Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences and School of Interdisciplinary Studies
Fall 2013
VISM 2B15 Introduction to Games Studies
Wednesday 3:10 - 6:10
Room TBD

Professor Jeff Watson (jwatson@faculty.ocadu.ca) // Twitter: @remotedevice
Office Hours & Location: By appointment only

Credit Value: 0.5 credits
Prerequisite: none
Antirequisite: VISC 3B92 & VISC 2B93

TA: TBD

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION:

Games studies views games as complex objects, mapping the game "object", the player "subject" and the critical dialogue that delimits game space. This course explores games as cultural artifacts, arising from diverse cultural histories, landscapes and geographies, impacting and impacted by sub-cultures. Students will learn to analyse the mechanics, aesthetics and practices of games via varied analytical approaches addressing their textual, performative, socio-cultural, design and political contexts. As well, the course introduces students to tools and techniques to analyze the cultural impact of the videogame.

CONTEXT.

The rapid rise in popularity of videogames over the past several decades has opened the door to myriad new kinds of expression, socio-political engagement, and applied design interventions. As intrinsically-rewarding, agency-rich experiences, games as a medium offer artists and designers opportunities to engage with audiences in uniquely active ways that can bring about transformative shifts in consciousness and behavior. However, despite these clear and present opportunities, the real power of games as a medium has only begun to be tapped. Truly sophisticated games depend on there being both sophisticated designers to create nuanced and elegant experiences, and sophisticated players to play and appreciate them. Being able to understand how games create meaning, how they impact (and are impacted by) cultures, how they connect with community, and how they integrate with the broader ecosystem of 21st century media practices is not only a crucial competency for designers and artists, but for players as well. This is perhaps the greatest utility of the interdisciplinary field of games studies: that it can provide pathways to understanding the complex nature of games as artifacts
of culture – pathways which ultimately lead to better designers, better players, and better games.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS/COURSE PACKS:

Links to additional required readings provided below.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Games are one of the preeminent media forms of the 21st century. As such, they are an essential object of study for any artist, designer, or researcher looking to engage with the contemporary media landscape. In this course, you will:

* draw on voices from cultural studies, art history, social psychology, game design practice, games journalism, and science and technology studies in to explore a range of frameworks for understanding and analyzing digital games and related forms of interactive entertainment;

* contextualize games within the broader history of games and play – a history that predates digital computation by thousands of years and includes diverse cultural practices such as performance art, ritual, and political activism; and,

* engage in written reflection and participate in in-class knowledge-sharing exercises in order to develop the critical skills necessary to analyze and interpret videogames and other play experiences.

COURSE ORGANIZATION:
You are expected to actively participate in class discussions and knowledge-sharing activities.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION SCHEDULE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Game Response</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Due week 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Variable due dates (determined in first class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper Proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Due week 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Due week 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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Game Response: You will be required to write a 1250-1500 word personal response to a game of their choice.

Presentation: Each student must deliver one presentation on a game or game culture artifact. You will select the subject for your presentation in the first class. The date of your presentation will depend on the subject you select.
Research Paper proposal: This short 300 word blurb will describe the focus of your final paper and the methodology or combination of methodologies you intend to use.

Research Paper: This 3000 word paper is the primary deliverable for this course. Your paper will analyze a game or element of game culture using a methodology or combination of methodologies covered in class.

Quizzes: Three "pop quizzes", each worth 5 percent of your overall grade, will be held at unpredictable times during the course. Each quiz will challenge you to recall and apply key concepts from the required readings. Hint: at least one quiz will take place in the first 4 weeks.

You will be provided with detailed descriptions of each assignment in class.

FINAL EXAM:
This class does not have a final exam.

POLICY ON LATE ASSIGNMENTS & INCOMPLETE GRADES:
Late papers will be deducted 10 percent per day, up to a limit of 5 days. After that, the paper will be graded a zero.

