

HIST 3010.001: History through Video Games

Fall 2025

Class Location: WH 115

Class Days: MWF, 10am to 10:50am



Instructor:

Dr. Manny A. Grajales

Office Location:

Wooten Hall 241

Office Hours:

Wednesday and Friday, 1:15pm-3:15pm or by appointment

Instructor's University Email:

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Purpose: Movies and TV were a major introduction of historical moments or themes outside of classrooms throughout the 20th century. People that might not care much about classroom instruction can point to a film or TV series that got them interested in History. With the growth of the Video Game industry during the late 20th century and early 21st century, video games acted as an avenue for people to interact with history. This class intends to look at the historical themes, topics, and moments within video games, specifically how games introduce gamers to historical content and provide a narrative entry into the study of history for students, researchers, and educators. There will be times during the semester where we will interact with different games based on the era we discuss in class. The overall goal of the class is to embrace historically themed video games as an introduction to historical topics and think critically on how game creators make decisions about the topics and characters they tackle.

Required Text(s):

+There are no required textbooks or books for the course. Assigned materials that build our weekly discussions will be available on Canvas or accessible through UNT Libraries. Course materials that examine the major themes of the course include the following: Primary source documents (newspapers, letters, journal entries, etc.); Oral interviews with figures from the past; academic articles; popular journals; podcasts; documentaries; videos that discuss issues from the past still discussed today.

Class Setup:

The course will have a mix of lectures, discussions, and interactive engagement with our subject matter. Mondays and Wednesdays (unless otherwise stated in the syllabus) will be dedicated to class discussion about the themes we are tackling. Make sure to have already read/listened to any material assigned prior to the start of the week. Fridays (again, unless otherwise stated in the syllabus) will be our **Lab Day...**

What is Lab Day?

What is Lab Day in the context of a history course? We will meet in the Eagle's Nest on the 2nd Floor of Willis Library, close to the Media Library. There will be several consoles (and maybe a computer with old tech) that will allow us to play specific parts of the games we are discussing during the week. During the first week, we will take a tour of the Media Library and the Lab on Friday. I will provide more directions on what lab day is during the first week of class.

Course Expectations:

Attendance:

Because we will be discussing a lot of important content in class, it is vital for students to attend class. I do understand that commitments outside of this class may cause conflicts or personal wellbeing will need to be prioritized. For that, please communicate with the instructor to let me know what is going on so we can plan accordingly. Additionally, you are allowed three unexcused absences (one that you have not discussed with me or is not a university-excused absence) during the semester. A class roster will be read at the beginning of each class until I can take roll by memory. If you walk in late to class, be sure and remind the instructor at the end of class that you are in attendance. Otherwise, you may not receive attendance credit.

Semester Expectations:

The attached class schedule lists weekly reading assignments, which you should complete before the first lecture of that week. Whether or not you can complete reading assignments before I deliver the corresponding lectures, I do expect you to keep up with the readings. Your grade depends in part upon your ability to participate meaningfully in discussions. The practice of history is about making and supporting arguments, but I do expect you to remain civil and respect the opinions of your classmates during these dialogues.

Student Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course:

1. Students should be able to understand historical tropes, narratives, and themes within video games with a historical setting in the modern era (1500s to early 21st Century).
2. Students will demonstrate awareness of societal and civic issues within the narratives of video games to implement as a teaching tool.
3. Students will improve their analytical, discussion, and writing skills when analyzing history inspired by video games.
4. Students will use their creative and analytical skills to develop a project that merges history and video games together.
5. Students will the process of research and experiencing historical moments through playing games to understand how history is constructed, remembered, and framed.

Assignments/Requirements

Attendance/Participation (15%)

Your participation in class is also vital to the course. This course is highly collaborative and participatory. It is imperative that you attend (if healthy), and that you are ready to contribute to discussions to nurture both personal and communal growth in the class.

This can range from comments about the materials or asking questions about a reading or theme. may be times when I ask you all to break up into small groups. Participation may also include actively submitting all assignments in a timely manner. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, I will provide alternatives that allow you to earn the participation grade. Just showing up to listen to a podcast or watch a Twitch stream of something will not earn you participation points.

