

**COMM 404- Fall 2016**  
**Video Games: Industry and Culture**  
**Monday and Wednesday, 1-2:30PM**  
**3242 LSA**  
**Instructor: Dr. Amanda Cote**

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Email is the best way to get in touch with me. In general, you should expect a response to your message within 24 hours on weekdays, 48 hours on the weekends.

When sending an email, include COMM 404 in the subject line, to ensure that I see your email as soon as possible.

Mailbox: 5334 North Quad

I rarely check my mailbox, so if you leave anything time-sensitive, please notify me by email. Do not submit papers to my mailbox without arranging this with me in advance.

Office Hours:

Monday 10:30-11:30am

Thursday 12:00-1:00pm

5356 North Quad (Next to the elevators on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor)

### **Course Overview**

From its development in the 1970s through today, the video game industry has exhibited extraordinary growth and impressive change. The industry grosses billions of dollars a year, and recent reports from the Entertainment Software Association indicate that 42% of Americans game 3 or more hours per week. Games have grown from an accidental off-shoot of Cold War military research into a serious industry that is deeply embedded in our economic, social, and cultural lives. As the comic below points out with its humorous reference to early Nintendo games, it is impossible to deny the presence and popularity of video games in modern culture.



This course offers a broad introduction to various areas of game studies, from industrial labor and globalization to gender and race representations, and it provides students with the opportunity to explore their particular interests through in greater depth with their final projects. No prior knowledge of gaming required! The course will begin with a unit on the game industry and game history, then will continue with a second unit on video game culture. The third and final unit of class will focus on mediated representations of games and gamers, to address gaming's place in popular culture. Each unit combines academic research, documentaries, and hands-on game play to provide diverse perspectives and opportunities for critical analysis.

**Grading:**

Attendance- 5%

Participation and prep work- 15%

Game company brief (9/28)- 5%

Game review (10/26)- 15%

Media analysis (11/14)- 15%

Final paper: Proposal (11/21)- 10%

Final paper: Presentations (12/7 and 12/12)- 15%

Final Paper (12/12)- 20%

**Assignment Details**

*Attendance-* Attendance is mandatory. Each student can miss one meeting for any reason without penalty. Each unexcused absence thereafter will lead to a penalty of 20% of the attendance grade. Repeated absences may lead to larger penalties and a significant grade drop. Excused absences will not affect the attendance score, but you are expected to make up missed work.

*Conflicts:* In the case of a *foreseeable* conflict with class (allowable only for a serious reason), you must provide documentation within the first week of class. In the case of an *unforeseeable* conflict with class (again, allowable only for a serious reason and with documentation), you must let me know by e-mail as soon as possible after learning of the conflict. Accommodations will then be arranged. Acceptable reasons include illness, family emergency, religious holidays, or official participation in recognized university events. Exam dates cannot be altered or accommodations made for other reasons.

*Illness:* If you are ill, go to <http://lsa.umich.edu/students/> and click on the button that reads “What to Do if You’re Sick” and complete the form. This will report your illness to all of your instructors. An email to your instructor will not suffice to have your absence excused; you must complete the LSA web form. If you are going to miss more than one day of class, or if your illness impacts your ability to complete an assessment, you must provide a medical note.

*Religious:* For a religious holiday, notify me of the dates on which you will be absent. Do this within the first week of class. Assignments are due as scheduled.

*University business:* For UM athletes and others traveling to represent the university, your team staff will give you paperwork to provide. Notify me within the first week of class.

*Participation and prep work-* Participation requires you to complete the reading and any assigned prep work prior to the session for which it is listed. You are considered collaborators in the discussions and therefore are required to engage with the material and your peers. Participation includes being engaged in class discussion, activities, and exercises, actively listening to each other, and being prepared to discuss the required readings. Participation can take many forms, from taking notes for your group to asking questions when you are confused. As such, it is a key component of the class, and it will help you comprehend the material.

*Game company brief-* This assignment requires you to research a game company of your choice and write a short memo (1-2 pgs.) regarding its history, one major contribution it has made to games or game culture, and your analysis of why this contribution mattered. The assignment will provide a template for you to work from.

*Game review-* You will select a game and play it all the way through (in the case of games without endings, such as *Candy Crush*, you will need to choose an amount to play and defend that choice in your review). You will also choose a game magazine or review source. After you play the game, you will write a review of it, emulating the style of your chosen press source.

*Media analysis*- View a film or TV show, or read a novel, focusing on video gamers or video games. Drawing on representational concepts like ideology, power, and discourse, analyze what the text is saying about gamers and games and present your analysis in a 4-5 pg. paper.

*Final Paper*—This assignment requires you to write an 8-10 pg. paper on a topic of your choice. You will need to conduct outside research, develop a critical perspective on your topic, and support the side you take with evidence. You can expand on one of the weeks of the semester or propose a new topic that we haven't discussed in class. The paper must explain the topic and its significance, provide relevant background, and present your argument in a well-researched and well-supported way. Outside sources must be used and cited properly.

