

ENGL 4750-090 & ENGL 5050-092

English Honors Seminar Video Games & Culture

Fall 2016

Dr. Aaron A. Toscano Office: Fretwell 280F Office hours: Tues/Thurs 3 pm - 5 pm (and by appt)	Classroom: Fretwell 302 Time: Thursdays (R) 5:30 pm - 8:15 pm http://clas-pages.uncc.edu/aaron-toscano/
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Course Description

Video games, like all entertainment, fulfill a demand for fun, leisure, and escape. These entertaining texts reflect Americans' collective interests and prevailing ideologies. By reading the recurring themes these virtual environments recreate, we learn what society values. Students will delve deeply into video games using several theories of interpretation to understand the significance of video games. Through readings, discussions, and assignments, including a multimodal assignment, we will address the history and controversies surrounding video games. This class is intended for those with no experience playing video games to those with lots of experience.

Course Objectives and Biases

This course uses a critical theory approach to analyze video games, which are cultural products. Although there are other ways to interpret video games (game play and design to name two others), we will privilege a cultural studies approach and ask, "what do video games tell us about the culture from which they come (or the culture in which they're played)?" I also have a bias that drives my pedagogy, and I want to make this absolutely clear: **I believe that education for the sake of education is good in and of itself.** I don't make any claim that you will learn anything practical that you may directly apply to a 9-to-5 job, and I hope we engage only in abstract theoretical endeavors. Another huge bias I have is that a university education is not about reinforcing student beliefs; instead, students should consider how their own biased perspectives/experiences have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a new (preferably broader) intellectual appreciation of texts and technologies. As a rhetorician, I have a bias that your discussions will be sound, well-thought out, and resemble a commitment to logical reasoning. In this course, students should push themselves to engage in critical thinking by developing their analytic faculties as well as field-specific vocabularies for talking about video games. Therefore, ALL students will have to articulate an understanding of the material that reflects the rhetorical sophistication and level of commitment to pursuing knowledge expected in an Honors and Graduate-level course.

Expectations

I expect students to be prepared to participate in class discussions; therefore, students should finish all readings before the class meets. Participation means you must thoughtfully engage in class discussions. Merely showing up will not get you participation credit—you must speak. Asking questions is participation. Asking questions is an ancient strategy students have used for millennia. Asking questions shows that you've attempted to think through the reading. There is no magic number of times to participate and not all contributions are equal—some contributions are more thoughtful than others—

but you should strive to be an active participant whenever possible. If you're not in class for discussions (whether they be small group discussions or class-wide ones), you can't receive credit, so your participation grade will be affected. I will note your participation (or lack thereof) daily. I emphasize participation as a way to assess your understanding of the course materials in conjunction with online posts and your writing. This class doesn't simply measure what you "read" and can regurgitate; instead, I try to evaluate how you negotiate the course material through discussions. Students can't show they're thinking critically if they don't participate in class discussions. Honors students and graduate students MUST show they are astute critical thinkers.

Text and Materials

Required	<p>Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith, & Susana Pajares Tosca. <i>Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction</i>. 3rd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2016. {9781138849822}</p> <p>Kowert, Rachel & Thorsten Quandt. <i>The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games</i>. New York: Routledge, 2016. {9781138831636}</p> <p>Sim, Stuart & Borin Van Loon. <i>Introducing Critical Theory: A Graphic Guide</i>. London: Icon, 2005. {9781848310599}</p> <p>Sardar, Ziauddin & Borin Van Loon. <i>Introducing Cultural Studies: A Graphic Guide</i>. London: Icon, 2010. {9781848311817}</p> <p>Willingness To Learn</p>
Recommended	<p>Having seen movies, TV shows, Commercials, Youtube Videos, etc.</p> <p>Having used (at least once) a Joystick, Controller, Keyboard, Mouse, Mobile device, etc. to manipulate an Avatar</p>

Work Requirements

The ability to read college-level texts critically is a major requirement. In addition to the textbooks above, you might have readings on Canvas if I feel you need more background in a particular area. I expect you to do research for your assignments, so that—in addition to the textbooks—might be enough. You won't have to print out the readings and bring them to class, but I still expect you to be able to discuss them. In addition to participation, students will complete two written essays, a multimodal essay/project, online posts/responses, and a presentation.

The final presentations will be during the regularly scheduled final exam time: **Thursday, December 15, 2016 5:30-8:00 pm**. Please note that the Exam time is 30 minutes longer than a regular class meeting.

Grading Policy

Your final grade is supposed to reflect your entire work for the semester and will be based on the percentages below:

Grading Scale for Graded Assignments and Final Grade:				
A= 90 - 100	B= 80 - 89	C= 70 - 79	D= 60 - 69	F=Below 60

Definition of A, B, C, D, and F Grades

Remember, your final grade is a combination of the five areas above in the assignment percentage table. An 'A' means your work was excellent—not mediocre, average, or just good. A 'B' means your work was good—not quite excellent but definitely above average and thoughtful. As Honors and Graduate students, those are the only two grades that you should expect to get. However...

