

University of Calgary
Department of Communication and Culture

Communications Studies Coms 401 Lecture 1
Special Topics in Communications Studies
Introduction to Video Game Studies

Fall 2014

September 9 - December 4, 2014

Tuesday & Thursdays 9:30-10:45 am

Instructor: Aiden Buckland
Office: SS 204
Office Phone: 403-210-9471
E-Mail: abucklan@ucalgary.ca
Web Page: D2L available through MyUofC portal
Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 11:00-12:00

Course Description

Explores the emerging area of game studies as it relates to the field of communication. The course will introduce students to the emerging approaches to studying digital and video gaming cultures currently being used by game studies scholars. We will explore the contexts in which these approaches arose, identify their major strengths and weaknesses, and consider how game studies engages the social world through research on video gaming culture. Areas to be covered include: history of video gaming, meaning making in games, games and narrative, player communities, networked gaming, the embodiment of gaming, gaming and identity, the political economy of video gaming and challenges of game design.

Additional Information

Some of the materials and topics presented in class may include explicit sexual or violent content and course language. If these materials make you uncomfortable, you are encouraged to speak with the professor. You will not be exempt from any assigned work but we will work together to accommodate your concerns. This class respects difference and diversity while welcoming thoughtful, critical discussions about mass mediated representations and discourses. Responsibility for attending and fulfilling the requirements for all aspects of this course resides with the student.

Objectives of the Course

Through readings, lectures, discussions and additional course materials, the course will

- introduce students to the burgeoning area of gaming research
- provide an integrated sense of the development of theory and method in game studies
- consider the contributions of the various approaches to game studies and situate them within the broader field communications research.

Textbooks and Readings

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon; Heide Smith, Jonas; & Tosca, Susana Pajares. (2013). Understanding Video Games The Essential Introduction. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge

Internet and electronic communication device information

Students are expected to use these technologies exclusively for the enrichment of their class experience. All networked devices should be placed on mute or vibrate during class time. I reserve the right to ask any student to power down a device if it becomes a distraction to the other students in the class.

Assignments and Evaluation

Participation 10%

Will be evaluated on the basis of a series of in class activities.

Blog Reflections 20% (Schedule will be provided)

Students will be expected to contribute three 150-250 word contributions to the class blog, as well as six comments on the work of their classmates. A posting schedule and further details about expectations will be posted on the blog and handed out during the first week of class.

Content Analysis Project 15% Due Oct 2, 2014

Using the library's retro gaming collection you will choose a video game (console or computer) and provide a thorough analysis of the game utilizing approaches that have been covered in the course. Your finished product will be a report detailing your analysis of the game (8-10 pages). Detailed assignment guidelines will be posted on blackboard and discussed in class.

Literature Review or Autoethnographic Paper 30% Due Nov 27, 2014

For this assignment you will be asked to provide a brief literature review of one of the areas within game studies covered in the course or to conduct an autoethnographic analysis of your own play. The paper should be 10-15 pages, double-spaced not including works cited or title page. You will be required to do research beyond the parameters of the textbook. Further details about how to conduct your literature review or ethnography will be provided in class.

Take Home Exam 25% Due Dec 11, 2014

The exam will consist of a combination of short and long answer questions and will cover material from the entire course. Students will be expected to synthesize and apply what they've learned from the course to this final assignment. The exam will be distributed during the last week of class. Office hours will be posted for those students who want to hand in their assignment in person.

Registrar-scheduled Final Examination: No

All assignments and exams must be completed or a course grade of F may be assigned at the discretion of the instructor.

Submission of Assignments: Please submit all assignments directly to dropbox in D2L. If it is not possible to do so, a daytime drop box is available in SS320; a date

stamp is provided for your use. A night drop box is also available for after-hours submission. Assignments will be removed the following morning, stamped with the previous day's date, and placed in the instructor's mailbox.

Please include your name and ID number on all assignments, and be prepared to provide picture ID to pick up assignments or look at final exams in SS 320 after classes have ended. Personal information is collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act*. For more information, see <http://www.ucalgary.ca/secretariat/privacy>

Note: It is the student's responsibility to keep a copy of each submitted assignment. For courses in which assignments are submitted electronically, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that the correct copy of the assignment is submitted. (Including the version date or version number in your file name may help you avoid submitting the wrong version of your written assignments.)

Policy for Late Assignments

Assignments submitted after the deadline may be penalized with the loss of a grade (e.g.: A- to B+) for each day late.

Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability who may require academic accommodation, it is your responsibility to register with the Student Accessibility Services (220-8237, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>) and discuss your needs with your instructor no later than 14 days after the start of the course.

