

**Video Game Studies (CMLIT 490/INTST 493)
T/Th 2:30-3:45 (108 Wartik)**

Professor Eric Hayot
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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, noon to 1, and by appointment
<http://www.personal.psu.edu/euh2/>

Texts:

Tristan Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games*
Lastowka, *Virtual Justice: The New Laws of Online Worlds*
Noah Wardrup-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, eds., *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*

In addition to these books, we'll read a number of essays, available as PDF files via ANGEL (labeled *PDF* in the syllabus).

We'll be discussing a number of games in class. You don't have to play all of these, but you should play some of them. I assume you have access to a Windows-based PC. Many of these games can be downloaded for free; some of them cost \$5-\$10; some more. Games labeled *gog* are available at www.gog.com; games labeled *aban* are available at www.abandonia.com. Other games are marked (web) or (amazon). In general I assume a basic familiarity with games and gaming, which is why most of the games I'm asking you to look at date from well before most of you started playing games.

Games we'll discuss/play include many of the following:

RPG/Adventure: *Adventure*, *Zork*, *Rogue*, *King's Quest*, *Planescape: Torment*, *Privateer*, *Gabriel Knight*, *Dragon Age*, *Fallout* series, *Heavy Rain*

FPS: *Doom*, *Quake*, *Bioshock* series, *Half-Life* series

RTS: *Command & Conquer* series, *Warcraft/Starcraft*, *Age of Kings*

Will Wright: *SimCity*, *The Sims*

Peter Molyneux: *Black & White*, *Fable*

4X/Sid Meier: *Civilization* series

Indie: *Flow*, *Machinarium*, *Canabalt*, *Passage*, *Gridrunner Revolution*

Online/MMO: *Minecraft*, *A Tale in the Desert*, *WoW*, *EverQuest*

Puzzles: *Tetris*, *Myst*, *Portal*

Other: *GTA* series

Course information:

This course is a comparative introduction to the nature and history of video games as cultural artifacts, from Pong to online role-playing. It introduces students to academic discussion on and creative work in new digital forms including hypertexts narrative, video games, machinima, and more. Students will survey major debates over the meaning and value of video games, and study some of the major theoretical terms and perspectives developed to elaborate the cultural and sociological value of video games.

Grading:

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Class presentation (group) *10 percent*

<i>Posts to Class Forum (ANGEL)</i>	<i>10 percent</i>
<i>Mid-term Exam (2.5 hours)</i>	<i>45 percent</i>
<i>Final Exam (2 hours)</i>	<i>35 percent</i>

The group presentation (15 minutes) will involve groups of 2-4 students introducing the class to a game that we haven't discussed, and placing it in the context of the historical and analytic material we've read so far. The class Forum will involve posts (3 times in the semester) discussing games, the reading, or the class discussion. The exams we'll discuss in class.

Failure to complete any of these assignments will prevent you from passing the course. On top of this will be your class participation grade, which can either hurt you or help you (up to 1/3 a grade either way). It will be determined by the degree to which you help the class learn, or keep it from learning. I do not penalize students who do not talk in class.

In exceptional circumstances I will consider the granting of a grade of incomplete, but only when all but a minor portion of the course work has been successfully completed.

Lateness, absences, and other rules:

Because this is a large class, I will not be taking attendance. However, I will act to limit distractions, so, no newspaper reading, chatting, and so on, unless you want to leave. You may use laptops, since I assume that occasionally you will want to look up class-related material or take notes. Students who use laptops must sit in the last two occupied rows of the class. Finally, don't be late. It's annoying.

I don't accept late work unless you talk about it with me in advance. Unexcused late work will receive a grade of 0. If you are not in class when something is due (or when we take an exam), you will receive a grade of 0, unless you have spoken about things with me in advance.

Plagiarism and academic honesty:

If you use someone else's ideas, whether through direct quotation or paraphrase, you need to say so. Use parenthetical references and a works cited list (as explained in the *MLA Style Guide*, available in the library or at the bookstore) to show your reader where your ideas are coming from. *This course will not require you to do external research to write papers, so avoid the temptation to plagiarize by sticking with the materials we're reading in class.*

Dishonesty of any other kind will not be tolerated. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Acts of dishonesty will result in academic sanctions and will be reported to the University's Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

Equal access:

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, please contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the ODS website at: www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Please notify me as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.

Daily syllabus. Have everything read before coming to class.

