Concordia University
Communications Department

COMS 333 : Games, Media & Culture
Winter 2020

Time : Fridays, 1:15 – 4:00pm
Location : CJ 4.320

Instructor : Adam Stangeby
Email : adamjamesmass@gmail.com
Office hours: Fridays 12-1pm, or by appointment

Course Description
This course takes a critical approach to understanding the role of games as media and cultural objects. Students explore how to make sense of games, both as scholars and as players. The course offers ample opportunities for students to play, discuss, and experiment with games themselves, as well as with media about games.

Course Objectives
This course will familiarize students with key texts, ideas, and debates in game studies. Students will become conversant in the following topics:

- how digital games emerged historically
- the advantages and disadvantages of understanding digital games in a transmedia context and through pre-existing theories of media
- the role of digital games in shaping cultural practices, identities, and communities
- the social and educational implications of games as participatory media

Readings, discussions, and class activities will equip students with the analytical tools to independently develop research-based responses to discussions of key questions in the field of game studies.

Required Readings
Readings are available through Moodle via the library's Course Reserve system

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment	Due date	% of grade
Attendance and participation	All Term	12%

Response Papers (8 x 3%)	All Term	24%
Case Study Paper	February 14, 2020	24%
Final Project Proposal	February 24, 2020	10%
Final Project	April 20, 2020	30%

Attendance and participation

You are expected to show up to each class on time, ready to participate in discussions and activities. You are allowed one unexcused absence in the course of the term. If you have a good reason to miss the class, you need to contact me in advance so that we can work out an arrangement.

For the official department guidelines on both attendance and participation expectations please see below under General Course Policies.

Response Papers

After the break in the middle of each class, you will write a response to the readings reviewed that week in class. You may write your response using a word processor and email me an electronic copy, but late submissions will not be accepted. Your eight highest graded responses will be taken to determine this portion of your grade.

These response papers are meant to provide an opportunity to organize your thoughts around issues and topics discussed in the course as we move along.

Case Study Paper

The essay paper (6-9 pages, double-spaced, 1" margins, Times New Roman 12-pt. font) will be a comparative analysis of two video games (one **vintage** and the other **contemporary**). You will be expected to formulate a clear thesis for the paper as well as use at least **two** sources from the assigned readings as support for that thesis.

Your paper should attempt to highlight some important historical developments of the game industry, game culture, and/or player communities. The essay can focus on technical aspects, marketing campaigns, audience reception, narrative development, or theoretical importance of the games, among other possible areas of focus.

Check with me when you have chosen your two games so that I can approve them as appropriate for the assignment.

Final Project
For the final project, you will get to choose between two options:

Option A: a traditional, independently-written research paper (8-12 pages, double-spaced, 1" margins, Times New Roman 12-pt. font)

OR

Option B: A game prototype (created using an authoring system such as Game Maker, RPG Maker, Twine, or Inform 7) that critically engages with course content (students may work in groups of no more than three persons; each student will independently write a written component (3-4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt. font) and will receive an individual grade.

Prior to completing the final project, you will need to submit a 1 or 2 page project proposal in which you present your choice of option, explain your argument or game project and how it will engage with the concepts presented in the course. The first line of the proposal should be the proposed thesis for your project/paper.

Detailed instructions and criteria for assignments will be provided separately.

Additional Notes: For students choosing the research paper, the "circuit of culture" analysis model (introduced in Week 7) will be the primary analytical framework tool used to explain at least one set of relations (ie. production, consumption, regulation, identification, representation) relevant to your chosen game studies topic. Detailed examples will be provided separately.

Additional Notes: For students choosing the game prototype project, the individualized responses will focus on a single (and separate) important aspect of the game production and reception process. Ideally, the individualized responses should be compiled into a coherent whole along with the addition of an introduction and conclusion (written by one or more of the group members). Detailed examples will be provided separately.

Late work: Assignments must be submitted in class on the due dates provided on this syllabus. Final project proposals and final projects can be submitted online but must be arranged with me beforehand. Final project proposals can be submitted during class (Week 7) or via email the following Monday (first day of Reading Week). If you cannot make the deadline or come to class on that day, you must contact me ahead of time so we can make arrangements. Otherwise, any assignment that have not been received by the end of the class will be considered late and will be subject to a late penalty of 5% per day.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Jan. 10: Course Introduction

      Course introduction and syllabus review

N.B. In this syllabus, some multimedia supplements are marked with an asterisk signaling that this content may involve mature content, themes, or situations (coarse language and/or violence). Audio-visual supplements will not be subject to grading and are optional to engage with, but which may be discussed during weekly classes.

