

COMM 350 - Video Games: Content, Industry, and Policy

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3:20

Room: ASC 232

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Overview

Video games are an increasingly important communication medium in terms of national use, cultural impact and profitability. With the majority of the population now playing them and communicating through them, games are media that need to be examined for their use and impact. This industry, its history and the cultural practices it engenders have until very recently been neglected in comparison to television and other media.

The course has been designed as a broad introduction to the medium and history of video games. It draws from a wide variety of disciplines to examine video games as aesthetic products, cultural products, economic outputs, as a policy issue, as possible sources of effects and sites of community.

Learning Objectives

The interdisciplinary approach will give students exposure to the fundamentals of business and economics, sociology, social psychology, history, policy analysis and cultural studies.

Students need not have prior experience in these areas but must demonstrate a willingness to learn several approaches. Students should also be aware that the interdisciplinary nature of the course will make it more challenging than most, but will in turn offer more to the student over the course of the semester.

Assignments

The main requirements are participation, readings, two midterms and short assignments leading to a major term project. *Participation is an important component of the class.*

Readings will be supplied via Blackboard. All of the readings in the syllabus are required, and supplemental readings may be added as the term progresses, depending on the interests of the students. The materials consist of book excerpts, magazine articles, research papers, and trade articles.

A series of short paper assignments will lay the groundwork for a larger, final project of the student's choosing that will be developed by the student and approved by the instructor.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and is taken at the beginning of the class. You are allowed two absences *without explanation*. Anything else must be documented or will otherwise affect your grade significantly.

Don't be late, and don't leave early.

Other

All students are required to sign up for two email services:

- 1) Games Industry Biz update at <http://www.gamesindustry.biz>
- 2) A customized email digest based on "video games" at <http://www.google.com/alerts?hl=en>.

Grading

The papers for this class are graded on both content and format. Papers written unprofessionally will receive poor grades.

Exams are graded blind: names are removed before grading for anonymity.

Any queries about your grade on an assignment must be submitted to me in writing, *no sooner* than 24 hours after you get your grade. I will then review your work again and meet with you to discuss your grade.

Short assignments

There are five short assignments during the term:

- 1) Write a one-page profile of a game company. Include its origins, its market, and its prospects, plus any relevant statistics.
- 2) In one page, describe your own categorization within the player typology scheme known as Bartle's Types. Which one are you and why? Provide examples.
- 3) Write a one-page reaction paper for the readings on Media Construction and Social History. What are the key points and do you agree or disagree with them?
- 4) Without reading about it, try a game for the first time. Write a one-page ratings summary that includes a justification of your own rating, an explanation of the official rating, and why the two differ (if they do).
- 5) Read through the web site "Terra Nova" (terranova.blogs.com). Find one or more posts and threads of interest and write a one-page reaction paper. Incorporate concepts from the course readings.

Grade breakdown

Short assignments	15%
Midterm 1	20%
Midterm 2	20%
Debate performance	5%
Final Paper	30%
Participation	10%

Final Paper

The final paper is a research paper on a topic of student's choosing, approved by the instructor. Students will submit proposals and outlines during the term. The paper will be between 10 and 15 pages and due at the Final Examination Period.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) on the main USC campus each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is +1 213 740-0776.

Academic Integrity Policy

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's Academic Integrity code as detailed in the SCampus Guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the Academic Integrity Code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication degree program.

It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting a paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. If you have doubts about any of these practices, confer with a faculty member.

Resources on academic honesty can be found on the Student Judicial Affairs Web site (<http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS>.)

“Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism” addresses issues of paraphrasing, quotations, and citation in written assignments, drawing heavily upon materials used in the university's writing program; “Understanding and avoiding academic dishonesty” addresses more general issues of academic integrity, including guidelines for adhering to standards concerning examinations and unauthorized collaboration.

The “2007-2008SCampus” (<http://www.usc.edu/scampus>) contains the university's student conduct code and other student-related policies.

Important dates

2/19: Midterm I

3/17-22: Spring Break, no classes

3/27: Midterm II

5/8, 2-4 PM. Final paper due, and extra credit session.

Date	Session	Readings	Associated Assignments
1/15	Intro, Hello		
1/17	Game Content: Genres/AI, Content Analysis, Popularity	Sellers, M. (2006). Designing the experience of interactive play. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i> . Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.	
1/22	Industry History: Origins	"Spacewar" chapter. Levy, S. (1994). <i>Hackers: Heroes of the computer revolution</i> . New York: Penguin Books.	
1/24	Industry History: Atari	Ch. 3-5 (p. 27-58). Kent, S. (2000). <i>The first quarter: A 25-year history of video games</i> . Bothell, Washington: BWD Press.	
1/29	Industry History: Nintendo to Now	p. 1-11 & 349-389. Sheff, D. (1999). <i>Game over, press start to continue: The maturing of Mario</i> . Wilton, Connecticut: GamePress.	
1/31	History, then Economics	Ch. 7, p. 151-168. Kline, S., Dyer-Witheford, N., & DePeuter, G. (2003). <i>Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing</i> . Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.	Short paper: Game & company profile
2/5	Economics/IO model	Kline et al, "Digital Play" Ch. 8, p. 169-192	
2/7	Economics/IO model	Williams, D. (2002). Structure and competition in the U.S. home video game industry. <i>The International Journal on Media Management</i> , 4(1), 41-54.	
2/12	Motivations	Raney et al. (2006). "Adolescents and the Appeal of Games" In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i> . Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.	