*Final Paper Proposal*—To help prepare for your final paper, you will submit a one pg. proposal for your final project, including a draft of your thesis, an outline of your main points, and a list of at least three quality academic sources you plan to draw on to support your points.

*Paper Presentations*—The last two classes of the term will be devoted to 10-15 minute presentations. You will explain your topic, your thesis, and your supporting evidence. You will also indicate how your paper goes beyond earlier class discussions and why your topic is significant to the study of video games and their socio-cultural impacts.

### Readings

All readings are available via links in the syllabus or will be posted to Canvas as pdf files.

### ACADEMIC DISSHONESTY

Just don't do it. Plagiarism is the uncredited use of someone else's intellectual work and can occur in multiple forms. You are responsible for carefully recording and citing academic sources as you find and use them. Similarly, cheating is the copying of others' work or one's own earlier work in all or part of an assignment. Plagiarism or cheating will not be tolerated and will lead to a failing grade on the assignment, a possible failing grade for the class, and referral of the case to Student Academic Affairs. Please review the university's definitions on plagiarism and cheating, available at: [http://www.ur.umich.edu/9394/Apr18\\_94/18.htm](http://www.ur.umich.edu/9394/Apr18_94/18.htm) Also, please consult the WPA guidelines on plagiarism, available at: <http://www.wpacouncil.org/positions/WPAplagiarism.pdf>

### RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

<p><b>Sweetland Writing Center</b>          1139 Angell Hall, 435 S. State St.  <a href="http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland">http://www.lsa.umich.edu/sweetland</a>  <a href="mailto:swcinfo@umich.edu">swcinfo@umich.edu</a>          Phone: (734) 764-0429</p>	<p><b>University Health Service (UHS)</b>          207 Fletcher St.  <a href="http://www.uhs.umich.edu/">http://www.uhs.umich.edu/</a>  <a href="mailto:ContactUHS@umich.edu">ContactUHS@umich.edu</a>          Phone: (734) 764-8320</p>
<p><b>Office of Services for Students with Disabilities</b>          G-664 Haven Hall, 505 S. State St.  <a href="http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/">http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/</a>  <a href="mailto:sswdoffice@umich.edu">sswdoffice@umich.edu</a>          Phone: (734) 763-3000, (TTY): (734) 615-6921</p>	<p><b>Counselling &amp; Psychological Services (CAPS)</b>          Michigan Union, 530 S. State St., Rm. 3100  <a href="http://www.umich.edu/~caps/">http://www.umich.edu/~caps/</a>  <a href="mailto:tdsevig@umich.edu">tdsevig@umich.edu</a>          Phone: (734) 764-8312</p>

## Course Schedule

### Unit 1: The Video Game Industry

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- 1- Wed. Sept. 7 Introductions, course expectations, overview
- Video Games: The Movie (Available on Netflix or YouTube)
- 2- Mon. Sept. 12 Defining video games
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. "What is a game?" in Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction
  - Gibson Bond, J. "Definition of *Game*" in Introduction to Game Design, Prototyping, and Development
- 3- Wed. Sept. 14 The arcade era
- June, L. [For Amusement Only: the life and death of the American arcade](#). *The Verge*.
  - [Timeline of Arcade History](#), *Wired Magazine*
  - Go to Pinball Pete's and play at least 30 minutes of games OR play [Space Invaders](#), [Ms. Pac-man](#), and [Double Dragon](#) (keep notes on what you play and how you do to share during discussion)
- 4- Mon. Sept. 19 Video game history- Pre-crash
- Donovan, T. Excerpts from Replay: The History of Video Games
  - Play at least two [Atari 2600 games](#) or [Commodore 64 games](#), online or at the CVGA
- 5- Wed. Sept. 21 The video game crash and recovery
- Ryan, J. Excerpts from Super Mario: How Nintendo Conquered America
  - Play at least two [Nintendo Entertainment System games](#) or [Sega Genesis games](#), online or at the CVGA
- 6- Mon. Sept. 26 Industry trends and labor issues
- Consalvo, M. Crunched by Passion, Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat.
  - Huntemann, N. [Irreconcilable differences: Gender and labor in the video game workplace](#), *Flow*.
  - "[EA: The Human Story](#)." And "[Wives of Rockstar San Diego Employees Have Collected Themselves](#)."
- 7- Wed. Sept. 28 The rise of independent studios
- Watch *Indie Game: The Movie* (on Netflix or via [the UM Library's electronic resources](#)) and take notes using the questions provided
  - \*\*GAME COMPANY BRIEF DUE\*\*
- 8- Mon. Oct. 3 Casual games
- Juul, J. A Casual Revolution, Ch. 1-2
- 9- Wed. Oct. 5 Gaming and globalization
- Consalvo, M. Console Video Games and Global Corporations: Creating a Hybrid Culture, *New Media and Society*

