

ATCM 3376: History of Games REVISED

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00 PM – 11:15 PM

JO 3.516

Spring 2020

**Course taught remotely beginning March 30, 2020

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This undergraduate course examines the history of digital games and the gaming industry, beginning with the arcades and early home consoles of the seventies and ending in the current decade. The course focuses both on the chronology of development and design as well as the origins and evolution of the mechanics, genres, technologies, and hardware that inform and influence modern game design philosophy.

Student learning objectives include: understanding the history of the digital game industry; understanding the impacts of past design decisions on modern game design structures; and developing critical analysis skills and techniques for evaluating both historical and current digital games.

RECOMMENDED COURSE MATERIALS

Replay: The History of Video Games, Tristan Donovan (2010)

All Your Base Are Belong to Us: How Fifty Years Of Videogames Captured Pop Culture, Harold Goldberg (2011)

Blood Sweat and Pixels: The Triumphant, Turbulent Stories Behind How Video Games Are Made, Jason Schreier (2017)

Introduction to Game Analysis, Clara Fernandez-Vara (2015)

Additional readings and games will be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

GRADING

“Zeroth” paper: 10%

First paper: 15%

Second paper: 20%

Third paper: 20%

Fourth paper: 25%

Participation and professionalism: 10%

Late Assignments

Late work will not be accepted in this course. It is each individual student's responsibility to keep track of the goals and deadlines and to turn in finished work on the specified dates. Written assignments are due in electronic form only at the beginning of class unless otherwise noted by the instructor in writing. Students will receive no credit for assignments that are not turned in complete and on time. In rare cases involving extenuating circumstances, late assignments may be accepted at the discretion of the instructor.

Digital Game Assignments

Students in this course are expected to have a basic level of computer literacy such that they can purchase, download, install, and play games without assistance from the instructor. Students are also expected to maintain a level of maturity in dealing with semi-anonymous online game spaces, including handling potential encounters with griefers and trolls.

Student Conduct and Discipline

Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated in this course. Students can find all university rules and regulations on Academic Dishonesty here:

<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/dishonesty/>

<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/integrity/>

<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/bigfour/>

<http://www.utdallas.edu/deanofstudents/maintain/>

Email Use: Only UT Dallas email accounts will be used for this course. All email communication from the instructor will be mailed to students UT Dallas email accounts and no other. Students are responsible for checking their UT Dallas email regularly for course information and updates.

Additional detailed information on university policies and procedures can be found at:

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

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**All descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.*

- Jan. 14-16: Introduction to game history. Notable games and events.
- Jan. 21-23: From arcades to consoles: the rise and fall of Atari. The rebirth of an industry: Nintendo conquers Japan, then America
Zeroth paper DUE Thursday Jan. 23
- Jan. 28-30: Early PC gaming: EA, Infocom, and Sierra. Interactive movies, simulations and god games.
- Feb. 4-6: The Tetris Story. The start of the console wars: Sega vs. Nintendo.
- Feb. 11-13: Violent content and legal issues: Mortal Kombat. Guest lecture: Jazmine Jones
First paper DUE Thursday Feb. 13
- Feb. 18-20: PC gaming in the 90s. CD-ROMs, 3D graphics, and the birth of the first-person shooter. DOOM and Myst change the face of gaming.
- Feb. 25-27: A brief history of mobile gaming (lecture by Jazmine Jones, TA)
- Mar. 3-5: The console wars continue: Nintendo vs. Sony. Combining 3D graphics and CD storage in one device. Female protagonists, stealth, survival-horror, and the brief Golden Age of 1997-1998
- Mar. 10-12: Postmortem Break: behind-the-scenes development of four influential games of the 90s
Second paper DUE Thursday Mar. 12
- Mar. 17-19: Spring Break; no class
- Mar. 24-26: Extended Spring Break: no class
- Mar. 31-
 Apr. 1: Massively Multiplayer Online games, virtual economies, and the beginnings of mod culture.
Reading: *Replay*, Chapter 23: "You Haven't Lived Until You've Died in MUD" and *All Your Base Are Belong To Us*, Chapter 11: "The EverQuest Killer"
- Apr. 7-9: More console wars: Sony vs. Microsoft vs. Nintendo. Rise and fall of the Sega Dreamcast. A wild Pokémon appears!
Reading: *Replay*, Chapter 26: "All-Access Gaming"
- Apr. 14-16: The beginning of the modern gaming era. Open worlds. Creativity as a core mechanic. Sims, machinima, and games as creative engines.
Reading: *Replay*, Chapter 25: "Little Computer People" and Chapter 27: "The Grooviest Era of Crime"
- Apr. 21-23: Postmortem Break: behind-the-scenes development of four influential games of the modern era
Reading: From *Blood Sweat and Pixels* (Choose two of the following four): "Diablo III"; "Stardew Valley"; "Halo Wars"; "The Witcher 3"

