Fall 2025 - MRTS 3630.001: *Game Studies: Players, Culture and Industry*
Dr. Stephen Mandiberg (he/him) – Stephen.Mandiberg@unt.edu
Monday/Wednesday 9:00am - 10:20pm in RTFP 135
Office Hours: Wednesdays at 11am-1pm in RTFP 224 (and Zoom), or by appointment

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 video games that have gradually formed between the 20th and early 21st centuries; (2) to show how and why video 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 different 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 video games.

By the end of this course students will be able to:
1. Recall a variety of academic and industry perspectives on the study of video games that you will have obtained through careful reading of complex sources.
2. Apply academic and industry theories to the analysis of individual video games.
3. Play video games with a focus on developing audio, visual and ludic literacies.
4. Compose a mixture of descriptive and analytic writing aimed at different audiences and using different tones.
5. Discuss how video games matter as more than entertainment: 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 imbedded links (you will need to use a VPN when accessing off campus - guide at https://itss.untsystem.edu/sites/default/files/campus_vpn.pdf)
    • Online Course Reserves – at http://iii.library.unt.edu/search/p?SEARCH=mandiberg ; the password is pci2025f
    • ***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, consoles and games are available to borrow at the UNT Media Library.

Formula for Final Grade (500 total points):

Attendance and Participation (50 points), Quizzes (10x5 points [lowest 2 dropped]), Review (100 points), Analysis (100 points), Midterm Exam (100 points), Final Exam (100 points).

Assignments:
1) Quizzes – You will take 10 five-question quizzes during the semester. These quizzes are on Canvas and you must use LockDown Browwer. You will have 15 minutes for each quiz, and questions are a combination of multiple-choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, short answer, etc. Quizzes draw from the current and previous content modules. Questions are derived from the required Readings (pay attention to the Reading Tips) and Lectures and Discussion. *The lowest two quiz scores will be dropped*.
2) Exams – You will take two cumulative exams. A midterm exam and a final exam. Each exam will have 30 short questions and 2 essay questions; you will be given 90 minutes to finish. Short questions are from the same pool as the quizzes, and derived from the Lectures, Discussion, and Readings. So, pay attention to what you did right and wrong on the quizzes, and discuss anything you got wrong when we go over the quizzes in class! The essay questions require a paragraph or two to answer and are not drawn from the quizzes.
3) 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; for the second game you will write a more critical-cultural or industry studies based analytic paper.
   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.
   b) Review and Analysis
      • These can be written in an informal or formal 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, polished (20 pts), and clearly structured (20).
   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 posts and writing comments.
      • ***Comments can be posted until the end of the term (December 12, 2025 @ 11:59pm)***.
      • To raise your score you can read other students' reviews/analyses and write thoughtful comments, you can 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.

- 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.

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 was attentive in class, and often did not participate. [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 was often distracted in class, and rarely participated. [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 attend class, or inattentively attended class while on a device. [300-349 = D]

F. Work submitted in a way that fails to fulfill requirements; Work not submitted will receive zero points [0-299 = F]

Late or Missed Assignments:
Most late work is accepted for one week after the original deadline (peer review and end of term work not accepted late), but will be marked down by one grade point (A→B, etc). Work submitted after the one-week grace period (but before the end of the semester) will be marked down by two grade points (A→C, etc). 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. In the event of emergencies, documentation (e.g., doctor's note) must be provide within 1 week following the absence. Upon returning to class you have 1 week to reschedule the exam and/or submit the assignment

Attendance and Participation:
Attendance is mandatory. Attendance may be taken at the beginning and/or end of each class. *Four or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.* In addition to being in a seat, your grade depends on active participation during class. If you are unable to participate during class please talk to me to work out alternate strategies for participation. Discussing theories during office hours can count as participation!

Questions and Problems:

If you have any questions, ask them! If you encounter problems with the course, let me 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 through office hours. Grades may only be discussed and/or disputed in person during office hours.

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 ChatGBT 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. As 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 Generative AI tools like Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, etc. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. However, some AI adjacent writing tools like Grammarly are allowed with provisions. As noted above in the TurnItIn policy, all work is subject to submission for textual similarity and AI review. In accordance with the UNT Honor Code, if you use Grammarly or a similar writing assistance tool you must disclose your use and submit a clean, initial draft of your paper. Both your initial draft and your final, Grammarly assisted draft must be submitted to TurnItIn. It is mandatory that you disclose your use and that TurnItIn not detect any use of AI in your initial draft.

