189 SYLLABUS: Advanced Topics in Digital & Electronic Media Studies

INTRODUCTION TO VIDEO GAME STUDIES

SPRING 2010

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10-11:45am, in Communications 150 (Studio C)

Instructor: Suzanne Scott  •  sulscott@ucsc.edu
Office hours: Tuesdays from 12-2pm (or by appointment) in Communications 151

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Games have always been an integral part of our culture, and studies of culture have long been fascinated by our propensity for play. Beginning with a brief historical overview of the inception of the video game industry and arcade culture, this course is centrally concerned with identifying the pleasures of play and engaging with the cultural and academic discourses and debates that surround video games and gamers. While video games have proven themselves as a dominant industrial force over the past decade, the stigmas and social anxieties that circulate around video games persist. Consequently, one of the primary goals of this course is for students to both become conversant in these critiques and proficient in speaking back to them, acquiring the vocabulary to discuss and analyze the rules that govern our engagement with video games, and our experiences playing them.

In addition to viewing gameplay in class, for the first half of the course we will be screening films about video games or game culture, in order to broach conversations about how old media reflexively engages with new media, and consider how common conceptions about video games are created and circulated. While live gameplay in class will be limited due to time constraints, students are encouraged and expected to play outside of class and bring those experiences with them to our discussions and their presentations.

REQUIRED READINGS: Readings are listed below on the course schedule; assigned chapters and articles are to be read before class each Tuesday. All are required unless listed as “recommended.” All readings can be found either in the assigned book (available at the Bay Tree Bookstore) or online (web addresses listed in course schedule, when applicable). Additional links to online articles or recommended reading may be sent via email.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your **weekly attendance and active participation** is central to the class’ success and to your success in the class, as is your thoughtful engagement with the course readings. Ample time will be allotted to discuss your response to the readings and their correlation to the course screenings, and your own experiences playing video games. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up in class, you can post comments to our blog to bolster your participation grade. You’re also encouraged to email me with any additional material you come across that you think might be relevant to the class (blog posts, videos, articles, etc.).

In addition to a **midterm exam** composed of short identifications and essay questions, you will be responsible for conceptualizing and writing a **final paper** (7-9pgs) on a research topic of your choice. You will submit your proposed final paper topic via email on (or before) Monday, 5/17 in the form of a short paragraph describing your project and how it relates to the class. More details on this assignment will be distributed in the coming weeks.

The final three Thursday class sessions (5/20, 5/27, and 6/3) will be devoted to in-class presentations. You will present on a specific game of your choice, as it relates to the topic and readings for that week. You will sign up for these presentations on 5/6 IN CLASS. These presentations will be 8-10 minutes long. If you would like to work with a partner, you will be allotted 15 minutes to present as a pair. If you would like to include live gameplay as part of your presentation, please see me to make those arrangements.

You will also be responsible for completing a **play journal** over the first few weeks of the course. You will pick **one** of the games listed below, play it (for at least 1-2 hours), and post **one play journal** (selecting **1 of the 3 following course topics**: 1. Play, 2. Rules of Play, or 3. Narrative). You will post your entry to our course blog before you come to class on Thursday. To clarify, all journals on play must be posted by 10am on 4/8, all journals on rules of play must be posted by 10am on 4/15, and all journal entries on narrative must be posted by 10am on 4/22. **FAILURE TO UPLOAD YOUR JOURNAL ENTRY TO THE BLOG BY THE START OF CLASS THURSDAY (10 AM) WHEN IT IS DUE WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC F FOR YOUR JOURNAL ENTRY.**

The course blog is located at: [http://fdm2.ucsc.edu/blogs/spring10/189/](http://fdm2.ucsc.edu/blogs/spring10/189/). I will post an entry for each week, and you will upload your journal as a comment. Be sure to include your name at the end of your entry. Each entry should be approximately **500-750 words** and should include a **critical, thoughtful discussion of how the game and your experience playing relates to the course reading for that week.** I’ve attempted to pick a range of games, both in terms of genre, appeal, and platform. If you have concerns about gaining access to one of these games, or have any questions about this assignment, please don’t hesitate to email me.