History through Video Games journals (40%):

Throughout the semester, we will be discussing and analyzing readings and content to go along with playing specific games. You will be responsible for 8 total submissions. Here is the breakdown:

The **first reflection** will be due at the end of week 1. In **400 or more words**, tell me a little about your journey to college, your major, what histories do you find interesting, what are your favorite historical video games, and what are your thoughts about discussing the subject of History through the lens of video games? Do you see it as a window for people to become interested in history? Could it be a good teaching tool? If you have limited context with History or video games, what do you know and what questions do you want to explore in class? See this as practice for the Journal Submissions (see below).

The rest of the Journal submissions are your way of showing me you're actually keeping track of the readings/materials by writing your observations about them. You will have to submit **six journal submissions**. The objective of these is to reflect on the games or genre we discussed during the week and how that impacted your observation of gaming during Lab Day. There will be a general question to guide you, but the reflection is your own.

You can choose two ways to complete this task:

- Written journal reflection (500 or more words)
- Video presentation with slides (5-7 minutes)

You will need to submit the first Journal Reflection (on course materials/readings) by the end of week 4. This will allow me to provide feedback so you can see what my expectations are with the assignment.

Regardless of format, these are the components you need to incorporate:

- +Citations (Whatever style you use. History Majors, you use Chicago/Turabian)
- +At least one of the readings from a specific week.
- +A reading or video from your own research.
- +Comment on how the themes or concepts you write about were visible during Lab Day (for example, how would the concept of a game as a museum mentioned in an article be visible from playing Assassin's Creed Syndicate during lab day).

The final reflection, due during week 15, will be a self-reflection of your journey within the course, how you experienced history through the process of play enhanced your understanding of history, and how Video Games can make history accessible to students and the public. More instructions will be available on Canvas and during the first week.

Midterm: Opinion Piece on Historical Video Games as a Teaching Tool (10%):

You will choose one of two personas:

Persona 1-A teacher what is an expert in developing History Curriculum (choose whether you will be a Secondary Educator or work in Higher Education)

Persona 2-A video game developer that specializes in historical content or using fiction and fantasy with historical themes and settings.

Premise: As an avid gamer, you have noticed opinion pieces, editorials, and other news sources stating video games are not a feasible teaching tool because produce highly inaccurate historical content. Using your expertise, you will write an 800 to 1000 words Op-Ed to a "local newspaper" discussing why video games are an effective teaching tool. More directions will be available on Canvas.

Major semester project: Create your own History Based Video Game (35%)

Students will work on a detailed portfolio pitching a video game during an era in History. This project is not limited to US based History: there are no geographic or periodic boundaries.

You have to discuss what era you are focusing on, identify if it is based on true events/alternative history/etc. The project will provide an overview of the historical era and inspirations, a preliminary premise for the setting and story, and what issues you might face with creative license. The project will have three components.

+*A preliminary proposal (5%)*

+*Final portfolio of the Video game pitch (20%)*

Portfolio will include the following materials:

-Artistic piece

-Written component (2,100 to 2,400 words)

-3-to-4-minute Elevator Pitch video

-Chart showing amount of time worked on assignment

+*Poster presentations of your project (end of the semester) (10%)*

More details about this project will be available on Canvas.

List of Major Assignments

Attendance/Participation	15%
Journal Entries	40% total (5% each for eight entries)
Midterm	10%
Semester Project	35% total (four components)

Grading

Grades for the semester will be determined according to the following breakdown. There will not be extra credit opportunities in class. Grades will be tabulated in Canvas for you:

The grading scale used for this course is as follows:

89.5-100	A
79.5-89	B
69.5-79	C
59.5-69	D
59 or lower	F

Course Outline and Readings.

Assignment Due Date and Important Dates

Important Dates

Labor Day-No Class, September 1st
Final Day to Drop Course, November 7th.
Request an Incomplete, Start on November 8th.
Thanksgiving Break, November 24th to 30th

Assignment due Dates

Who Are You? Reflection

August 24th (Sunday)

Journal Reflections:

Journal Entry 1: September 7th

Journal Entry 2: September 28th

Journal Entries 3 and 4: November 2nd

Journal Entries 5 and 6: November 23rd

Note: I will explain more on submitting the Reflections during the first week of class.