2/14	Player types	Bartle, R. (1996). Players who suit MUDs. <i>Journal of MUD research</i> , 1(1).	Bartle player type exercise
2/19	Midterm 1		
2/21	Culture Wars: Left vs. Right vs. Players	<p>"The Coming of the Masses." Gasset, J. O. y. (1994). <i>The revolt of the masses</i>. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.</p> <p>Excerpt: Adorno, T., & Horkheimer, M. (1979). <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>. London: Verso.</p>	
2/26	Media Constructions/Social History	<p>p. 58-74. Glassner, B. (1999). <i>The culture of fear: Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things</i>. New York: Basic Books.</p> <p>Ch. 4, p. 43-59. Hertz, J. C. (1997). <i>Joystick nation</i>. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.</p>	Reaction Paper
2/28	Media Constructions/Social History	<p>Williams, D. (2006). A (brief) social history of gaming. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.</p>	
3/4	Effects	<p>Anderson, C., & Bushman, B. J. (2001). Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal, and prosocial behavior: A meta-analytic review of the scientific literature. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 12(5), 353-359.</p> <p>Freedman, J. (2002, October 27). <i>Evaluating the research on violent video games</i>. Paper presented at the Playing By the Rules, Chicago, Illinois.</p>	

3/6	Effects/Legal Cases	Ch. 10. Jones, G. (2002). <i>Killing monsters: Why children need superheroes, fantasy games, and make-believe violence</i> . New York: Basic Books.	Ratings check assignment: evaluate evaluators
3/11	Ratings Systems	ESRB.com and psvratings.com	
3/13	Public Policy: Debate & Debrief	Debate Packet: handouts of roles with backgrounds and profiles. Possible updated news clippings. Materials given out in class #17.	Group meetings: prepare for debate
3/18		SPRING BREAK	
3/20		SPRING BREAK	
3/25	Review Class	No reading	
3/27	Midterm 2	No reading	
4/1	Gender, Sexuality in games	Bryce, J., & Rutter, J. (2005). Gendered gaming in gendered space. In J. Raessens & J. Goldstein (Eds.), (pp. 301-310). Boston: MIT Press. p. 143-147. King, B., & Borland, J. (2003). <i>Dungeons and dreamers: The rise of computer game culture. From geek to chic</i> . Emeryville, California: McGraw-Hill. Kline et al "Digital Play" p. 258-268.	
4/3	Identity, Race in games	Nakamura, L. (2001). Race in/for cyberspace: Identity tourism and racial passing on the Internet. In D. Trend (Ed.), <i>Reading digital culture</i> (pp. 226-235). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc.	

4/8	Term Paper Workshop	"Murder Incorporated" handout	Term paper topic + brief (1 page max) write up due
4/10	Future of games	Bing Gordon visit Hall, J. (2006). Future of games: Mobile gaming. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i> (pp. 47-55). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum. Watters, E. (2005). The player. <i>WIRED</i> .	Prepare questions for visit
4/15	Online Issues I: IP, Ultima, Role Play, Griefing	King & Borland, "Dungeons & Dreamers" p. 148-163, then either browse http://www.igda.org/wiki/index.php/IP_Rights_SIG OR read Herz, J. C. (2002, June). 50,000,000 Star Warriors Can't Be Wrong. <i>WIRED</i> , 10, 114-119.	
4/17	Online Issues II	Luc Barthelet visit	Prepare questions for visit
4/22	Online Issues III	Dibbell, J. (2003, January). The 79th richest nation on Earth doesn't exist. <i>WIRED</i> , 12, 106-113.	Terra Nova Assignment
4/24	Online Community: Guilds, Clans, Effects; Case Study: Order of Light	Dibbell, J. (2001). A rape in cyberspace; or how an evil clown, a Haitian trickster spirit, two wizards, and a cast of dozens turned a database into a society. In D. Trend (Ed.), <i>Reading Digital Culture</i> (pp. 199-213). Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers. Chiarella, T. (2004). The lost boys. <i>Esquire</i> .	
4/29	Student choice of topic: Education/serious games, Presence, or something else	Lieberman, D. (2006). What can we learn from playing interactive games? In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i> (pp. 379-397). Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum	

	OR	<p>Lee, K. (2006). Narrative and interactivity in computer games. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Crawford, C. (2006). Interactive storytelling. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.</p>	
5/1	Term recap session	No reading	