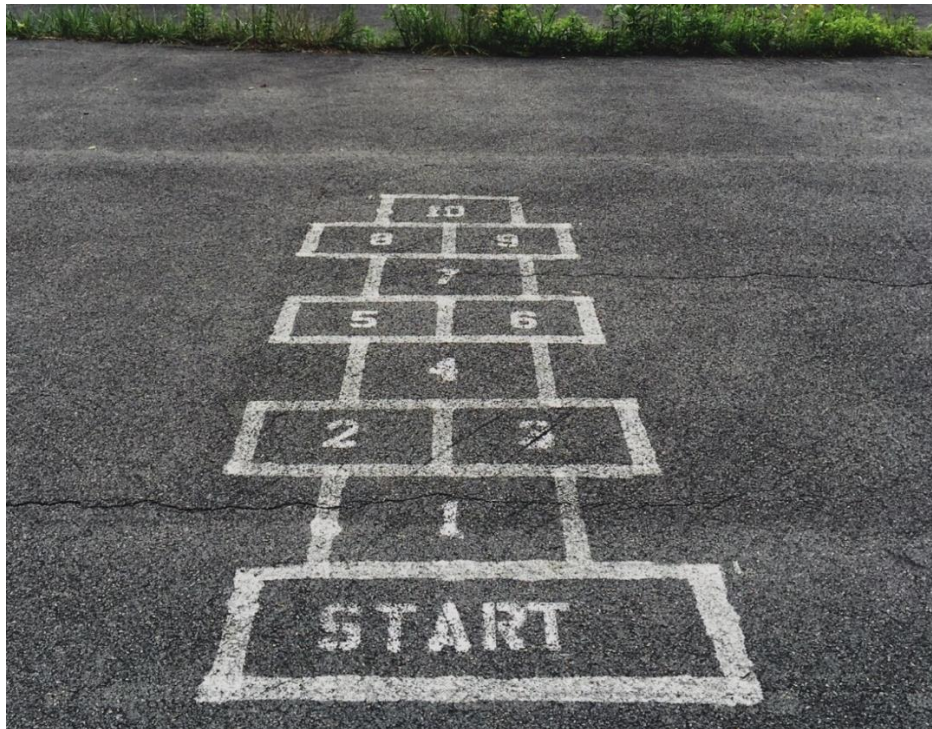"Play Is" from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart

"Playgrounds" from *Play Matters* - Miguel Sicart

Play:

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

Journal:

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 (February 7) – Defining Games

Read:

"There is No Magic Circle" - Mia Consalvo

"Searching for the Well-Played Game" – Bernie De Koven

Play:

Game Definitions by Molleindustria

The Game by [REDACTED]

Journal:

How do we define games? How do we define "good" games? What methods do we have for analyzing and critiquing both digital and analog games?

Game Definitions

Week 4 (February 14) – 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
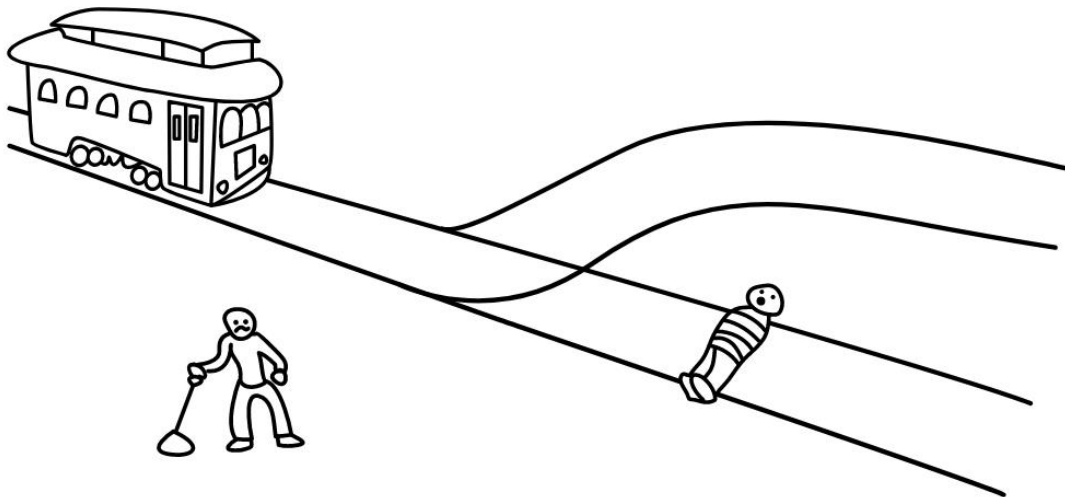
Play:

Will You Press the Button?