Writing Skills Statement

Department policy directs that all written assignments (including, to a lesser extent, written exam responses) will be assessed at least partly on writing skills. For details see <http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/needtoknow>. Writing skills include not only surface correctness (grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, etc) but also general clarity and organization. Sources used in research papers must be properly documented. If you need help with your writing, you may use the Writing Centre. Visit the website for more details: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>

Grading System & Dept of Communication and Culture Grade Scale

Work in this course will be graded using percentage grades. The following grade scale percentage equivalents are used in Communication and Culture:

| Grade Point Value | Description | Grade | Department grade scale equivalents | Letter grade % equivalent for calculations |
|--------------------------|--|--------------|---|---|
| 4.00 | Outstanding | A+ | 96 - 100% | 98.0% |
| 4.00 | Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject | A | 90 - 95.99% | 93.0% |

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|-------------|--|------------|-------------|-------|
| | matter. | | | |
| 3.70 | | A - | 85 - 89.99% | 87.5% |
| 3.30 | | B+ | 80 - 84.99% | 82.5% |
| 3.00 | Good--clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete. | B | 75 - 79.99% | 77.5% |
| 2.70 | | B- | 70 - 74.99% | 72.5% |
| 2.30 | | C+ | 65 - 69.99% | 67.5% |
| 2.00 | Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter. | C | 60 - 64.99% | 62.5% |
| 1.70 | | C- | 55 - 59.99% | 57.5% |
| 1.30 | Minimal pass—marginal performance; generally insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same subject | D+ | 53 - 54.99% | 54.0% |
| 1.00 | | D | 50 - 52.99% | 51.5% |
| 0.00 | Fail – unsatisfactory performance or failure to meet course requirements. | F | 00 - 49.99% | 0% |

Plagiarism

Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense. Consequences include failure on the assignment, failure in the course and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university.

You must document not only direct quotations but also paraphrases and ideas where they appear in your text. A reference list at the end is insufficient by itself. In-text citations must be provided, and readers must be able to tell exactly where your words and ideas end and other people's words and ideas begin. Wording taken directly from a source must be enclosed within quotation marks (or, for long quotations, presented in the format prescribed by the documentation style you are using). Paraphrased information must not follow the original wording and sentence structure with only slight word substitutions here and there. These requirements apply to all assignments and sources, including those in non-traditional formats such as Web pages or visual media.

For information on citation and documentation styles (including APA, Chicago, IEEE, MLA, and others), visit the links provided at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/node/208> . If you have questions about how to document sources, please consult your instructor or the Writing Centre (3rd Floor TFDL, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support>).

Academic Misconduct

For information on academic misconduct and its consequences, please see the University of Calgary Calendar at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Research Ethics

Whenever you perform research with human participants (i.e. surveys, interviews, observation) as part of your university studies, you are responsible for following

university research ethics guidelines. Your instructor must review and approve of your research plans and supervise your research. For more information about your research ethics responsibilities, see <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/research/research/research-ethics>

Important information, services, and contacts for students

| For information about . . . | Visit or contact . . . |
|--|--|
| ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING (PIC) | SS 102 403-220-3580 picarts@ucalgary.ca |
| CAMPUS SECURITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calgary Police Service • Emergency Text Messaging • Emergency Evacuation & Assembly • Safewalk Program | http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ 403-220-5333 403-266-1234 Emergency: call 911 http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/textmessage http://www.ucalgary.ca/emergencyplan/assemblypoints If you feel uncomfortable walking alone at any time, call Campus Security for an escort (220-5333). For more information, see http://www.ucalgary.ca/security/ |
| DESIRE2LEARN (D2L) Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IT help line | http://elearn.ucalgary.ca/desire2learn/home/students 403-220-5555 or itsupport@ucalgary.ca |
| STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing Support Services • Student Services Mobile App | http://ucalgary.ca/ssc http://www.ucalgary.ca/ssc/writing-support http://ucalgary.ca/currentstudents |
| STUDENTS' UNION CONTACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty of Arts Reps • Student Ombudsman | http://www.su.ucalgary.ca/governance/elections/home.html http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/students/ombuds |
| SU WELLNESS CENTRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling Services • Health Services • Distress centre 24/7 CRISIS LINE • Online resources and tips | 403-210-9355 (MSC 370), M-F, 9:00–4:30 pm http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/counselling http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/health 403-266-HELP (4357) http://ucalgary.ca/wellnesscentre/healthycampus If you're concerned about a friend or your own well-being, it is important to seek help early. Call or visit the SU Wellness Centre or the 24-hour crisis line. |

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

| Week | Theme |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Sept 9-Sept 11 | Introduction |
| Sept 16-Sept 18 | What is a Game |
| Sept 23-Sept 25 | History |
| Sept 30-Oct 2 | The Industry |
| Oct 7-Oct 9 | Aesthetics |
| Oct 14-Oct 16 | Narrative |
| Oct 21-Oct 23 | Learning(MineCraft) |
| Oct 28-Oct 30 | Serious Games |
| Nov 4-Nov 6 | Risks |
| Nov 11-Nov 13 | Culture |
| Nov 18-Nov 20 | Esports |
| Nov 25-Nov 27 | Preparing a Game Studies Project |
| Dec 2-Dec 4 | Preparing a Game Studies Project |