Because of the size of this class, we need to make sure that everyone's presentation takes place on the day that it is scheduled. Any student who needs to reschedule their presentation may only do so with the permission of the instructor, and must swap both their time slot and topic with another student. If you don't show up for your presentation, you will not get a second chance to do it.

Class attendance is mandatory. If you know you are going to be absent for a particular class and have a valid (i.e., medical or religious) reason, please contact the instructor immediately.

CLASS CONDUCT AND EXPECTATIONS:
1) You must ensure you are properly registered for the course. If you have any concerns about your registration status, you may confirm on-line, confirm with the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences Office, or contact the Office of the Registrar. Please first check your registration and read the codes carefully (the codes are clearly explained in the Course Calendar which is available on-line at www.ocadu.ca).
2) You are expected to conduct yourself in a manner respectful of your instructor and your fellow students. This includes, at a minimum:
   - Arriving on time
   - Turning off your cell phone upon arrival
   - If late, entering the classroom with the least disruption
   - Not interrupting or speaking when someone else has the floor
   - Using your laptop appropriately (i.e. not for email)
ABSENCES AND MAKE UP TESTS

Only under very special circumstances may students hand in late assignments or be absent from classes or tests/exams. If a student is sick, it is incumbent upon the student to notify the Instructor (and the Office of the Registrar, in the case of missed final exams) with proper documentation as soon as possible. Students with special needs must contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities, ext. 339 at least two weeks prior to the test or assignment.

ABSENCE FOR RELIGIOUS PURPOSES:

A student who foresees a conflict between a religious obligation and any scheduled class assignments, including the final examination, must notify his/her instructor in writing and in the case of final examinations must make a written request to the Office of the Registrar within three weeks of publishing of the syllabus and/or the final exam schedule.

PLAGIARISM AND REFERENCING YOUR RESEARCH SOURCES:

Plagiarism is the act of taking someone else's ideas, opinions, writings, etc. and representing them as one's own. You plagiarize whenever you borrow another scholar's ideas or quote directly from a work without giving credit through proper citation or acknowledgement. Plagiarism is a serious offense at OCADU (please see OCADU's Policy in the OCADU Academic Calendar). Any assignment in which the ideas of another author are intentionally represented without acknowledgement and/or presented as the student's own work will receive a grade of zero. Please see the following web link for more information. <Web link to the academic policy on plagiarism>

ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:

Each student has final responsibility for her or his conduct. Students are expected to be aware of and abide by the regulations as they have been established in OCAD U’s academic and non-academic policies, which can be found on the OCAD U website at the following web link <Web link to Student Policies> under “Student Policies”. These policies outline the responsibility of students to “conduct themselves appropriately and reflect the highest standards of integrity in non-academic as well as academic behaviour”. All allegations of misconduct will be reported and investigated as per the current policies.

WEEKLY READINGS & CLASS SCHEDULE:

** Please make sure to do all the readings for each week before coming to class.

Week 1: September 11
Introduction to the Course / Methods of Inquiry: Games Journalism, Game Design Research, Game Studies

• “Speaking of Games” (SZ, 44)
• “What is a game?” (SZ, 77)
• “What is Play?” (SZ, 83)
• Leigh Alexander, “Gaming Made Me: Colossal Cave Adventure”
  http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2011/06/04/cолосal-cave-review/

Week 2: September 18
Play and Players

  http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/gameplayerworld/
• Brian Sutton-Smith, “Play and Ambiguity” (SZ, 296)
• “The Player Experience” (SZ, 9)

Optional reading:
• Kiri Miller, "The Accidental Carjack: Ethnography, Gameworld Tourism, and Grand Theft Auto" http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/miller

Week 3: September 25
Rules and Procedurality

• “The Rules of a Game” (SZ, 8)
• Greg Costikyan, “I Have No Words & I Must Design” (SZ, 192)
• Stephen Sniderman, “Unwritten Rules” (SZ, 476)

*** Due: Game Response Paper ***

Week 4: October 2
Games and Computation

• Browse the various sections of “Bitstory” in The Dot Eaters:
  http://thedoteaters.com/?page_id=6

