New York University  
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication  
MCC-UE 1008.001  
Video Games: Culture and Industry  

**Course Description**  
Over the past 30 years, video games have metamorphosed from household novelties and hobbyist toys to one of the most globally recognized forms of popular entertainment. The Entertainment Software Association 2013 Essential Facts report states that 58% of Americans play video games of some form, and 51% of all households own a dedicated console; it's long been acknowledged that major AAA video game releases generate more global revenue than a Hollywood blockbuster. Everyday, the world of video game play and video game production grows more embedded in our cultural, technical and economic lives. Games are no longer marginal entertainment: they are definitive modes of experience in the 21st century.  

This class is designed to offer a broad introduction to the phenomenon of video games, focusing primarily on Western U.S. histories and cultural practices. We'll investigate the relationship between play and games, learn (and practice!) intro game design, examine current events around issues of race, gender and inclusivity in the contemporary game scene, study cultural practices as diverse as modding, cheating and goldfarming, and come to better understand the stakes of the rising “indie” game scene. In short, we're here to make games—those simple pleasures we engage with everyday—seem unfamiliar and full of complexity.  

And in this class, we'll also *play*. Playing games as a class provides us an opportunity to put our theoretical understanding of the subject in perspective, as well as give us a sense of what makes both classic and contemporary games compelling from a user's vantage point. Expect to play, win and fail all in plain view of your classmates.  

**Learning Outcomes**  
Students will be able to:  
- Categorize and evaluate games based on genre, design, historical period, employing vocabulary native to media studies, game studies and game design  
- Describe the relationships between play, electronic games, and broader cultural, social and economic forces  
- Evaluate shifting trends in game development, between AAA and indie industries, as well as between casual and “hardcore” titles  
- Demonstrate familiarity with basic areas of employment in the games industry, including games journalism, preservation, arts practices, and design
REQUIRED TEXTS


REQUIRED GAMES

For most of our meeting days, specific games have been assigned alongside the readings. Some of these games will only be played in class. However, some of these games you are expected to download and/or purchase and play on your own time in order to be prepared for the day's discussion. The list below includes all games which you are required to play for homework, in addition to your reading.

Several of these games require purchase through a third party site, such as Steam or GOG.

*Quest for Glory I* (VGA version), Sierra On-Line [February 14] [requires GOG.com account, must buy as QfG I-V bundle] [http://www.gog.com/game/quest_for_glory](http://www.gog.com/game/quest_for_glory)


*Consensual Torture Simulator*, Merritt Kopas. [April 18] *PLEASE NOTE* *Consensual Torture Simulator* is a representation of a sado-masochistic relationship, which some students may deem sexually explicit. Because of this sensitive content, we will not be playing this game in class. Students are expected to play the game independently, on their own time. If any individual student finds this material objectionable and wishes not to play, for any reason, please speak with me so we may develop an alternate assignment. [http://mkopas.net/2013/10/consensual-torture-simulator/](http://mkopas.net/2013/10/consensual-torture-simulator/)


ASSIGNMENTS

*Reading Presentations*

Each student will select a reading from the syllabus and prepare a 10 minute presentation, delivered on the day the reading is assigned to be read. This presentation will serve as the introduction to that day's discussion. Students should practice their presentations independently and time themselves to ensure their presentation is approximately 10 minutes. Skills Assessed: Reading Comprehension, Synthesis, Summary, Public Speaking

To fulfill the assignment, students must give an oral presentation accompanied a 6-slide Powerpoint (or some form of projected, slide-style visuals). Each slide of the Powerpoint has a specific goal:
Slide 1: Title Slide (include title of reading, your name, class, class date)
Slide 2: Author background w/ picture
Slide 3: Article synthesis. Summarize the article in broad strokes and identify the large-scale idea, claim or argument the reading is making?
Slide 4: Identify any specific vocabulary used in the article
Slide 5: Summarize what you think is the most salient or provocative example or claim worth discussing
Slide 6: Questions

Writing Assignments
This class has three required writing assignments, each roughly 4-5 pages. These assignments are intended to hone diverse skills for responding critically to games, and to acquaint students with standard genres of writing used in the games journalism industry/blog-o-sphere. These three writing assignments are the Board Game Analysis, the Game Scene Event Blog Article, and the Video Game Review. Assignment sheets can be found on NYU Classes, under the Assignments tab.

To develop your awareness of the scene and hone your writing skills, I encourage you to follow these game journalism outlets on your Twitter/Facebook/RSS feeds:
   Gamasutra http://www.gamasutra.com/
   Killscreen http://killscreendaily.com/
   Polygon http://wwwpolygon.com/
   Indiestatik http://indiestatik.com/

Midterm and Final
A midterm and final are detailed on the syllabus. The midterm and the final will have the same format, and be comprised of terminology identifications, short answers, and an essay.

Grade Evaluation Breakdown

Participation 5%
Reading Presentation 10%
Board Game Analysis 15%
Game Scene Event Blog Article 15%
Video Game Review 15%
Midterm 20%
Final 20%

Evaluation Rubric

A= Excellent
This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments
offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.

B=Good
This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.

C=Average
This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.

D= Unsatisfactory
This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.

F=Failed
This grade indicates a failure to participate and/or incomplete assignments

A  = 94-100
A- = 90-93
B+ = 87-89
B  = 84-86
B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79
C  = 74-76
C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69
D  = 60-64
F  = 0-59

THE MANDATE OF MUTUAL RESPECT
A great deal of effort goes into preparing and teaching a class; likewise, you each spend much time and energy reading and preparing for classes, tests and papers. Respect in the classroom is a mutual experience.