PART 1: Introduction to Game Studies

Week 2

Jan. 17: Who Let the Gamers Out? (Intro to Gamer Representation, Identity, and Inclusiveness)

- Richard Bartle, "Hearts, clubs, diamonds, spades: Players who suit MUDs," *Journal of MUD research* (1996)
- Adrienne Shaw, "Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity," *New Media Society* 14:1 (2012): 28-44

Supplementary Reading:

Mia Consalvo, "Hardcore casual: Game culture Return(s) to Ravenhearst," Paper presented at 4th International Conference on Foundations of Digital Games, Port Canaveral, FL (April 26-30, 2009)

Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (trans. David Wyllie) Project Gutenberg, Ebook #5200

PART 2: Foundations of the Field

Week 3

Jan. 24: What in Ergodic's name is Going on Here? (Theories of Play)

- Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature,* John Hopkins University Press, 1997: 1-23
- Jesper Juul, "The magic circle and the puzzle piece," in *Conference Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games,* ed. by Stephan Günzel, Michael Liebe and Dieter Mersch, Potsdam: University Press, 2008: 56-67

Supplementary Reading:

Thomas M. Malaby, "Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games," *Games and Culture* 2:2 (April 2007): 95-113

Michel Foucault, "Remarks and Consequences," in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Vintage Books; Random House, 1972: 71-76

Week 4
Jan. 31: "Dissonance is the Truth about Harmony" (History: Game Studies vs the World!)
- Dimitri Williams, "The Video Game Lightning Rod," Information, Communication & Society 6:4 (2003): 523-550

Supplementary Reading:

Eugene Provenzo, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999: 49-71

Watch: The Simpsons S27E08 "Paths of Glory" (aired Dec. 6, 2015; produced by Fox Broadcasting Company; created by Matt Groening)

Week 5
Feb. 7: You say Mag-neat-O, I say Mag-net-O (History: Game Studies vs Itself!)
- Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation Versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology," In *Video Game Theory Reader*, edited by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron. New York: Routledge, 2003: 221-235
- Celia Pearce, "Theory Wars: An Argument Against Arguments in the so-called Ludology/Narratology Debate," Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views – Worlds in Play (2005): 1-6
- Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," In *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004: 118-30

Supplementary Reading:

Jesper Juul, "A Clash Between Game and Narrative – a thesis on computer games and interactive fiction," Published Master's Thesis from University of Copenhagen (1999)

Edgar Allan Poe, *The Philosophy of Composition*, Project Gutenberg, Ebook #55749

Week 6
Feb. 14: How do you say that in Games? (Materialism and the Logic of Games)

- Ian Bogost, (excerpts from) *Unit Operations – An Approach to Video Game Criticism*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006: 3-19, 99-109

Supplementary Reading:

Katherine N. Hayles, "Print is Flat, Code is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis." Poetics Today, 25:1 (Spring, 2004): 67-90

Audrey Anable, "Platform Studies," *Feminist Media Histories* 4:2 (Spring 2018): 135-140

Watch: "How is this speedrun possible? Super Mario Bros. World Record Explained" uploaded by Bismuth to YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FQJEzJ_cQw (uploaded Mar. 2, 2018)

PART 3: Featured Framework

Week 7
Feb 21: What Goes Around, Comes Around (Semiotics: Circuit of Culture Analysis Model)
- Paul Du Gay et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The story of the Sony Walkman*, Milton Keynes: Open University; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997: 1-40 (multiple full-page images)

Supplementary Reading:

Felan Parker, Jennifer R. Whitson & Bart Simon, "Megabooth: The cultural intermediation of indie games," *New Media & Society* 20:5 (2018): 1953-1972

Bridget Tombleson and Katharina Wolf, "Rethinking the Circuit of Culture: how participatory culture has transformed cross-cultural communication." *Public Relations Review* 43:1 (2017): 14-25

Watch: "Game Theory: Was Ninja Worth It? (The Ninja Mixer Deal) uploaded by The Game Theorists to YouTube https://youtu.be/FT71iZqRXkU (uploaded Aug. 25, 2019)*

Feb 24-28: MID-TERM BREAK!