- Week 1: Aug 23, 25
T: Introduction
Th: Caillois, "Definition of Play" (PDF); **Post A**
- Week 2: Aug 30, Sept 1 / Play, Games, and Genre
T: Caillois, "Corruption of Games," 43-67 (PDF); Suits both essays (PDF);
Th: *First Person*, 1-70; *Afternoon* www.wwnorton.com/college/english/pmaf/hypertext/aft/ ;
Post B
- Week 3: Sept 6, 8 / Early History
T: Donovan, 1-95; *Adventure* (aban) *Rogue* (aban); *Zork I* (aban); play some Atari games www.2600online.com **Post C**
Th: Wark, "Agony," "Allegory" (PDF); **Post D**
- Week 4: Sept 13, 15 / The early 1990s
T: Donovan, 85-153; play some Nintendo games www.virtualnes.com
Steger, "What is Globalization?" (PDF)
Th: Donovan, 153-186; Bissell, "Little, Big" (PDF); *Balance of Power 1990* (aban);
Post E
- Week 5: Sept 20, 22 / Auteurs: Molyneux
T: Donovan, 187-212; *Tetris* www.freetetris.org Bissell, "Molyneux" (PDF)
Interview: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/apr/30/molyneux>
Th: *Populous* (aban), *Black & White* , *Fable* series (amazon); **Post A**
- Week 6: Sept 27, 29 / Theories
T: *First Person*, 117-165; **Presentation 1**
Th: Donovan, 213-237; *Myst* (aban); **Presentation 2; Post B**
- Week 7: Oct 4, 6 / Auteurs: Wright
T: *Sim City*, *SimCity 2000*, *SimEarth* (aban); **Presentation 3**
Atkins, "Sim City"
Interviews with Will Wright:
<http://www.popsci.com/entertainment-gaming/article/2007-02/wright-stuff>
<http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/maxis-will-wright-interview>
<http://pc.ign.com/articles/724/724248p1.html>
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/6386/the_replay_interviews_will_wright.php
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2008/may/02/will.wright>
Th: *The Sims* series (amazon); *spore* (amazon); **Presentation 4; Post C**
- Week 8: Oct 11, 13
MID-TERM EXAM (both days)
- Week 9: Oct 18, 20 / History: rise of the FPS; physics
T: Donovan, 237-265; Atkins "Half Life" (PDF); **Presentation 5**
Th: *Doom II* (aban); *Quake* (amazon); *Half-Life* (amazon); **Presentation 6; Post D**

- Week 10: Oct 25, 27 / Auteurs: Meier, Cage
 T: *Civilization* (I and II aban; III and up amazon); *Alpha Centauri* (gog) Galloway, “Allegories of Control” (PDF)
Presentation 7
 Interviews/discussion of Sid Meier:
<http://tinyurl.com/3gzfbn3>
<http://www.mindjack.com/interviews/sidmeier.html>
<http://www.next-gen.biz/features/interview-sid-meier>
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/1523/the_history_of_civilization.php
 Th: *Indigo Prophecy* (amazon); *Heavy Rain* (PS3); **Presentation 8; Post E**
 Interviews with David Cage:
<http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/heavy-rains-david-cage-interview>
<http://www.joystiq.com/2010/03/19/interview-spoiling-heavy-rain-with-david-cage/>
http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/tech_and_web/article7029223.ece
- Week 11: Nov 1, 3 / Virtual Worlds
 T: Donovan, 289-320; Lastowka 1-48; **Presentation 9**
 Th: Lastowka 49-66; *WoW*, *Tale in the Desert*; **Presentation 10; Post A**
- Week 12: Nov 8, 10
 T: Donovan, 343-357; Lastowka 67-101; **Presentation 11**
 Th: *GTA* series; Lastowka 102-143; **Presentation 12; Post B**
- Week 13: Nov 15, 17 / User Development, Mods, Machinima, Art
 T: Donovan, 321-332; Lastowka, 144-196; **Presentation 13**
 Th: Steger, “Cultural Globalization” (PDF)
Red vs. Blue; *The Movies* (amazon); *Super Mario Clouds* (web); **Presentation 14; Post C**

Thanksgiving Break is November 20-26

- Week 14: Nov 29, Dec 1 / Indie and Avant-Garde Games
 T: Donovan, 357-369; Galloway, “Countergaming” (PDF); Bissell, “Braided” 91-103 (PDF)
 Th: *First Person*, 85-94
 Article about Jason Rohrer’s Chain World:
http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/07/mf_chainworld/all/1
untitled game (web); *Flow* (web); *Passage* (web); *Flower* (PS3); *Portal* (amazon); see also *Machinarium*, *Canabalt*, *Gridrunner Revolution*, *Inside a Star-Filled Sky*; **Post D**
- Week 15: Dec 6, 8
 T: The future of game studies and gaming
 Th: Conclusions; preparing for the final; **Post E**

FINAL EXAM (date/location TBA)