



# GAME STUDIES I

ATCM  
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# ATCM 3366 | Fall 2019

# Game Studies I

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# Games as...

# Play as...

This course provides an introduction to the study of the basic vocabularies, frameworks and arguments discussed in the field of **game studies**. Together, we will explore how established concepts and arguments about games and play, especially pertaining to digital game play, can help us examine and reflect upon our own gameplay experience. At the same time, we will consider how our gameplay experiences can contribute to existing understandings about games and play. By extension, we will practice using these concepts and our experiences as building blocks for constructing well-grounded arguments about games and play. To do so, we will engage with a variety of texts, analog and digital games. We will reflect and analyze on how our gameplay experiences intertwine with or interject existing arguments made by game studies scholars. This analysis and reflection will prepare you to compose well-supported and researched arguments about your experiences.

The purpose and intent of this course is meant to serve as a companion to Game Design I; as the process and practice of dissecting and analyzing games and play explored in this course will feed into your ability to be better game designers. At the same time, your experiences as a game designer will provide you the ability to perceive and notice specific design logics and choices made by other game designers. Through this course, we will engage with the following questions:

- 1 What are **games**?
- 2 What is **play**?
- 3 What relationship do these terms have with the interactive media we create and consume?
- 4 How do we move beyond superficial engagement with the games we create and consume?

## To answer these questions,

**weekly discussions** will focus on a particular theme. This theme may require **playing a game** before or during class, it may require **reading some texts**, or it may require you **providing an object** for discussion.

To study and discuss games and play on a systematic and communicative level, we must first acquire the necessary vocabularies and grasp the common concepts utilized by other people who are invested in these endeavors. We must, in turn, practice using these ideas in our communicative methods and gestures. Therefore, the purpose of these weekly assignments is for you to not only read and practice writing about your reading, but to engage with these materials critically and beyond systematically.

Games are more than finite state machines, and carry with them the explicit and implicit materials and politics found in every technology. We are going to be engaging with this weekly and how these implicit politics and materials complicates our understanding.

**Technologies** are not merely aids to human activity, but also powerful forces acting to reshape that activity and its meaning .

- **Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor*, p.4**



## Students will learn how to

### **Understand**

the complicated histories of games and play as material and practice.

### **Analyze**

existing game and play practices within historical, material and cultural contexts.

### **Create**

unique analysis through the development of personal research and writing skills for participating in the scholarly study of games and play.



## Texts & Materials

### eLearning

Assigned readings will be found on the class eLearning portal.

### Required Games

Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition Starter Set (ISBN-13: 978-0786965595 )

Fortnite

Team Fortress 2

Life is Strange, Episode 1

Elegy for a Dead World

### Films

King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters

# Class Expectations

A dark, blue-toned photograph of a casino floor. In the foreground, several slot machines are visible, with their screens displaying various game graphics. One screen prominently shows the text "FREE SPIN SLOTS". The background is filled with the blurred lights and structures of a casino, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. The overall lighting is dim, with bright spots from the slot machines and neon signs.

- 1 Indicate the name and pronouns you would like to use
- 2 Use your UTD email for any correspondence. Please put [ATCM3366](#) in the subject line.
- 3 No messages through social media, text, Facebook, phone.
- 4 Office Hours are your time. Use them.

# Attendance, Weekly Work & Final Projects

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a 10% penalty (one letter grade) to your final grade. More than 4 unexcused absences will result in an automatic failure of the course.

## Weekly Work

Each week, students will generate a reflection as a reaction to the assigned readings and/or media. This assignment is meant to serve as a point of departure for our weekly discussion. This reflection is meant to be short, between 200 and 400 words, and should include how you understood the concepts and arguments being presented by the authors and how it connects with your experiences. This reflection should also include at least three questions which will be used every week to initiate discussion. This reflection will be graded on completion and is due by MIDNIGHT every Tuesday via eLearning. No late work will be accepted. This work CAN be presented in a format other than text, such as an audio recording or video response. Additional points may be awarded for exceptional responses.

## Final Project

The final project posits a unique argument with relevant supporting evidence. You will create and present a clearly-articulated, well-researched, fully-substantiated paper that investigates an issue pertaining to game studies through the thematic lens of our course. By clearly articulated, you are able to communicate a central thesis and demonstrate why that thesis is important. By well-researched, you are able to discuss how your thesis relates to, is supported by, and/or contradicts with existing discourses. By fully-substantiated, you are able to support your thesis with evidence that you've gathered. This assignment is your opportunity to articulate your position and opinion on your chosen topic with the intention of sharing it publicly. If you are considering further study in the field of Game Studies, this sort of analysis is foundational and can serve as an inspiration for future work.