My Obligations to You
To be prepared and on time for class
To lecture, lead discussion, and run groups that reflect the purpose and content of the course
To test and grade fairly, and be unbiased in my assessment
To treat your questions with respect and your concerns with sensitivity
To help you succeed in this class insofar as you help yourself to succeed
To inform you promptly of any changes to the syllabus or class rules

*Your Obligations to Me*

To be prepared and on time for class, including bringing your readings to class
To approach class with respect, recognizing that it is an establish time of learning and discussion
To dedicate your attention during class; no texting, reading the paper, napping, headphones, etc.
To treat myself and your peers with thoughtfulness; no putting others down and no hate speech
To complete all work yourself; no plagiarism or un-cited sources, as they will result in failure and disciplinary action
To take responsibility for your work, and to accept the consequences of your choices

*COURSE POLICIES*

*Absences and Lateness*
There is no attendance requirement for this class. However, attendance is a requisite for participation, so expect absences to negatively affect your participation grade. All assignments must be turned in on time, either in class or to my email inbox by the start of class. Absence is never an excuse for late work. Writing assignments will be docked 5% per day late. Midterm and Final cannot be made up. You must give your Reading Presentation of the day you are assigned—no exceptions.

Also, don’t be late for class. It’s rude. And you might find the door locked. 😊

*Format*
Please type and double-space your written work. Typing improves the clarity and readability of your work and double-spacing allows room for me to comment. Please also number and staple multiple pages. You are free to use your preferred citation style. Please use it consistently throughout your writing.

*Grade Appeals*
Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

*Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism*
The relationship between students and faculty is the keystone of the educational experience at New York University in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. This relationship takes an honor code for granted and mutual trust, respect, and responsibility as foundational requirements. Thus, how you learn is as important as what you learn. A university education aims not only to produce high-quality scholars, but to also cultivate honorable citizens.

Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams to making oral presentations to writing term papers. It requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours.

You violate the principle of academic integrity when you cheat on an exam, submit the same work for two different courses without prior permission from your professors, receive help on a take-home examination that calls for independent work, or plagiarize.

Plagiarism, one of the gravest forms of academic dishonesty in university life, whether intended or not, is academic fraud. In a community of scholars, whose members are teaching, learning, and discovering knowledge, plagiarism cannot be tolerated.

Plagiarism is failure to properly assign authorship to a paper, a document, an oral presentation, a musical score, and/or other materials that are not your original work. You plagiarize when, without proper attribution, you do any of the following: copy verbatim from a book, an article, or other media; download documents from the Internet; purchase documents; report from other’s oral work; paraphrase or restate someone else’s facts, analysis, and/or conclusions; or copy directly from a classmate or allow a classmate to copy from you.

Your professors are responsible for helping you to understand other people's ideas, to use resources and conscientiously acknowledge them, and to develop and clarify your own thinking. You should know what constitutes good and honest scholarship, style guide preferences, and formats for assignments for each of your courses. Consult your professors for help with problems related to fulfilling course assignments, including questions related to attribution of sources.

Through reading, writing, and discussion, you will undoubtedly acquire ideas from others, and exchange ideas and opinions with others, including your classmates and professors. You will be expected, and often required, to build your own work on that of other people. In so doing, you are expected to credit those sources that have contributed to the development of your ideas.

Avoiding Academic Dishonesty

Organize your time appropriately to avoid undue pressure, and acquire good study habits, including note taking.
Learn proper forms of citation. Always check with your professors of record for their preferred style guides. Directly copied material must always be in quotes; paraphrased material must be acknowledged; even ideas and organization derived from your own previous work or another's work need to be acknowledged. Always proofread your finished work to be sure that quotation marks, footnotes and other references were not inadvertently omitted. Know the source of each citation.

Do not submit the same work for more than one class without first obtaining the permission of both professors even if you believe that work you have already completed satisfies the requirements of another assignment.

Save your notes and drafts of your papers as evidence of your original work.

Disciplinary Sanctions
When a professor suspects cheating, plagiarism, and/or other forms of academic dishonesty, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken following the department procedure or through referral to the Committee on Student Discipline.

The Steinhardt School Statement on Academic Integrity is consistent with the New York University Policy on Student Conduct, published in the NYU Student Guide.

Student Resources
Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212-998-4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.

Writing Center: 411 Lafayette, 3rd Floor. Schedule an appointment online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just walk-in.

Schedule of Classes, Readings and Assignments

January 31 – Welcome

Feb 7 – Play and Culture
[Game Play] Killer Queen arcade machine, NYU Game Center; Pong, Atari
Optional Reading: Geertz, GlifORD. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”  
*Daedalus* 134.4 (2005): 56 – 86.

**Feb 14 – An Introduction to Games and 20th Century Game History**


[Game Play] *Quest for Glory I*, EGA Version, 1989 (REQUIRED GAME);  
*Doom*, id Software, 1993

**Feb 21 – Game Design // Guest Speaker: Toni Pizza, NYU Game Center**


**Feb 28 – In-Class Game Jam**

*Board Game Design Analysis Due*

**March 7 – Narrative and Simulation**


**March 14 – Gender, Space and Access**

*First Game Journalism Essay Due*


**March 21 – ****Spring Break! ******
March 28 – The Problem of Inclusivity in the Contemporary Game Industry //


Different Games Conference. “Inclusivity Statement.”


April 4 – Race and Representation
[Game Scene Event Blog Article Due]

http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/84/89


April 11 – MIDTERM

April 18 – Games, Violence and the Military Industrial Complex // Guest Speaker: Merritt Kopas, indie game designer


April 25 – Unexpected Outcomes of Video Game Culture

[Game Play] Super Mario World, Super Nintendo with Game Genie

May 2 – Video Game Preservation // Guest Speaker: Raiford Guins, Associate Professor, Stony Brook University [Video Game Review Due]


May 9 – Indie and Casual Gaming