- Nakamura, L. Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*

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## Unit 2: Video Game Culture

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10- Mon. Oct. 10	<p>What is video game culture? The meaning of games</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaw, A. What is Video Game Culture?, <i>Games and Culture</i></li> <li>• Bogost, I. The Rhetoric of Video Games, <i>The Ecology of Games</i></li> </ul>
11- Wed. Oct. 12	<p>Video game journalism and reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kirkpatrick, G. <a href="#">Constitutive Tensions of Gaming's Field</a>, <i>Game Studies</i></li> <li>• Nieborg and Sihvonen- The new gatekeepers: The occupational ideology of game journalism, paper presented at DiGRA 2009</li> </ul>
12- Mon. Oct. 17	FALL BREAK- No class!
13- Wed. Oct. 19	<p>Analyzing games and game culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fernandez-Vara, C.- Excerpts from <a href="#">Introduction to Game Analysis</a></li> </ul>
14- Mon. Oct. 26	<p>Representation in games- race</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leonard, D.- Live in Your World, Play in Ours, <i>SIMILE</i></li> <li>• Brock, A.- "When Keeping it Real Goes Wrong": Resident Evil 5, Racial Representation, and Gamers, <i>Games and Culture</i></li> <li>• Newman- <a href="#">Why my video game chooses your character's race and gender for you</a>, <i>The Guardian</i></li> <li>• **GAME REVIEW DUE**</li> </ul>
15- Wed. Oct. 28	<p>Representation in games- gender and sexuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Williams et. al, The virtual census: representations of gender, race and age in video games, <i>New Media and Society</i></li> <li>• Shaw, A. Do you identify as a gamer?, <i>Games and Culture</i></li> <li>• Play at least 30 minutes of a game with a playable female character (your choice). Take notes on her representation (appearance, voice, behavior, reactions of other characters to her presence, etc.) to use during class discussion</li> </ul>
16- Mon. Oct. 31	<p>Identity in online spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turkle, S. Introduction to <a href="#">Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet</a></li> <li>• Martey et al, The strategic female: gender-switching and player behavior in online games, <i>Information, Communication &amp; Society</i></li> </ul>
17- Wed. Nov. 2	<p>Video game communities- pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bainbridge, W. The Scientific Research Potential of Virtual Worlds, <i>Science</i>.</li> <li>• Molyneux et. al, Gaming Social Capital. <i>Journal of Computer Mediated Communication</i>.</li> </ul>
18- Mon. Nov. 7	<p>Video game communities- cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nakamura, L. "It's a Nigger in Here! Kill the Nigger!" User-Generated Media Campaigns Against Racism, Sexism, and</li> </ul>

Homophobia in Digital Games, *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies*

- Cote, A. "I Can Defend Myself": Women's Strategies for Coping With Harassment While Gaming Online, *Games and Culture*

19- Wed. Nov. 9

WRITING DAY- No class

- Wrap up your media text and work on media analysis paper

20- Mon. Nov. 14

E-sports

- Taylor, T. L. Raising the Stakes, Ch. 1
- \*MEDIA ANALYSIS PAPER DUE\*\*

21- Wed. Nov. 16

Video games and violence

- Anderson et al., Violent video game effects on aggression, empathy, and prosocial behavior in Eastern and Western countries: A meta-analytic review, *Psychology Bulletin*
- Ferguson and Kilburn, Much ado about nothing: The misestimation and overinterpretation of violent video game effects in Eastern and Western nations: Comment on Anderson et al. (2010), *Psychology Bulletin*

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### Unit 3: Video Games in Popular Culture

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22- Mon. Nov. 21

Fan-created texts

- Postigo, H. Video Game Appropriation through Modifications. *Convergence*.
- Rehak, B. Mapping the Bit Girl Lara Croft and new media fandom. *Information, Communication and Society*.
- Find a fan-created, game inspired text and bring it (or notes on it) to class for discussion
- \*\*FINAL PAPER PROPOSAL DUE\*\*

23- Wed. Nov. 23

THANKSGIVING- NO CLASS

24- Mon. Nov. 28

Representations of gamers

- Cowert et al. Geek or Chic? Emerging Stereotypes of Online Gamers. *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*.

25- Wed. Nov. 30

Representations of games

- Glass, F. (1984). Sign of the Times: The Computer as Character in "Tron, War Games", and "Superman III". *Film Quarterly*.

26- Mon. Dec. 5

Adapting games to other media

- Kaldamanidou, B. and Katsaridou, M. Silent Hill: Adapting a Video Game. *Literature/Film Quarterly*.
- Child, B. [Assassin's Creed star Michael Fassbender had 'never played the game'](#). *The Guardian*

27- Wed. Dec. 7

Final presentations

28- Mon. Dec. 12

Final presentations

- \*\*FINAL PAPER DUE\*\*