# Attendance, Weekly Work & Final Projects

## Final Project (Cont.)

Your final paper will conform to the following requirements:

The paper...

- 1 will be between 1500 and 2000 words (excluding all references) in length.
- 2 will be written in the MLA or APA style.
- 3 will include at least 3 academic sources. These are to be peer-reviewed, published articles or other scholarly works. What makes a scholarly work? If the author is affiliated with a university, has an appropriate credential, and provides a list of references / bibliography to other works, then it is a safe bet that it qualifies. These works will be published by a reputable publisher.

Your final paper will go through the following stages:

- 1 Pitch is due on March 12th via eLearning by midnight.
- 2 Peer-Review is due on April 9th via eLearning by midnight.
- 3 Presentation will be a 5-minute presentation to your peers during either weeks 15 or 16. Visual aids are required. All materials are due via eLearning at the end of the student's presentation day at **midnight**.
- 4 Final Paper will be submitted, with revisions based on feedback from your peers, on May 6th at **midnight**.

# Grading Policy

## Overview

Weekly Reflections		30%
Final Paper		40%
Participation		30%

Late work, without an arranged extension, will not be accepted nor will it receive any feedback. To arrange an extension on any assignment, please contact me at least one week in advance. Your grade will be assigned based on tallied points according to the following scale:

Percentage	Letter Grade
100-94	A
93-90	A-
89-87	B+
86-84	B
83-80	B-
79-77	C+
76-74	C
73-70	C-
69-67	D+
66-64	D
63-60	D-
59-0	F

# Participation and Engagement

## Weekly Attendance

I will take attendance at the beginning of every session and at the end of every session. This is a small class, so I will notice when people arrive late or leave early. It is rude to both the instructor and your fellow classmates. Failing to conduct yourselves appropriately, do the readings and turn in your reflection is potential grounds for loss of attendance and participation for that week.

## Presence, Participation and Engagement

I expect you to be present and attentive. To that end, laptops and computers can be used in the classroom solely at the direction of the instructor and for activities and discussions at-hand or if afforded due to accommodation. Do not use computers for other tasks. This is disrespectful to the instructor and serves as a distraction for your classmates.

The use of cell phones is prohibited during class time. They should not be seen at all. This includes needed to be charged.

There will be one warning, after that, attendance and participation grade penalties will be assessed for each infraction.

Be here, be present. Enjoy this time here and now to thoughtfully engage with the content.

Be sure to do your assignments on time, if not early. You should expect, per week, to do 9 hours of work for this class (3 hour class x 3). Use Box to backup your work. Create your work using Office 365 so that it is stored digitally. Your computer will crash and threaten to lose everything you created. Backup early and often. Your computer will smell your stress and react to it. Be prepared for it to fail.

# Accessibility & Academic Integrity

## Accessibility Notice

Students with disabilities are encouraged to utilize the on-campus resources at the Office of Student Accessibility. You can contact the office at 972-883-6104 or email: [studentaccessibility@utdallas.edu](mailto:studentaccessibility@utdallas.edu). Their office is located in the Student Service Building (SSB), suite 3.200. They can provide documentation and details for accommodations to address your individual needs. If you need any special accommodations to complete this course successfully, please provide me with this information as soon as possible, so we can make appropriate arrangements.

## Academic Integrity

All work must be original for this class. Unless you are specifically told to collaborate with classmates, complete your graded work individually. Plagiarism is using the words and materials of others as if they were your own. It is a serious offense with serious consequences that can range from failing the assignment, failing the course and dismissal from the university.

Use proper citation to indicate the use of other people's work to support and strengthen your own.

All suspicions of plagiarism will be investigated and reported to the Dean of Students.

For more information on academic honesty, please consult this link:  
<https://www.utdallas.edu/conduct/dishonesty/>

Remember to:

- 1 Always note where you found something.
- 2 Give credit where credit is due; cite the reference accordingly.
- 3 Be critical of Wikipedia; use it as a spring board, not a primary citation.
- 4 Protect your integrity; a plagiarism charge is serious and will follow you.

# Additional University Policies

Review additional policies by visit:

<https://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>

This link provides greater detail for:

- Sexual Misconduct Information and Procedures
- Campus Carry
- Technical Support for your UTD Email
- Field Trip Policies
- Student Conduct and Discipline Procedures
- Academic Integrity
- Copyright Notices
- Email Use
- Withdrawal Policies
- Student Grievance Policies
- Incomplete Grade Policies
- Accessibility Services
- Religious and Holy Day Policies
- Student Success Services

January 15

01

# Welcome to Game Studies

## **Introduction of Instructor and Course**

Syllabus and Course Scope Review

Discuss required materials, films, and readings

Discuss grading and late policies

## **In-Class Activities**

Define Working Terms for Play and Games.