Pick **one** game from the following list as the basis for your play journal:

- **Bioshock** (2007) [PC, Xbox 360, or PS3]
- **Braid** (2008) [PC, Xbox Live Arcade]
- **Diner Dash** (2003) [PC or Mac, iPhone, Nintendo DS, etc.]
- **Plants vs. Zombies** (2009) [PC or Mac, Xbox Live Arcade, iPhone]
- **Super Mario Galaxy** (2007) [Wii]
All assignments must be handed in on time, and turning in assignments late will be detrimental to your grade. Exceptions will be made and extensions will be given only for medical or family emergencies (provided you can offer documentation).

**Grading breakdown:**

- Attendance/Participation = 20%
- Play Journal = 15%
- Midterm = 20%
- In Class Presentations = 15%
- Final Paper = 30%

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**
If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please get an Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and submit it to me in person outside of class (e.g., office hours) within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY), or http://drc.ucsc.edu for more information on the requirements and/or process.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:**

PLAGIARISM IN ANY FORM WILL BE REPORTED TO THE APPROPRIATE PROVOST’S OFFICE, WILL RESULT IN FAILURE OF THE COURSE, AND COULD LEAD TO DISMISSAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY. If you have any questions or doubts about how to properly cite a source, don’t hesitate to contact me.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1 • Introduction: From Arcades to Consoles**
Tuesday 3/30 and Thursday 4/1

Read: Richard Rouse III, “Game Analysis: Centipede” [460-473]

Screen: *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* (Seth Gordon, 2007, 79 min.)

**Week 2 • Play**
Tuesday 4/6 and Thursday 4/8

Read: Johan Huizinga, “Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon” [96-120]
Roger Caillois, “The Definition of Play: The Classification of Games” [122-155]
Noah Waldrip-Fruin, et. al., “Agency Reconsidered”

Screen: *Tron* (Steven Lisberger, 1982, 96 min.)
Due: Play journal

**Week 3 • Rules of Play**
Tuesday 4/13 and Thursday 4/15

Read: Bernard Suits, “Construction of a Definition” [172-191]
Greg Costikyan, “I Have No Words & I Must Design” [192-210]
Staffan Björk and Jussi Holopainen, “Games and Design Patterns” [410-437]

Screen: *Stay Alive* (William Brent Bell, 2006, 85 min.)
Due: Play journal
Week 4 • Narrative & The Pleasures of Play  
Tuesday 4/20 and Thursday 4/22  
Read:  Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, “Interaction and Narrative” [642-669]  
Henry Jenkins, “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” [670-689]  
Gordon Calleja, “Experimental Narrative in Game Environments”  
Screen:  eXistenz (David Cronenberg, 1999, 97 min.)  
Due:  Play journal  

Week 5 • Child’s Play: The Violence/Education Debate  
Tuesday 4/27 and Thursday 4/29  
Kurt Squire, “Cultural Framing of Computer/Video Games”  
[http://www.gamestudies.org/0102/squire/]  
Johannes Fromme, “Computer Games as a Part of Children’s Culture”  
[http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/fromme/]  
Screen:  The Wizard (Todd Holland, 1989, 100 min.)  

Week 6 • MMORPGs and Online Gaming  
Tuesday 5/4 and Thursday 5/6  
Mark Chen, “Social Dimensions of Expertise in World of Warcraft Players”  
Screen:  The Guild (selected webisodes, 2007)  
Second Skin (Juan Carlos Pineiro-Escoriaza, 2008, 94 min.)  
Select:  Presentation topic and date  

Week 7 • Global Gaming & Midterm Exam  
Tuesday 5/11 and Thursday 5/13  
Read:  William Humberto Huber and Stephen Mandiberg, “Kingdom Hearts, Territoriality, and Flow”  
Britta Neitzel, “World and Place- Map and Territory”  
Exam:  Thursday, 5/13 (Bring blue books, a pen, and something to write on)  
Due:  Term paper proposals to sulscott@ucsc.edu by (or before) Monday, 5/17 at noon.
**Week 8 • War/Games**
Tuesday 5/18 and Thursday 5/20

**Read:**

**Due:** Presentations (Thursday, 5/20)

**Week 9 • Gender and Gaming**
Tuesday 5/25 and Thursday 5/27

**Read:**
- Henry Jenkins, “‘Complete Freedom of Movement’: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces” [330-363]

**Due:** Presentations (Thursday, 5/27)

**Week 10 • Machinima and Video Game Fandom**
Tuesday 6/1 and Thursday 6/3

**Read:**
- [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/06/gender_and_fan_studies_round_t_1.html]

**Due:** Presentations (Thursday 6/3)

**Week 11 • Term Papers Due**
Tuesday 6/8: 10am, in class