Disability Accommodations:
UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (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 Accommodation at 940-565-4323, Sage Hall Suite 167, or https://disability.unt.edu/. 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.

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.

Schedule:
August 18 - Class 1 - Introductions

August 20 - Class 2 - "Fun" 1
• Raph Koster. 2004. Chapters 2-5 in *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*: pp. 12-101. [eLibrary]

August 25 - Class 3 - "Fun" 2
• Quiz 1 - (*DUE: Friday, August 29 by 11:59pm*)

August 27 - Class 4 - Designing Fun 1
• 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]

September 1 - Labor Day (no class)

September 3 - Class 5 - Desighing Fun 2
• Quiz 2 - (*DUE: Friday, September 5 by 11:59pm*)

September 8 - Class 6 - Experiencing Other Things 1
• 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]

September 10 - Class 7 - Experiencing Other Things 2
• Quiz 3 - (*DUE: Friday, September 12 by 11:59pm*)

September 15 - Class 8 - Media Effects: Violence 1
• 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.
• (*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. [
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September 17 - Class 9 - Media Effects: Violence 2
• Quiz 4 - (*DUE: Friday, September 19 by 11:59pm*)

September 22 - Class 10 - Media Effects: Addiction 1
• Mark D. Griffiths and Filip Nuyens. 2017. "An Overview of Structural Characteristics in Problematic Video Game Playing." *F. Curr Addict Rep*: 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*. [
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September 24 - Class 11 - Media Effects: Addiction 2
• Quiz 5 - (*DUE: Friday, September 26 by 11:59pm*)

September 29 - Class 12 - Games and Learning 1
• James Paul Gee. "Learning and Games." 2008. In *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning,* edited by Katie Salen: 21–40.

October 1 - Class 13 - Games and Learning 2
• Quiz 6 - (*DUE: Friday, October 3 by 11:59pm*)

October 6 - Class 14 - Writing Workshop
• Game Review: A 'Fun' Experience? - (*DUE: Friday, October 10 by 11:59pm*)

October 8 - Class 15 - Midterm Exam Review
• Midterm Exam - (*DUE: Friday, October 17 by 11:59pm*)

October 13 - Class 16 - Social Gaming 1
• Mia Consalvo. 2007. "Gaining Advantage: How Videogame Players Define and Negotiate Cheating" in *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*: pp. 83-105. [eLibrary]

October 15 - Class 17 - Social Gaming 2
• Quiz 7 - (*DUE: Friday, October 17 by 11:59pm*)

October 20 - Class 18 - From Gamer Culture…
• 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]

October 22 - Class 19 - …to Game Cultures
• Quiz 8 - (*DUE: Friday, October 24 by 11:59pm*)

October 27 - Class 20 - Esports and Streaming 1
• T. L. Taylor. 2019. "Networked Broadcasting" in *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*: pp. 23-65. [eLibrary]]

October 29 - Class 21 - Esports and Streaming 2
• Quiz 9 - (*DUE: Friday, October 31 by 11:59pm*)

November 3 - Class 22 - Making Games 1
• 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]

November 5 - Class 23 - Making Games 2
• Quiz 10 - (*DUE: Friday, November 7 by 11:59pm*)

November 10 - Class 24 - Localizing Games 1
• Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan. 2006. "Game Localization: Unleashing Imagination with 'Restricted' Translation." *Journal of Specialized Translation*, no. 6: pp. 10-21. [http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_ohagan.pdf]

November 12 - Class 25 - Localizing Games 2
• Quiz 11 - (*DUE: Friday, November 14 by 11:59pm*)

November 17 - Class 26 - Selling Games 1
• Peter Zackariasson and Mikolaj Dymek. 2017. "Introduction," "Chapter 2: Marketing Strategy and the Marketing Mix," and "Chapter 3: Video Games as Products or Services" in *Video Game Marketing: A Student Textbook*: pp. 1-9, 27-52. [eLibrary]

November 19 - Class 27 - Selling Games 1
• Quiz 12 - (*DUE: Friday, November 21 by 11:59pm*)

Thanksgiving Break - November 24-November 30

December 1 - Class 28 - Writing Workshop

December 3 - Class 29 - Final Exam Review
• Game Analysis - (*DUE: Friday, December 5 by 11:59pm*)

Finals Week - Final Exam
• Final Exam - (*DUE: Wednesday, December 10 by 11:59pm*)