

Spring 2026 - MRTS 3630.400: *Game Studies: Players, Culture and Industry*

Professor

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:00pm-3:00pm via remote appointment or request

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Course Description

As an introduction to the field of game studies, this course has three purposes: (1) to introduce students to some of the theories and methods used to study games that have gradually formed between the 20th and early 21st centuries; (2) to show how and why games matter to people and the world not simply as entertainment, but as a communicative medium; and (3) to help students learn the basics of theoretical reading, research, and writing. We will approach games from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints and from different moments in their production, distribution, and reception. Students will read theoretical texts, play games, and write analyses. No previous experience as a game player is necessary for participating in this class, but students must be willing to explore issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality within an educational framework, particularly in how they relate to games.

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

1. Recall a variety of academic and industry perspectives on the study of games that you will have obtained through careful reading of complex sources.
2. Apply academic and industry theories to the analysis of individual games.
3. Play digital and analog games with a focus on developing audio, visual, and ludic literacies.
4. Compose descriptive and analytic writing aimed at different audiences and using varied tones.
5. Discuss how games matter as more than entertainment and argue why they matter as a medium, as a commodity, as a form of communication, as a social practice, as a human problem, as a means of learning, and as an art form.
6. Strategically read large amounts of theoretical and technical text.

Required Materials

- Access to Canvas
- All readings available **FREE** online through:
 - Syllabus – as URLs and embedded links (you will need to use a VPN when accessing off campus - guide at https://aits.unt.edu/support/palo_alto_vpn.html)
 - Online Course Reserves – Link TBA (Course Password: CirbyGamesSPR26)
 - **All readings are accessible for free.** If you find yourself at a paywall, contact the professor.
- 2 Games – You will need to play and write about two games; one for each half of the course. You can play on any platform you have available. Additionally, board games, books, and video games/consoles are available to borrow at the [UNT Media Library](#).

Formula for Final Grade (500 total points)

Discussion Boards (15x3½ points), Quizzes (10x5 points [*lowest 2 dropped*]), Review (100 points), Analysis (100 points), Midterm Exam (100 points), Final Exam (100 points)

General Grading Criteria

- A. The student demonstrated an excellent understanding of course material, and presented clear, well-articulated analyses in written works. The student is able to intelligently employ terms and concepts introduced in class in proving their thesis. The student was highly motivated and nearly always participated in discussions. [450-500 = A]
- B. The student demonstrated accurate comprehension of course material, but the student's understanding did not go beyond the basic requirements. Ideas are presented in clear and direct manner with few errors. Analysis was incomplete, the thesis was unclear, or there was a gap between the thesis and argument. The student did not participate as often as needed. [400-449 = B]
- C. The student demonstrated an incomplete understanding of course material. Written ideas and arguments were incomplete, unclear, often inaccurate, and generally needed editing. The student rarely participated or engage with course topics during discussion. [350-399 = C]
- D. The student showed inadequate comprehension of the basic premise, and core concepts of the course. Writing did not fulfill the assignment, and was constructed poorly. The student often failed to participate in discussions or did not sign on to Canvas for extended periods. [300-349 = D]
- E. Work was submitted in a way that failed to fulfill basic requirements; Work not submitted will receive zero points [0-299 = F]

Assignments

- 1) Discussion Boards– with each module, you will be required to post in one or two discussion boards. The first two modules have two discussion boards; all of the ones thereafter only have one board. These boards require that you to connect the content of the readings, the theory in the Further Exploration sections, and your own experiences, observations, and expertise. You must also read and *substantively respond* to at least two peers' posts.
- 2) Quizzes – During each module you will take a 5 question quiz. You will have 15 minutes for each quiz. Quizzes draw from the current and previous content modules. Questions are derived from the required Readings (pay attention to the Reading Tips) and the Further Exploration sections. *The lowest two quiz scores will be dropped.*
- 3) Exams – You will take two cumulative exams: a midterm exam and a final exam. Each exam will have 30 short questions and 2 long answer questions; you will be given 90 minutes to finish. Short questions are from the same pool as the quizzes and derived from the required Readings and the Further Exploration sections. So, pay attention to what you did right and wrong on the quizzes, and to the General Comment Announcements! The long questions require a paragraph or two to answer and are unique to each exam.
- 4) Writing – You will pick two games to play and write about during the course. For the first game, you will write a review that incorporates the theory from Modules 1-6; for the second game, you will write a more critical-cultural or industry studies based analytic paper based on Modules 9-14.
 - a) Games - You can pick any game. It can be something you've played before that you will return to playing, or one that you have never played. You can choose an analog or digital game, and you do not need to purchase a game for these assignments. You will need to spend at least 3 hours playing each game, however, so I recommend choosing something you find interesting.
 - b) Review and Analysis
 - These can be written in an informal (general audience) or formal (academic) style/voice.
 - Writings must fulfill a series of requirements that engage with the Canvas writing interface as a form of digital/online writing (these include linking, specific formatting, and inclusion and use of images, movies and sounds). ***Attaching a file instead of using the Canvas API to fulfill the requirements will result in 0 points given for the basic requirements initial grade.***
 - Writing Rubric: fulfills the basic requirements (20 pts); clear review/analysis with a logical point (20 pts) that aptly grapples with theory by applying it to the game being reviewed/analyzed in an appropriate manner (20 pts); is well thought out, explained, and polished (20 pts), and clearly structured (20).
 - Each writing assignment must also be submitted to a separate Canvas portal for an Academic Integrity Check.