PART 4: Circuit of Game Culture

Week 8

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Mar 6: (Production - Industry)
- Mia Consalvo, "The Canadian video game industry," *Mediascapes: New patterns in Canadian communication* (2014): 238-253
- Randy Nichols, "Who Plays, Who Pays? Mapping Video Game Production and Consumption Globally," in *Gaming Globally – Production, Play, and Place*, ed. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013: 19-39

Supplementary Reading:

Vit Šisler, "Video Game Development in the Middle East: Iran, the Arab World, and Beyond," in *Gaming Globally – Production, Play, and Place*, ed. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013: 251-271

Christian McCrea, "Australian Video Games: The Collapse and Reconstruction of an Industry," in *Gaming Globally – Production, Play, and Place*, ed. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013: 203-207

James Portnow, Arthur Protasio, and Kate Donaldson, "Brazil: Tomorrow's Market," in *Gaming Globally – Production, Play, and Place*, ed. Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013: 75-77

Watch: "Game Theory: The Ninja Mixer Mistake! (The Ninja Mixer Deal Part 2) uploaded by The Game Theorists to YouTube https://youtu.be/SEYVHHqMU_o (uploaded Aug. 29, 2019)*

Week 9
Mar 13: (Consumption – 'Playbour')
- Nicholas Taylor, Kelly Bergstrom, Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell, "Alienated Playbour: Relations of Production in EVE Online," *Games and Culture* 10:4 (2015): 365-388
- Julian Kücklich, "Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry," *The Fibreculture Journal* 5 (2005)

Supplementary Reading:

Nick Yee, "The Labor of Fun – How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play," *Games and Culture* 1:1 (2006): 68-71

Watch: "The Bishop of Battle" from Nightmares (d. Joseph Sargent, 1983)*

Week 10
Mar 20: (Identity I – Casual vs Hardcore)
- Rachel Kowert, *Video Games and Social Competence,* New York: Routledge, 2015: 1-15
- Jesper Juul, *A Casual Revolution: Reinventing Video Games and their Players*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009: 25-63

Supplementary Reading:

Shira Chess and Christopher Paul, "The End of Casual: Long Live Casual," *Games and Culture* 14:2 (March 2019): 107-118

Watch: "Tim Judges DrDisrespects Fortnite Skills! – ft. DrDisRespect, NickMercs & SypherPK" uploaded by TimTheTatman to YouTube https://youtu.be/6LpKstMDIjI (uploaded Oct. 26, 2019)*

Watch: "Average Day as Air Traffic Controller in Flight Simulator X (Multiplayer)" uploaded by Airforceproud95 to YouTube https://youtu.be/EI1Tofqrc1A (uploaded Dec. 2, 2017)*

Week 11
Mar 27: (Representation – Dark Play)
- Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: essays on algorithmic culture*, Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2006: 107-126
- Jesper Juul, "Fear of Failing? – The Many Meanings of Difficulty in Video Games," in *The Video Game Theory Reader 2* ed. by Bernard Perron and Mark J. P. Wolf. New York: Routledge, 2009 :237-252

Supplementary Reading:

Mia Consalvo, "Cheating" (personal copy): 1-13

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 :183-197

Watch: "Leeroy Jenkins HD 1080p" uploaded by J Jonah Jameson to YouTube https://youtu.be/mLyOj_QD4a4 (uploaded Jun. 11, 2014)*

Watch: "Luring Players into a fake floor Scam Shop! – Rust Trap Base" uploaded by Wilsonator to YouTube https://youtu.be/VWi-aqcSS_s (uploaded Oct. 26, 2018)

Week 12
Apr 3: (Identity II – Gender, Ethnicity and Orientation)
- Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell, "Girls@Play - An ethnographic study of gender and digital gameplay," *Feminist Media Studies* 11:2 (2011): 167-179
- Souvik Mukherjee, *Videogames and Postcolonialism – Empire Plays Back,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017: 75-99

Supplementary Reading:

Mia Consalvo "Hot Dates and Fairy-Tale Romances: Studying Sexuality in Video Games," in *The Video Game Theory Reader* ed. by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron. New York: Routledge, 2003: 171-194