Moral Machine

Journal:

How do games become inscribed with cultural values? What elements of games help express these 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 21) – Games with Politics

Read:

"Adapting Violence: Death Race and the History of Gaming Moral Panic" from *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade* – Carly Kocurek

"Why *Monopoly* Monopolises Popular Culture Board Games"
-- Lisa J. Hackett & Jo Coghlan

Play:

Monopoly (Any Version)

Journal:

How do games convey the politics of their designers, players, and cultures? How have games been interpreted as political objects?

Monopoly for Millennials

Week 6 (February 28) – Critical Play

Read:

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

Experience:

Barbie Liberation Organization

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

dead-in-iraq – Joseph DeLappe

Journal:

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

dead-in-iraq, *America's Army*

Week 7 (March 7) – Critical Games & Midterm Prep

Read:

"Critical Computer Games" from *Critical Play* – Mary Flanagan

Play:

Hair Nah – Momo Pixel

Spent by McKinney & Urban Ministries of Durham

Bring:

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

Journal:

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 14) – Midterms (No Class)

The Midterm is due by 11:55 PM on March 14th.
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!*
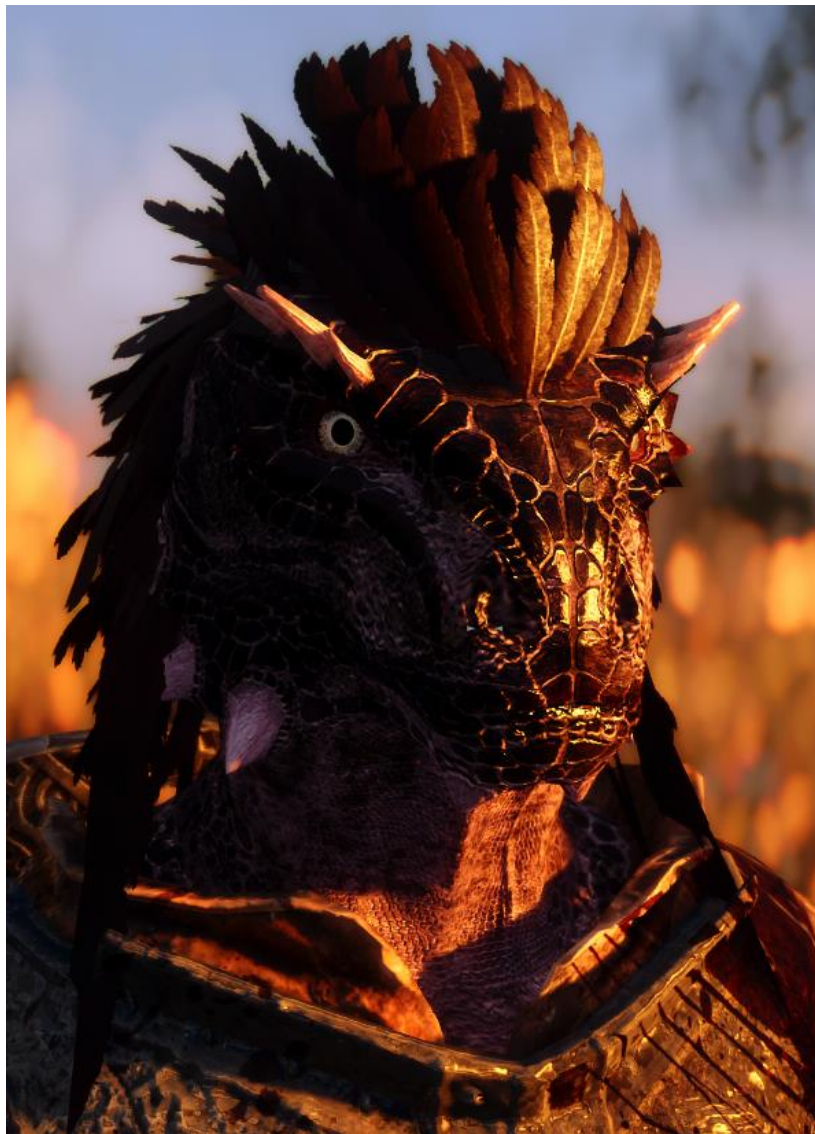
Week 9 (March 21) – Spring Break