c) Comments

- If you do not get the full 100 points for your initial writing, ***you can raise your grade by up to 5 points*** by reading other students' reviews/analyses and writing thoughtful comments. You may also respond to comments on yours and others' posts. While you cannot edit your original post (edits after the original submission date will not be graded), you can make addenda in the form of comments to your own post: these addenda will count as comments
- ***Comments can be posted until the end of the term (May 8, 2026 @ 11:59pm).***
- Comment/Response Grading: 0 for pleasantries; .25 for reading and showing that you read in your comment; .5 for reading, showing that you read, and incorporating a theorist/reading ***or*** extending using your own experience/understanding; 1+ for reading, showing that you read, fully utilizing a theorist/reading, ***and*** extending using your own experience/understanding. Bonus points cannot exceed maximum grade.

Module Unlock Schedule, Deadlines, and Late Assignments

- Modules 1-8 unlock at the beginning of the semester, but they require you to work through them sequentially. To finish a module and move to the next, you must do all of the work listed on the Objectives and Checklist pages. Modules 9-16 unlock in the middle of the semester during Module 7. This means you can work beyond where the class is, but cannot go beyond the half of the class that we're doing.
- All deadlines are listed on the syllabus **in red** and on Canvas on the syllabus tab.
- Most late work is accepted for one week after the original deadline (peer review comments and end-of-term work not included), but will be marked down by one grade point (A→B, etc). Work submitted after the one-week grace period will be marked down by two grade points (A→C, etc). Unsubmitted work will receive a 0. Exceptions may be granted for religious holy days, for active military service, for official university functions, for pregnancy/parenting under Title IX, and for medical or family emergencies. If requested, you must be able to provide documentation of your emergency. Upon returning to class, you have 1 week to reschedule the exam and/or submit the assignment.

Questions and Problems

If you have any questions, ask them! If you encounter problems with the course, let your professor know! Short/simple questions are best through email and the General Q&A Discussion Area (do both for the fastest response); long/complex questions are best addressed through office hours. Grades may only be discussed and/or disputed in-person or through a virtual meeting during office hours or by appointment.

TurnItIn

By taking this course, students agree that certain required assignments will be subject to submission for textual similarity and AI review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Academic Integrity

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. Using ChatGPT and other forms of AI writing tools is a similar form of academic integrity violation. While some classes utilize AI writing, this class does not. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated. At a minimum, plagiarizing will result in failure for the assignment. It might also result in further sanctions at the university level. Familiarize yourself with the UNT policy at: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>.

AI Usage

As stated in the Academic Integrity policy above, this class does not allow the use of AI writing tools like ChatGPT. In addition, AI-adjacent tools like Grammarly are also forbidden in this course, although translation software is allowed with caveats. As noted above in the TurnItIn policy, all work is subject to submission for textual similarity and AI review. After submitting your writing for the Review and Analysis assignments, you must submit a clean, final draft of your paper to TurnItIn. If TurnItIn detects a statistically significant portion of your work was generated or altered by AI tools, your submission will be subjected to further review by the professor. TurnItIn is not 100% accurate, so manual review is required. This could delay grading and may result in a 0 if your work is deemed to not be your own.

Disability Accommodations

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. If you require or think you may require accommodations for disabilities, please register with UNT's Office of Disability Access at Chesnut Hall 102, call 940-565-4323 or visit <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access/>. If you do not register and request, we cannot make arrangements to fit your needs.

Emergency Notification and Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Netiquette Guidelines and Content Warnings:

This class requires that you are willing to explore issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion from a critical standpoint within an educational framework. If you are unable or unwilling to do this, you should think about enrolling in a different class. Additionally, you are expected to maintain reasonable etiquette in your online interactions. Please remember to remain respectful of your professor, TAs, and fellow classmates. More info here: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html>.