Apr. 28-30: Indie games go mainstream. VR, AR, immersive experiences, and game-like objects. The future of interactive entertainment.

Reading: *Replay*, Chapter 28: "Magic Shooting Out Of People's Fingers" and *All Your Base Are Belong To Us*, Chapter 19: "The Future"

May 5-7: Final Exam week; no class.

Third paper (Mechanics Analysis) DUE May 7 at 11:59 PM in Box.com

Fourth paper (Modern Event Analysis) DUE May 7 at 11:59 PM in Box.com

SEMESTER PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

**Assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor; any changes will be provided in writing.*

All papers must be turned in, typed and in hard copy only, at the beginning of the class in which they are due. Either single- or double-spaced formatting is fine for all assignments. Please include your total word count at the top of each paper.

****Papers 3 and 4 must be submitted in Box.com by May 7, 11:59 PM**

Paper assignments for this course:

- Zeroth paper (400-1000 words): Games and events worthy of study
- First paper (500-1000 words): Analysis of an 80s era game
- Second paper (750-1250 words): Analysis of a 90s era game
- Third paper (750-1250 words): Tracing a mechanic's historical development
- Fourth paper (1500-2500 words): Analysis of a modern event in gaming

ZEROTH PAPER

Due: Thursday, January 23

Word count: 400-1000

Citations: 0

In one paper, write briefly about the four following things:

1. A digital game you consider to be historically important or otherwise worthy of study, and why (100-250 words)
2. A second digital game, of a different era, that you consider to be historically important or otherwise worthy of study, and why (100-250 words)
3. A third digital game, of a different era than the first two, that you consider to be historically important or otherwise worthy of study, and why (100-250 words)
4. One event in gaming history that you consider important, influential, or otherwise worthy of study, and why (100-250 words)

You may consider the following five eras for your game choices, by the date of each game's original North American release: the beginning of digital game development to 1979; 1980-1989; 1990-1999; 2000-2009; and 2010-2019. No citations are required for this paper.

FIRST PAPER: Analysis of 80s era game

Due: Thursday, February 13

Word count: 500-1000

Citations: 2

Play a notable game of the 1980s (originally released in North America between 1978 and 1989), either to completion or for at least one hour of gameplay. In 500-1000 words, examine the following:

1. Explain what you think the developers were trying to achieve with this game. Include at least one quote or citation from the developers or a secondary source.
2. Describe three features or technologies that you think helped the developers achieve this goal. Features include but are not limited to: one or more game mechanics, an art style or aesthetic, a sound design choice, an interface or control scheme, a mission or level structure, a narrative choice, a programming structure or choice, etc.

Make sure you consider the historical landscape, technical limitations, and design constraints of the time period in which your game was released. Please also make sure that your paper includes a minimum of description: you should describe the game enough that someone who hasn't played it can follow your argument, but description should not make up the majority of your paper.

Your paper must include at least the following two citations:

1. The game you are analyzing
2. One direct quote or other secondary source to support your argument re: the developers' intent.

Citations may be in any format as long as they are consistent, although MLA, APA, and Chicago are all common in game studies. The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University provides resources for all three: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/resources.html

For digital games, citation information should include at least the following information (in approximately this order): Name of Game, Developer, Publisher, System/Console it was released on, Year and Date of Release. For this course, North American release dates will most often suffice.