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 28) – Gaming Fandom

Read:

"Writing 'Gamers': The Gendered Construction of Gamer Identity in *Nintendo Power* (1994-1999)" – Amanda C. Cote

"How Fandom Makes or Breaks Gaming" – Waypoint

"Gaming in Circles" from *Play Like a Feminist* – Shira Chess

Journal:

How can we better understand games through the people who play them? How is gaming constructed and policed by fandom? How do people become "gamers," and what does the term imply?

Sonic Forces

Week 11 (April 4) – Toxic Gaming

Read:

"The Hegemony of Play" –
Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, & Celia Pearce

"Blurring the boundaries" – Kishonna L. Gray, Bertan Buyukozturk, and Zachary G. Hill

"Of Dickwolves and Killjoys" from *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture* – Amanda Phillips

Journal:
Why and how do gaming spaces become toxic? For whom are they uninhabitable, and how could they be made hospitable? How did Gamergate expose players to toxic cultures of gaming?

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

Week 12 (April 11) – Case Study: Pokémon

Read:

"Panic Attacks: Anti-Pokémon Voices in Global Markets" – Christine Yano, from *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*

"'It is a Pokémon world': The *Pokémon* franchise and the environment" – Jason Bainbridge

"Pokémon GO: Globalization" – Randy Nichols, from *How to Play Video Games*

Journal:

How does Pokémon's position as a transmedia object affect our ability to study it? How has Pokémon's continued success impacted game playing, game design, and other aspects of popular culture around the world?

Pokémon exhibit @ the Vincent Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Week 13 (April 18) – Playbor (Play + Labor)

Read:

"Precarious playbour: Modders and the digital games industry" - Julian Kücklich

"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:

2024-2025 SAG-AFTRA Interactive Media (Video Game) Strike

Journal: 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 25) – Access & Preservation

Read:

"The Game Availability Study, Explained" - Phil Salvador

"Fan preservation of 'flopped' games and systems: The case of the Virtual Boy in Spain" –
Marçal Mora-Cantallops & Ignacio Bergillos

"Growing old on Newgrounds: The hopes and quandaries of Flash game preservation" – Mikahil Fiadotau

Experience:

"Survey of the Video Game Reissue Market in the United States" – Phil Salvador, for the Video Game History Foundation & the Software Preservation Network

Journal:

What are the dominant assumptions about older games? How do we determine what games are preserved and which ones are worth preserving? How can we access games history?

Atari's *E.T.* and *Centipede* in a New Mexico landfill

Week 15 (May 2) –
The Future of Games (Studies) & Paper Workshop

Read:

"How gamification took over the world" – Bryan Gardiner

"Introduction" from *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist* - Brendan Keough

(Optional) "Episode 31: Brendan Keogh" – *Keywords in Play*

Bring:

A draft of your final paper (Any%)

Journal:
What happens to our perspective of games when we shift it from looking at the "games industry" to passion projects by smaller groups? What happens when the logics of games are applied to everyday life? What does a future of game studies look like?

Lethal Company

Week 16 (May 9) – Free Week (No Class)

Read: **Play**:

Your Research.   Your Chosen Game.

Consider:

Using the Games Media Library to (re)play your chosen game. Or you could call your classmates to help them or work in the same room to remind one another of what you have learned.

Lady Dimitrescu from *Resident Evil 8: Village*

Week 17 (May 16) – Finals Due (No Class)

The final paper may be submitted on eLearning at any time before 11:55 PM on May 16th.

Note: As this is the last day of the semester, there will be no grace period, and I will not accept anything after the deadline. But submitting something is better than nothing at all.