Judith Butler *Gender Trouble – Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1990: 142-149

Watch: "Game Theory: Are GTA V Cops Racist? (Grand Theft Auto V)" uploaded by The Game Theorists to YouTube https://youtu.be/ZXpfsYiG8Dc (uploaded Mar. 12, 2015)*

Week 13
Apr 10: (Regulation -)
- Mark Finn, "Rockstar versus Australia," in *Video Game Policy – Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. by Steven Conway and Jennifer deWinter. New York: Routledge, 2016: 98-112
- Carly A. Kocurek, "Against the Arcade: Video Gaming Regulation and the Legacy of Pinball," in *Video Game Policy – Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. by Steven Conway and Jennifer deWinter. New York: Routledge, 2016: 206-216

Supplementary Reading:

Owen Livermore, "Digital Locks, Labor, and Play in Canada's Copyright Policy: Filtering Power through Configurations of Game Development," in *Video Game Policy – Production, Distribution, and Consumption*, ed. by Steven Conway and Jennifer deWinter. New York: Routledge, 2016: 27-41

Owen S. Good, *Another regulator says loot boxes are not gambling.* December 16th, 2017. Retrieved from Polygon.com.

Watch: "Why it Matters – Nintendo Seal of Quality (Episode 3)" uploaded by ProtoMario to YouTube https://youtu.be/5xLObvl7TyU (uploaded Sep. 2, 2017)

FINAL PAPERS DUE: April 20, 2020

Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University (2019/2020)

We would like to begin by acknowledging that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather today. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community. (Indigenous Directions Leadership Group, Feb. 16, 2017)

A list of Student Services and Useful Resources

1. Coms Academic Advisor: Ms. Marcella Di Claudio Marcella.DiClaudio@concordia.ca

2. Counselling and Psychological Services: http://concordia.ca/students/counselling-life-skills

3. Concordia Library Citation and Style Guides: http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/citations

4. Student Success Centre: http://concordia.ca/students/success

5. Health Services: http://concordia.ca/students/health

6. Financial Aid and Awards: http://concordia.ca/offices/faao

7. HOJO (Off Campus Housing and Job Bank): http://csu.qc.ca/hojo

8. Academic Integrity: http://concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity

9. Access Centre for Students with Disabilities: http://concordia.ca/offices/acsd

10. CSU Advocacy Centre: http://csu.qc.ca/advocacy

11. Dean of Students Office: http://concordia.ca/offices/dean-students

12. International Students Office: http://concordia.ca/students/international

13. Student Hub: http://concordia.ca/students

14. Department of Communication Studies: http://www.concordia.ca/artsci/coms.html

15. BA Coms announcement list: To subscribe, send an email to majordomo@lists.concordia.ca with 'subscribe bacoms' (no quotes) as the only text in your message. *Save the reply for future reference as we cannot unsubscribe you!*

16. Postings for internships and paid work for students in the Department of Communication Studies only: http://comsopps.concordia.ca *BA students cannot take internships in their first two semesters.*

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17. Sexual Assault Resource Centre: http://concordia.ca/students/sexual-assault.html

18. Indigenous Directions: http://concordia.ca/about/indigenous.html

University Rights and Responsibilities

Academic Integrity: "The Academic Code of Conduct sets out for students, instructors and administrators both the process and the expectations involved when a charge of academic misconduct occurs. The regulations are presented within the context of an academic community which seeks to support student learning at Concordia University." (From Article 1 of the Academic Code of Conduct). Full text:

http://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/offences.html

Plagiarism: The most common offense under the Academic Code of Conduct is plagiarism, which the Code defines as "the presentation of the work of another person as one's own or without proper acknowledgement." This includes material copied word for word from books, journals, Internet sites, professor's course notes, etc. It refers to material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It also includes for example the work of a fellow student, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased from any source. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone –it can refer to copying images, graphs, tables and ideas. "Presentation" is not limited to written work. It includes oral presentations, computer assignment and artistic works. Finally, if you translate the work of another person into any other language and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. **In Simple Words: Do not copy, paraphrase or translate anything from anywhere without saying where you obtained it!** Source: Academic Integrity Website: http://concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity

Disabilities: The University's commitment to providing equal educational opportunities to all students includes students with disabilities. To demonstrate full respect for the academic capacities and potential of students with disabilities, the University seeks to remove attitudinal and physical barriers that may hinder or prevent qualified students with disabilities from participating fully in University life. Please see the instructor during the first class if you feel you require assistance. For more information please visit **http://concordia.ca/offices/acsd**

Safe Space Classroom: Concordia classrooms are considered 'safe space classrooms'. In order to create a climate for open and honest dialogue and to encourage the broadest range of viewpoints, it is important for class participants to treat each other with respect. Name-calling, accusations, verbal attacks, sarcasm, and other negative exchanges are counter-productive to successful teaching and learning. The purpose of class discussions is to generate greater understanding about different topics. The expression of the broadest range of ideas, including dissenting views, helps to accomplish this goal. However, in expressing viewpoints, students should try to raise questions and comments in ways that will promote learning, rather than defensiveness and feelings of conflict in other students. Thus, questions and comments should be asked or stated in such a way that will promote greater insight into the awareness of topics as opposed to anger and conflict. The

purpose of dialogue and discussion is not to reach a consensus, nor to convince each other of different viewpoints. Rather, the purpose of dialogue in the classroom is to reach higher levels of learning by examining different viewpoints and opinions with respect and civility.

Department Policies

Participation: This grade is based on overall punctuality and attendance in the classes, labs and workshops. Student preparedness, initiative and *level of class engagement* is evaluated (this means participating in discussions and demonstration of familiarity with required readings). Participation also includes completing all required readings and all assignments **on time**. Students are expected to be collegial, respectful and tolerant of peers, teaching assistants, technical instructors and professors. The best classroom experience will occur with courteous and engaged participation and interaction with each other, the work, the discussions and debates.

Attendance: Regular attendance is a requirement. Students are expected to actively participate in all classes, workshops, critiques, discussions and labs associated with courses, and to complete all required course work according to deadlines and guidelines as assigned. Failure to comply can result in loss of marks.

Electronic Devices: No electronic devices may be used once the class starts. All mobile phones, iPods, PDAs, cell phones, laptops etc. *must be turned off and put away*. The only exceptions are if the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities has authorized such use or the instructor specifically grants permission for use.

COMMUNICATION STUDIES NUMERICAL GRADE, LETTER GRADE AND OFFICIAL GRADE POINT EQUIVALENTS

Numerical Grade	Letter Grade	Official Grade Point
94 - 100	A+	4.33
90 - 93	A	4.0
86 - 89	A-	3.67
82 - 85	B+	3.3
78 - 81	B	3.0
74 - 77	B-	2.67
70 - 73	C+	2.33
66 - 69	C	2.0
62 - 65	C-	1.67
58 - 61	D+	1.33

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54 - 57	D	1.0
50 - 53	D-	0.67
0 - 49	F	0.0

Please note the individual instructors may elect to use numerical grades, letter grades or both for individual assignments, while all final marks for the course are given as letter grades at the university level. Course grades are not considered final until approved by the Department Chair.

A *Superior work in both content and presentation. This is a student who appears, even at an early stage, to be a potential honours student. The work answers all components of a question. It demonstrates clear and persuasive argument, a well-structured text that features solid introductory and concluding arguments, and examples to illustrate the argument. Few, if any presentation errors appear.*

B *Better than average in both content and presentation. This student has the potential for honours, though it is less evident than for the A student. Student's work is clear and well structured. Minor components of an answer might be missing, and there may be fewer illustrations for the argument. Some minor but noticeable errors in presentation may have interfered with the general quality of the work.*

C *Student demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of the material. Ideas are presented in a style that is at least somewhat coherent and orderly. Occasional examples are provided to support arguments. Presentation errors that affect the quality of the work are more apparent than in B work. Some components of a question may have been omitted in the response.*

D *Student has only a basic grasp of the material. Sense of organization and development is often not*

demonstrated in the response. Few, if any, examples are provided to illustrate argument. Major components of a question might have been neglected; and major presentation errors hamper the work.

F *Shows an inadequate grasp of the material. Work has major errors of style; and provides no supporting illustration for argument. Ideas are not clear to the reader. Work lacks a sense of structure.*

Additional criteria, parameters and guidelines will be handed out in class when each assignment is introduced and discussed.