SECOND PAPER: Analysis of 90s era game

Due: Thursday, March 12

Word count: 750-1250

Citations: 4

Play a notable game of the 1990s (originally released in North America between 1989 and 2000), either to completion or for at least one hour of gameplay. In 750-1250 words, examine the following:

1. Explain what you think the developers were trying to achieve with this game. Include at least one quote or citation from the developers or a secondary source.
2. Describe three features or technologies that you think helped the developers achieve this goal. Features include but are not limited to: one or more game mechanics, an art style or aesthetic, a sound design choice, an interface or control scheme, a mission or level structure, a narrative choice, a programming structure or choice, etc.
3. Describe the influence this game had on future games and industry trends. Include at least one quote or source about the game's influence, and one citation of a more recent game (not in the same series) that was clearly influenced by this one.

Your paper must include at least the following four citations:

1. The game you are analyzing
2. At least one direct quote or other secondary source to support your argument re: the developers' intent.
3. A game that was directly influenced by your game (but not in the same series or franchise)
4. At least one direct quote or other secondary source to support your argument re: the game's influence on future games and developers

For this paper, you may not examine a game that qualifies in any way as a Massively Multiplayer Online game (i.e., Everquest, Ultima Online, any MUDs, and so on). I strongly suggest you play a game in a different series and genre than your first paper; for example, if you analyzed *Castlevania* (1986) for your first paper, I would recommend against analyzing *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (1997) for this paper.

THIRD PAPER: Tracing a game mechanic's historical development

Due: May 7 by 11:59 PM in Box.com

Word count: 750-1250

Citations: 6

Trace the history and development of a single game mechanic across no less than ten and no more than twenty-five years. For the purposes of this assignment, a "mechanic" is any individual feature or system that the player interacts with directly (including but not limited to: wall-jumping, destructible environments, the save function, skill trees as used in character development, tech trees as used in RTS games, finishing moves in fighting games, ammunition restrictions in survival-horror games, team attacks in various genres, and so on).

Your paper must include the following sections:

1. Introduction: defining your mechanic and what makes it fun
2. First example game: how the mechanic is used, and why it's fun
3. Second example game: how the mechanic is used, and how the kind of fun players have with it has changed or evolved
4. Third example game: how the mechanic is used, and how the kind of fun players have with it has changed or evolved
5. Conclusion: a concluding statement on how the mechanic in question has developed; and, if applicable, how it continues to change

This paper must include the following six citations:

1. Three individual citations for the three games you are using as examples
2. At least three other citations from developers, critics, game scholars, or other industry sources that support your argument

For this paper, please keep the following in mind:

- Games must be released no earlier than 1978 and no later than 2018. Given the potential length of the games under discussion, I strongly recommend you stick with games that you have already played extensively.
- The first North American release dates of your chosen games should be no more than fifteen years apart at maximum. In general, your chosen games should have been released about five to ten years apart. (Please remember to discuss them in chronological order, and to italicize game titles.)
- Your first game example does not have to be the first historical usage of your chosen mechanic. Of your three game examples, no more than two may be in the same game series or franchise. You may restrict your analysis of your chosen mechanic to a single genre or examine it cross-genre.
- Remember that "fun" as used here is a shorthand word that can mean compelling, engaging, entertaining, meaningful, etc.
- Please do not turn in a paper covering our in-class examples

FOURTH PAPER: Analysis of a modern historical event of importance to gaming

Due: May 7 by 11:59 PM in Box.com

Word count: 1500-2500

Citations: 10 or more

In 1500 words or more, examine a significant historical or cultural event in the modern gaming era. Please choose a single event that occurred between 2000 and 2019.

Your paper must include the following five sections:

1. Introduction and context: What is the historical and cultural context and/or the games industry landscape in which the event takes place?
2. Background: What forces, historical or cultural shifts, or other significant events lead up to this event?
3. Event: Describe, in detail, the event itself
4. Fallout: Describe the initial fallout, repercussions, and/or influence of the event, particularly in terms of immediate consequences or changes to the games industry.
5. Legacy: Explain the lasting impact of the event, first for the particular genre, subculture, community, or slice of industry in which it primarily occurred; and second for the history of gaming as a whole.

This paper must include at least ten citations, including any games discussed, involved in, or directly affected by your chosen event.