Midterm:

October 26th (Sunday)

Semester Project

Proposal: September 21st

Poster Presentation Day: December 3rd

Portfolio: December 5th

Final Reflection

December 8th

COURSE SCHEDULE

*Readings listed with the weeks are what the class will discuss that week. The instructor has the right to make adjustments. However, I will make sure to address any changes with you all prior to our class if possible:

Week 1: Course introductions (August 18-22)

Class introduction

Wed: Visit on Library resources, Mr. Doug Campbell

Friday: Tour of the Media Library and Lab space with Diane Robson/Steven Guerrero/Dakota Scott, Willis Library, Second Floor

Week 2: An Interconnected World, Part I: First Contact, Renaissance, and colonization (August 25-29)

Course Materials Packet

Wired (2021)-The Swashbuckling Adventures of Sid Meier's Pirates

Matt King-The Possibilities and Problems of Sid Meier's Civilization in History Classrooms (The History Teacher, 2021)

Andrés Bijsterveld Muñoz-National Identity in Historical Video Games (*Nations and Nationalism*, 2022)

Week 3: An Interconnected World, Part II: Pentiment and the power of historical memory (September 1 to 5)

Monday: Labor day: No Class

Course Materials Packet

Elijah Gonzalez, Paste Magazine-Pentiment Conveys the Importance of Contending with and Preserving History

Video: Rosencreutz (YouTube)-Pentiment, Aesthetic, and "Immersive" History

*UNT History Professor Samuel Fullerton will join us in our discussion about Pentiment

Week 4: Age of Sail, Revolution, and Global Conflict, Part I (September 8 to 12)

Course Materials Packet

Gamespot (2012)-Why do I keep Thinking About Assassin's Creed III: Liberation?

Emil Lundedal Hammar- Counter-hegemonic commemorative play: Marginalized pasts and the politics of memory in the digital game Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry (*Rethinking History*, 2017).

Video: "The Golden Age of Piracy"-Assassin's Creed: Real History (Online Knights)

Week 5: Age of Sail, Revolution, and Global Conflict, Part II (September 15 to 19)

Course Materials Packet

Stephen Joyce- Authentic-Deconstructionist Games and Tragic Historiography in Assassin's Creed III (*American Literature*, 2022)

Christopher Leffler-Memory Games: History, Memory, and Anachronism in the Paris of Assassin's Creed Unity (*Contemporary French Civilization*)

Forbes Magazine (2012)- The Awesome Mohawk Teacher and Consultant Behind Ratonhnhaké:ton

Week 6: 19th Century, Industrial Revolution, and "The West", Part I (September 22 to 26)

Course Materials Packet

Kill Screen (2016): Cultural Representation in Assassin's Creed Chronicles: India

Esther Wright (Book Chapter) - "What's Famous" & "What's True.": Women's Place from *Revolver* to *Redemption* (From book, *Red Dead Redemption: History, Myth and Violence in the Video Game West* by John Wills and Esther Wright)

Britanny Vincent - Rolling Stone Gaming- 'Like A Dragon: Ishin!': An Eccentric Action RPG Vision of Edo-Period Japan

Week 7: 19th Century, Industrial Revolution, and "The West", Part II (September 29 to October 3)

Course Materials Packet

Helena Esser- Re-Calibrating Steampunk London: Heterotopia and Spatial Imaginaries in Assassin's Creed: Syndicate and The Order 1886 (*Humanities*, 2021)

Video: Assassin's Creed-Echoes of History: The REAL History of Assassin's Creed Syndicate Soraya Murray-(Book Chapter) No Country for Old Tropes: Representation and Political Affect in *Red Dead Redemption* (From book, *Red Dead Redemption: History, Myth and Violence in the Video Game West* by John Wills and Esther Wright)

Week 8: Early 1900s and World War I (October 6 to 10)

Course Materials Packet

Diana Adesola Mafe- Race and the First-Person Shooter: Challenging the Video Game in BioShock Infinite (*Camera Obscura*, 2015)

Chris Kempshall-Pixel Lions: The image of the soldier in First World War computer games (*Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 2015)

Sky LaRell Anderson-The interactive museum: Video games as history lessons through lore and affective design

Week 9: Interwar Years and Origins of World War II (October 13 to 17)

Course Materials Packet

Imola Bülgözdí- A Quest for the "Missing People": Posthuman Affect in Where the Water Tastes Like Wine (*Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*)

Johannes Koski- Reflections of history: representations of the Second World War in Valkyria Chronicles (*Rethinking History*, 2017)
Forbes Magazine: Review of Through the Darkest of Times

Week 10: World War II (October 20 to 24)