Week 5: October 9
Game Contexts I: Games and Narrative

• Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture”
• Jesper Juul, “Games Telling Stories?” http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/

Optional:
• Jill Walker, “Distributed Narrative: Telling Stories Across Networks”
  http://jilltxt.net-txt/Walker-AoIR-3500words.pdf

Week 6: October 16
Game Contexts II: Game Spaces/Games and Space

- "Game Spaces" (SZ, 64)
- Celia Pearce, "Narrative Environments from Disneyland to World of Warcraft" http://remotedevice.net/2b15/pearce-narrative-environments.pdf

Week 7: October 23
Game Contexts III: Game Communities/Games and Community

- "Game Communities" (SZ, 39)
- Richard Bartle, Hearts Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players who Suit Muds. (SZ, 754)
- Edward Castronova, “Virtual Worlds: A First-Hand Account of Market and Society on the Cyberian Frontier” (SZ, 814)

Optional:

Week 8: October 30
Art and Games

- Read the introduction and browse the sections of the "Fluxus Performance Workbook" http://remotedevice.net/blog/the-fluxus-performance-workbook/

Mystery experience

*** Due: Research Paper Proposal ***

Week 9: November 6
Representation, Politics, and Serious Games

- "Cultural Representation" (SZ, 70)
- Browse the video interviews at http://valuesatplay.org/

Week 10: November 13
New Forms: Games Beyond the Screen

- Jeffrey Kim, et al "Storytelling in new media: the case of alternate reality games, 2001-
Optional:
• ARG Readings and Reflections http://remotedevice.net/blog/arg-readings-and-reflections-an-annotated-bibliography/

Week 11: November 20
Dialogues with Designers

• “The Game Design Process” (SZ, 21)
• Doug Church, “Formal Abstract Design Tools” (SZ, 366)
• Robin Hunicke, “MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Design Research” http://www.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf

Week 12: November 27
Reflections on Game Aesthetics

• Phillip D. Deen, "Interactivity, Inhabitation and Pragmatist Aesthetics" http://gamestudies.org/1102/articles/deen

*** Due: Research Paper ***

Week 13: December 4
Special Themes (determined by students)

Readings TBD.

End of class event.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES:

Writing and Learning Centre:
Resources specific to this course, for students requiring assistance with the material and with writing or reading comprehension, and for those for whom English is a second language, are provided through the Writing and Learning Centre, room 1501, 113 McCaul, 5th floor (ext. 229); e-mail: <Writing and Learning Centre e-mail link> One-on-one tutoring is available and confidential. The Writing and Learning Centre (WLC) provides free services for all students including writing, critical thinking, critical reading, and study skills, through one-on-one tutoring, group tutoring, writing and academic skills workshops, resource materials, and ESL assistance. Please see the following web link for more information. <Web link to the Writing and Learning Centre>
Services for Students with Disabilities
Formal and informal student-centred supports, such as counselling, academic accommodations, and specialized services are available year-round to students registered with the Centre for Students with Disabilities. Students who think they may have learning or physical disabilities should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (ext. 339), 51 McCaul St. 2nd level, as soon as possible. Students must be registered with the CSD to receive accommodations and related support. It is important to register early in the semester to ensure the accommodations can be scheduled by the start of the semester. Please see the following web link for more information. <Web link to the Centre for Students with Disabilities>

Dorothy Hoover Library
<Web link for the Dorothy Hoover Library>
OCADU Library, 113 McCaul, 2nd Floor, Room 1215
General Reference Desk: ex. 334
Art and Design Reference, Robert Fabbro: ex. 343
Art and Liberal Arts & Sciences Reference, Daniel Payne: ex. 217

Other University Services:
<Web link for the Health and Wellness Centre>
<Web link for the Academic Integrity>
<Web link for the Academic Advising>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
The following books are recommended to anyone interested in learning more about games studies and game design:


