

DIGITAL 334 – Race, Gender, Sexuality, U.S. Culture, and Video Games

Meeting Times: [REDACTED]

Location: [REDACTED]

Instructor: Dr. Tony Bushner | [REDACTED]

Office Hours: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Office Location: [REDACTED]

Far from the image of the stereotypical “gamer” popularized by late 1980s/1990s gaming publications and advertisements, modern video and board game audiences are more diverse than ever. The people making the games we play, however, still largely reflect that narrow “core gamer” audience of the late 20th century. Labor issues in the game design industry abound, as lawsuits such as California Department of Fair Employment and Housing v. Activision Blizzard painfully illustrate.

This course will offer a deep dive on the fascinating intersections of race and gender with interactive media. We will begin with an exploration of the queer experience of failure and its use as an interactive metaphor for passing. Next, we will explore the role of representation and embodiment in interactive media: from depictions of the “other” in games like *Fallout* and *Fable* to the connections between orientalism and the foundations of game studies to the at-hand nature of colonialist narratives in games, we will explore the intersection of race and interactive media. We will end the semester with a discussion on game industry labor issues, gaming culture’s problem with harassment (ala Gamergate & its connections to the alt-right movement), and a brief look at game accessibility.

The Race & Ethnicity (R&E) requirement helps us foster conversations and understanding about how race and ethnicity impact our society, media, and systems at large. Courses that satisfy this requirement (such as this one) help us more critically evaluate the assumptions we make about culture and media—and thus, the people who create and enjoy said media, as well as political movements that use that media to shape the world to reinforce those assumptions in ways that further their political ends. By tackling difficult subjects in a respectful and curious manner, you will be better equipped to navigate the complex and often confusing digital world in which we find ourselves.

Learning Goals for This Course

1. Students will analyze how video games serve as a potent environment for changing race, gender, ethnic, and religious power differentials in our increasingly networked global society
2. Students will explore the perspectives of designers and academics on the cutting edge of game design/game studies and how their work is impacting the assumptions we make about who games are “for”
3. Students will have ample opportunities to take the new insights gained from this course and use them to practice their written, visual, an interactive media production skills

Required Texts

In pursuit of a more equitable learning experience for all students, you will not be required to purchase any texts for this course. All readings for this course will be distributed as PDFs on Canvas or weblinks to online resources. Follow the Syllabus Calendar for a breakdown on which readings you should consult before attending each class session.

All of the games covered in this class are available for play in the [REDACTED] and should also be available through the CVGA (now in Shapiro Library). While these resources are useful for short play sessions, you may find that the final assignment (Rhetorical Analysis of a Game) is easier to complete with more convenient and consistent access to a game. I have provided all reading materials for you for free, so I expect that you will purchase the game you are writing about for this final project. **Please budget between \$15 and \$60 to purchase a game this semester as part of your required materials.**

Course Components

Students will complete a number of small and large projects from a menu of potential projects to achieve the grade they seek. Small projects worth 10 points or less are completion credit; the mid-term and final are graded via a rubric that will be given to you ahead of time. Here is a brief outline of those assignments (detailed assignment descriptions will be made available for each on Canvas):

Weekly Reading Response: 2.5 pts each (limit 12)

Play Report: 2.5 pts each (limit 3)

Bonus Reading Response: 2.5 pts each (limit 3)

Mid-Term Paper: 20 pts (limit 1)

Final Paper Proposal: 10 pts (limit 1)

Final Paper: 30 pts (limit 1)

Discussion Section: 10pts

The number of points you accumulate over the semester will directly correlate to your grade in this course. Completing 100 points of material will net you an A+. See the chart below for the grading scale:

Grade	Points
A+	97-100+
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72

D+	67-69
D	65-66
F	Below 65

Technology Policy

Feel free to bring your cell phone, laptop, tablet, Zune, Palm Pilot, or abacus to class with you *if it helps you learn* and does not become a distraction to you or others. I recognize that just because you're staring at a screen doesn't necessarily mean you're not paying attention. At times, I may ask everyone to put their devices away if it serves a pedagogical goal or if their presence seems to be impeding a pedagogical goal.

I noticed over the last year that some students seem to prefer responding to discussion questions via text chat. This is something that I am trying to embrace this semester, so to that end, you will be given access to a class Discord Channel that you may use to participate in class if you don't feel like speaking out loud. Feel free to use this Discord to coordinate group projects, extracurricular play sessions, or trips to the Duderstadt Games Archive.

Grading Policy

Students will complete a number of assignments for completion credit to earn their grade. Each assignment (outlined in the Assignment Menu Document) will be worth a number of points and are considered pass/fail: if your work meets required standards, you will receive full points for your assignment. If your assignment does not meet standards, it will be returned with notes for revision, and you will thereafter have the option to revise and resubmit or abandon the project (your choice). Final grades will be assigned based on the work the student completes, and full points will be awarded for completed work (to facilitate planning your workload for the semester). This grading system maximizes opportunities for experimentation and productive "failure" with an eye toward a more equitable environment for learning and assessment.

Office Hours

Students are encouraged to make office hours appointments regularly throughout the semester. Though I try to take every opportunity I can to give students individualized feedback and attention, it is simply too difficult to do so given our limited time together in class. Confused about a course concept or a specific reading? Make an appointment. Want some feedback on a project idea or partial draft? *Make an appointment*. Want to just chat about games or digital media in general? **Make an appointment**.

I love talking to students about my areas of research specialization, offering book recommendations, or suggesting games to check out in the archive. You're paying for access to your professors as part of your tuition: get your money's worth and learn all you can from us.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is *mandatory*, though it is *not a graded component of this course*. Usually, there is enough of a correlation between non-attendance and poor performance on graded work that assigning a point value to it really doesn't do anyone any favors. **Plus, I don't want you to even *think about coming to class if you're feeling unwell***, and I feel like assigning points for attendance would be working counter to this aim.

I expect you to participate in my class. That doesn't mean you have to raise your hand and speak every day. It doesn't mean that you have to be active in chat every day. What it *does* mean is that you come to class having read the assigned material and made note of any passages/concepts/ideas that don't make sense to you. I *love* explaining things to people, so please ask lots of questions. It's, like, the whole reason I entered into this profession.

Plagiarism Policy

The University of Michigan defines plagiarism as “submitting a piece of work (for example, an essay, research paper, work of art, assignment, laboratory report) which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.” Plagiarism is when you knowingly (or unknowingly) submit someone else's ideas or words as your own. Please check out the LSA's page on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty for more details: <https://lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/advising/note-on-plagiarism.html>

If you commit an act of academic dishonesty in this course either by plagiarizing someone's work or by allowing your own work to be misused by another, you will not receive credit for the assignment and you may fail the entire course. In addition, I will report the incident to both the Comparative Literature Department and the LS&A Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. Please note that if you submit work already completed for one course as original work for another course, you are violating university policies and will not receive credit for the assignment and may possibly fail the course.

Student Resources

Accessibility and Accommodations

The University of Michigan is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students, and I am committed to maximizing participation and making learning as accessible as possible for all of my students in this remote classroom environment. If you have any medical conditions or disabilities that seem likely to present you with particular challenges in this class, or for which you may need accommodations to participate and complete course requirements, please let me know as soon as possible. I'll do everything I can to make the course requirements and the virtual learning environment work for you. Please also avail yourself of the extensive support and services to be found at Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. SSD can provide documentation of the accommodations that you need and can share this documentation with me. If you do not wish to share your information with SSD, please let me know directly of any accommodation needs you have within the first few weeks of the semester. I will treat as private and confidential any information that you share. If you suspect that you may have a disability

and would like to be tested, Services for Students with Disabilities can provide referrals to diagnostic services. Here is the contact information for Services for Students with Disabilities: location: G-664 Haven Hall; phone: 734-763-3000; website: <http://ssd.umich.edu/>.

Mental Health Resources

As a student, especially during this time of a pandemic and heightened uncertainty about our health, learning, and living situations, you may experience challenges that negatively affect your learning, such as anxiety, depression, racial or ethnic discrimination, difficulty with eating or sleeping, grief/loss, interpersonal violence, and alcohol or drug problems. The University of Michigan offers several confidential services that you might find helpful for addressing such challenges and that are available remotely, including:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 734-764-8312

Psychiatric Emergency Services: 734-996-4747

UM resources for stress and mental health: <https://uhs.umich.edu/stressresources>

Well-being for UM students: <https://wellbeing.studentlife.umich.edu/>.

Student Sexual Misconduct

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct such as harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you are dealing with sexual misconduct, you can speak to someone confidentially by calling the 24-hour crisis line at the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC): 734- 936-3333. For non-emergencies, you can contact SAPAC at sapac.umich.edu. If you want to report an alleged violation, you can contact the Office for Institutional Equity (OIE) at institutional.equity@umich.edu. The OIE works to create a campus environment that is inclusive, respectful, and free from discrimination and harassment. Your report to OIE will not be confidential. Please note: As an instructor, I am responsible for helping to create a safe learning environment at UM, and I may be required to report information about sexual misconduct or a crime that may have occurred at UM.

Sweetland Center for Writing

The Sweetland Center for Writing is a wonderful, free resource for UM students! If you would like additional feedback or assistance as you are planning, drafting, or revising your writing assignments, you can schedule a virtual appointment with Sweetland (in-person appointments in North Quad 1310, G219 Angell Hall, the Shapiro Library, Alice Lloyd Hall, and the Duderstadt Center have been temporarily suspended). Sweetland offers three ways for undergraduates to get online writing assistance: 1. Writing Workshop (Online), 2. Peer Writing Center (Online), 3. Peer Writing Center (eTutoring). For more information on setting up an appointment, please visit: <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/writing-support>. Sweetland faculty members and peer writing consultants will not edit or proofread your work, but they can help

you to understand assignments, generate ideas, develop and organize arguments, use evidence and sources, and clarify your writing. I highly recommend this resource!

Changelog

January 19, 2023

Subtracted five points from mid-term and final. Created a new category for Discussion points and moved the subtracted 10 total points to that category to maintain 100-point total. The goal of this change is to reward students for engagement with discussion section and to lower the stakes of the mid-term and final.