Course Materials Packet

Video: Rosencreutz-Valkyria Chronicles, Persecution, and Atrocity
Debra Ramsey- Brutal Games: "Call of Duty" and the Cultural Narrative of World War II (*Cinema Journal*, 2015)
Harrison Gish- Playing the Second World War: Call of Duty and the Telling of History (*Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 2010)

Week 11 (October 27 to 31)

Research Days, No Class: Monday October 27 and Friday October 31

October 29th, World Building and the Pacific Theater in World War 2

Guest talk by Grant Hanson (UNT Alum), Living History Coordinator, National Museum of the Pacific War

Week 12: Early Cold War (November 3 to 7)

Course Materials Packet

Video: How L.A. Noire captured 1940s LA
Holger Potzsch and Vit Sisler- Playing Cultural Memory: Framing History in Call of Duty: Black Ops and Czechoslovakia 38-89: Assassination (*Games and Culture*, 2019)
Daniel Odin Shaw- Ideology in BioShock: A Critical Analysis (*Press Start*, 2019)

Week 13: Global Cold War (November 10 to 14)

Course Materials Packet

Video: Futurasound-Metal Gear Solid 3 and the Cold War
David J. Leonard- Virtual Anti-racism: Pleasure, Catharsis, and Hope in Mafia III and Watch Dogs 2 (*Humanity and Society*, 2019)
IGN- How 1979 Revolution: Black Friday Let Me Relive My Father's History

Week 14: 1980s to the War on Terror (November 17 to 21)

Course Materials Packet

Matthew Thomas Payne- War Bytes: The Critique of Militainment in Spe Ops: The Line (*Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2014)
Video: SuperBunnyhop- Anti-War War Games
Cansu Nur Simsek-Reframing Narratives through Play: Path Out and the Potential of Interactive Counter-Documentaries in Video Games (*Interactive Film and Media Journal*)

Course Expectations

The following are the basic expectations for success in this course.

- Come to class prepared. You must keep up with the assignments to perform well in this course. Do not hesitate to ask questions during lecture or after class.
 - All assignments must be completed on the scheduled due date, unless the student provides a valid, documented excuse. Absence on exam days will only be excused with appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note, letter from coach/Academic Advisor).
- All assignments can be discussed with the instructor by email or in person during office hours.
- **To pass this class, all assignments must be completed! No Exceptions!**

***NOTE on grading protocol for Written assignments:** After I return written assignments to you, there is a mandatory 24-hour reflection period before requesting a meeting. This allows you to read and understand the comments made.

Late Work Policy: I understand life happens: Work, family, other assignments, the realization that an assignment might have needed more time, etc. If you reach a point where you are freaking out about a deadline and the options that pop into your head include a sleepless night to finish (which might not be your best work), not submitting anything, or plagiarizing, I'd rather you turn the assignment in late than get a zero. Having said that, **all assignments have a 12-hour grace period after the set due date to still be submitted and counted as on-time.** If you require an extension to submit the assignment late, email me and we can discuss the timeline and any late penalty that will be attached (if applicable). I ask that you let me know about the need for an extension well in advance of the due date. However, I do understand that emergencies happen, and will take that into account.

Communication with Instructor: Students are encouraged to contact me with any issues you might have. Beyond the classroom, the best way to contact me is through email and office hours. Office hours are designated times for you, the student. Please come to talk to me about any concerns or issues that arise during the semester. If you are struggling with the class, need to talk out an idea about your paper, or need to talk about something, the times listed or making an appointment are the best way. Any discussion of grades must be done in person during office hours, as FERPA protocol dictates grades cannot be discussed over email. I will usually answer within 24 to 48 hours. Questions that can be found on the syllabus will receive lower response priority. Most importantly, **letting me know your concerns early allows us to find a solution to the problem instead of you coming in at Week 13 when options are limited. If you are struggling, reach out! I want you to succeed!**

Withdrawal Policy: If you are unable to complete the course, you must withdraw by the **12th University class day for a refund.** A student wishing to withdraw from a course before the end of the semester must initiate the process by filling out the official withdrawal form, which can be found on the University's website or at the Registrar's office.

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the

investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence. Students should be aware that "acts of dishonesty" include cheating, plagiarism, furnishing misleading information, and forgery. We will uphold the policies and regulations of the University.

(See: <http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/professionalstandards.cfm#Plagiarism> Links to an external site.)

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism while you are in the process of writing your final paper, see me. More information on academic integrity can be found in the Undergraduate Catalog.

Course-Related Academic Adjustments with the Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable 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 reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.