Schedule

Introduction to the Course

Introduce Yourself - (*DUE: Wednesday, January 14 by 11:59pm*)

Syllabus + Canvas Quiz - (*DUE: Wednesday, January 14 by 11:59pm*)

Module 1 - "Fun"

Raph Koster. 2004. Chapters 2-5 in *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*: pp. 12-101. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, January 16 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 1 - (*DUE: Friday, January 16 by 11:59pm*)

Module 2 - Designing Fun

Jenova Chen. 2007. "Flow in Games (and Everything Else)." *Communications of the ACM* 50, no. 4: pp. 31-34. [<http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1232769>]

Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek. 2004. "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research." *Game Design and Tuning Workshop at the Game Developers Conference*, San Jose 2001-2004.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228884866_MDA_A_Formal_Approach_to_Game_Design_and_Game_Research]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, January 23 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 2 - (*DUE: Friday, January 23 by 11:59pm*)

Module 3 - Experiencing Other Things

Ian Bogost. 2011. "Art" (pp. 9-17), "Relaxation" (pp. 89-95), and "Titillation" (pp. 103-109) in *How to Do Things With Video Games*. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, January 30 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 3 - (*DUE: Friday, January 30 by 11:59pm*)

Module 4 - Media Effects: Violence

Paul J. C. Adachi & Teena Willoughby. 2011. "The effect of video game competition and violence on aggressive behavior: Which characteristic has the greatest influence?" *Psychology of Violence*, 1(4), 259–274. [<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024908>]

(optional) Craig Alan Anderson and Karen E. Dill. 2000. "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78, no. 4: pp. 772-90. [<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/psp784772.pdf>]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, February 6 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 4 - (*DUE: Friday, February 6 by 11:59pm*)

Module 5 - Media Effects: Addiction

Mark D. Griffiths and Filip Nuyens. 2017. "An Overview of Structural Characteristics in Problematic Video Game Playing." *F. Curr Addict Rep* 4: pp. 1-12. [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-017-0162-y>]

José Zagal, Staffan Björk, and Chris Lewis. 2013. "Dark patterns in the design of games." *Foundations of Digital Games 2013*. [<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1043332>]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, February 13 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 5 - (*DUE: Friday, February 13 by 11:59pm*)

Module 6 - Media Effects: Learning

James Paul Gee. "Learning and Games." 2008. In *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, edited by Katie Salen: 21–40. [<https://issuelab.org/resources/861/861.pdf>]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, February 20 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 6 - (*DUE: Friday, February 20 by 11:59pm*)

Module 7 - Game Review

Game Review: A 'Fun' Experience? - (*DUE: Friday, February 27 by 11:59pm*)

Module 8 - Midterm Exam

Midterm Exam - (*DUE: Friday, March 6 by 11:59pm*)

Spring Break - March 9-15

Module 9 - Social Gaming

Mia Consalvo. 2007. "Gaining Advantage: How Videogame Players Define and Negotiate Cheating" in *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*: pp. 83-105. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, March 20 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 7 - (*DUE: Friday, March 20 by 11:59pm*)

Module 10 - Game Cultures

Benjamin Paaßen, Thekla Morgenroth, and Michelle Stratemeyer. 2017. "What is a True Gamer? The Male Gamer Stereotype and the Marginalization of Women in Video Game Culture." *Sex Roles* 76: 421-435. [[eLibrary](#)]

(optional) Janine Fron, Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce. 2007. "The Hegemony of Play." *The Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 Conference: Situated Play*: 309-318. [<https://doi.org/10.26503/dl.v2007i1.283>]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, March 27 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 8 - (*DUE: Friday, March 27 by 11:59pm*)

Module 11 - Esports and Streaming

T. L. Taylor. 2019. "Networked Broadcasting" in *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*: pp. 23-65. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, April 3 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 9 - (*DUE: Friday, April 3 by 11:59pm*)

Module 12 - Making Games

Aphra Kerr. 2017. "Production: Changing Production Logics, Organisations and Work/ers" in *Global Games: Production, Circulation and Policy in the Networked Era*: pp. 64-105. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, April 10 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 10 - (*DUE: Friday, April 10 by 11:59pm*)

Module 13 - Localizing Games

Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan. 2006. "Game Localization: Unleashing Imagination with 'Restricted' Translation." *Journal of Specialized Translation*, no. 6: pp. 10-21.

[https://jostrans.soap2.ch/issue06/art_ohagan.php]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, April 17 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 11 - (*DUE: Friday, April 17 by 11:59pm*)

Module 14 - Selling Games

Peter Zackariasson and Mikolaj Dymek. 2017. "Introduction," "Marketing Strategy and the Marketing Mix," and "Video Games as Products or Services" in *Video Game Marketing: A Student Textbook*: pp. 1-9, 27-52. [[eLibrary](#)]

Discussion Board(s) - (*DUE: Friday, April 24 by 11:59pm*)

Quiz 12 - (*DUE: Friday, April 24 by 11:59pm*)

Module 15 - Game Analysis

Game Analysis - (*DUE: Friday, May 1 by 11:59pm*)

Module 16 - Final Exam

Final Exam - (*DUE: Wednesday, May 6 by 11:59pm*)