January 22

02

# Play

## **Readings for the Week**

Miguel Sicart . “Play is.” In *Play Matters*.

## **Game for the Week**

Ninja, ATEC Lobby

## **Discussion**

What is play?

What is playfulness?

What is the magic circle?

## 03

# Games as... Rules

### Readings for the Week

Mia Consalvo, "There is No Magic Circle".

Miguel Sicart, "Against Procedurality"

### Class Activity

Day Zero, Dungeons and Dragons Class Game

### Discussion

What are rules?

How do rules structure games?

Is breaking the rules part of a game?

February 5

04

# Games as... Technologies

## Readings for the Week

L. Winner, "Do artifacts have politics?"

M. Flanagan & H. Nissenbaum, "Groundwork for Values in Games". In *Values at Play in Digital Games*.

## Class Activity

Dungeons and Dragons 5e, "The Lost Mine of Phandelver"

## Discussion

Are games technologies and are they political?

If they are political, what does their content reveal?

If they are political, what does their development process reveal?

February 12

05

# Games as... Representations

## Readings for the Week

Adrienne Shaw, "From Custer's Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Digital Games". In *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*.

## Digital Game for the Week

Life is Strange, Episode I (PC/Mac)

## Class Activity

Dungeons and Dragons 5e, "The Lost Mine of Phandelver"

## Discussion

Who and what is represented in and by games?

Why are these representations there?

What representations are available?

Why do these representations matter?

## 06

# Games as... Playgrounds

### Readings for the Week

Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight".

James Newman, "Superplay, sequence breaking and speedrunning". In *Playing with Videogames*.

### Class Activity

Dungeons and Dragons 5e, "The Lost Mine of Phandelver"

### Discussion

Where do we play?

How do people relate to each other and technologies in these play spaces?

What are some explicit and implicit rules in play spaces?

## 07

# Games as...

# Transgression and Meta

### Readings for the Week

Espen Aarseth – “I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player”

Mia Consolvo – “Gaining Advantage: How Videogame Players Define and Negotiate Cheating”  
In *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*

### Class Activity

Dungeons and Dragons 5e, “The Lost Mine of Phandelver”

### Discussion

What is transgression and how does it relate to games and play?

What are metagames?

What are implied players?

### In-Class Activities

Introduce Final Project

March 4

08

# Games as... Commodities

## Readings for the Week

Holin Lin and Chuen-Tsai Sun – *Cash trade in free-to-play online games*

## Digital Game for the Week

Fortnite

## Class Activity

Dungeons and Dragons 5e, “The Lost Mine of Phandelver”

## Discussion

How do games commodify play?

What are the different economic models we see in games?

March 11

09

# Workshop

## **In-Class Activities**

Bring 3 research paper pitches and workshop them with your peers

March 18

10

# Spring Break

March 25

II

# Games as...

# Labor

## Readings for the Week

Jane McGonigal – “More Satisfying Work” from *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*.

## Digital Game of the Week

Team Fortress 2 (PC/Mac)

## Discussion

Are modding practices a form of labor?

How does play commodify games?

How are players exploited as laborers?

April 1

12

# Games as... Profession

## Readings for the Week

Taylor, T. L. (2012). "Professionalizing players". In *Raising the stakes: E-sports and the professionalization of computer gaming*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sarah Needleman – "Ready, Aim, Hire a 'Fortnite' Coach: Parents Enlist Videogame Tutors for Their Children"

## Movie of the Week

King of Kong (streamable from Amazon, iTunes and Google Play)

## Discussion

What is the role of play in professional games?

How are professional competitive game players laborers?

April 8

13

# Peer Review

## **In-Class Activities**

Bring your annotated bibliography and paper outline and conduct a peer review session.

April 15

14

# Games as... Education

## Readings for the Week

Constance Steinkuehler and Sean Duncan – “Scientific Habits of Mind in Virtual Worlds”

Nicola Whitton – “Games as Active Learning Environments” in *Digital Games and Learning: Research and theory*

## Digital Game of the Week

Elegy for a Dead World (PC/MAC)

## Discussion

What, where and how are players learning?

April 22

**15**

# **Presentations I**

April 29

**16**

# **Presentations 2**

May 6

17

# Final Paper Due

## For This Week

Turn in papers via eLearning by 11:59pm.