A 'C' means your work was barely adequate enough to satisfy the assignment—showing a lack of effort or thought for the assignment guidelines. A 'D' or 'F' usually means assignments were late, missing, or incomplete—often this work does not demonstrate appropriate honors- or graduate-level coursework.

Assignments/Grade Distribution

Assignment	Pts.
Theoretical Lens Essay	100
Video Game Essay	200
Multimodal Project	200
Participation	200
Canvas Prompts	200
Final Presentation	100
Total	1000

The Toward a Theoretical Lens Essay, Video Game Essay, Multimodal Project, and Final Presentation must all cite the course readings. That doesn't mean you need to cite every reading, but it does mean you need to show that you're reflecting on the reading in your work. Canvas Prompts must have at least one citation from that week's reading. All of the above must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course.

Late Work

This is an Honors and Graduate class. There's absolutely no reason an assignment should be late. However, I have to have a policy. An assignment is due at the beginning of the class for which it was assigned. All late work will reduce the assignment by 50% for each class period it is late. Therefore, an assignment worth 100 points that is one class meeting late will not be able to have a grade higher than 50. If you will not or cannot be in class on the day an assignment is due, you should make arrangements to get the assignment to me via another student or put it in my mailbox. Do not e-mail me an attachment (for final assignments or drafts you'd like me to review). I will not accept assignments attached to e-mails.

Attendance

This is an Honors and Graduate class. There are probably one or two reasons you'd have to miss class. Missing class means you don't take your education seriously. I know you'll all attend every class, but I

have to have a policy. I will take attendance every day. Your grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each day missed beyond 2 absences. After 4 absences, you will receive a failing grade for the course.

Academic Integrity

All UNC Charlotte students have the responsibility to be familiar with and to observe the requirements of The UNC Charlotte Code of Student Academic Integrity. This Code forbids cheating, fabrication, or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, abuse of academic materials (such as Library books on reserve), and complicity in academic dishonesty (helping others to violate the Code). Any further specific requirements or permission regarding academic integrity in this course will be stated by the instructor, and are also binding on the students in this course. Students who violate the Code can be punished to the extent of being permanently expelled from UNC Charlotte and having this fact recorded on their official transcripts. The normal penalty is zero credit on the work involving dishonesty and further substantial reduction of the course grade. In almost all cases, the course grade is reduced to 'F.' If you do not have a copy of the Code, you can view it on UNC Charlotte's Academic Integrity Web site at <http://integrity.uncc.edu/>. Standards of academic integrity will be enforced in this course. Students are expected to report cases of academic dishonesty they become aware of to the course instructor who is responsible for dealing with them.

If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source, you will receive an 'F' in this course.

In addition to the above identification of Academic Dishonesty, students should be aware of technology-mediated concerns related to Academic Integrity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "integrity" as "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety." A second definition states that integrity means "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness." Therefore, anything that draws students' attention away from course activities and goals is a violation of academic integrity because it corrupts the soundness and condition of learning. For instance, engaging in critical thinking/awareness is a sound, perfect state activity for this course; on the other hand, devoting attention to facebook, texting, non-class-related Web surfing, e-mailing, etc. violates or corrupts the learning goals of this course. Although we may point to the internet in general and social media sites specifically in our discussions of 21st-Century communication, engrossing oneself in them during class to "catch up with friends" divides your attention and may be distracting to members of this class. This violation is as serious as plagiarism and will result in an 'F' in participation the first time and an 'F' in this course for a subsequent violation. This syllabus section is your warning.

You may also receive an 'F' in the course for other academic integrity violations specified on the UNC Charlotte Integrity website. Do not expect another warning—this is it. Please see me if you need further clarification regarding cheating, fabrication or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, complicity in academic dishonesty, or other violations of academic integrity.

Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with the Disabilities Resource Center (<http://ds.uncc.edu/>) to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or

accommodations. Please inform me about circumstances requiring any instructional modifications you may need in order to complete the course requirements successfully. I don't need specifics on a condition, but I will need to know what specific accommodations you will need.

A Note to Students from UNC Charlotte's English Department, Statement on Diversity (April 2009)

The English Department strives to create an academic climate that respects people of varied cultural backgrounds and life experiences. As a community of scholars and teachers who study language, literature, and writing, we are committed to nurturing intellectual and aesthetic diversity. In all our activities, we invite participation by diverse groups, including, but not limited to, those who define themselves in the following terms: race and ethnicity; gender; political orientation; sexual orientation; special health needs; age; religion; country of origin; and socio-economic status. Finally, by fostering multiple perspectives in our coursework, we can help our students prepare to participate in our increasingly diverse society, as well as in the global community. The Department of English is committed to the centrality of writing in our curriculum.

Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to his or her own tastes and convictions (but don't mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think design elements have single, universal, or straight-forward meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, etc. influence how we perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

Building "Issues" and Inclement Weather

Some buildings can have HVAC problems. Occasionally, the powers that be close buildings and classes are canceled because it is too brutally hot to remain inside. If a building related "issue" cancels class, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and Canvas posts. The library has lots of space and many computers. We'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus when we return to class. This also goes for inclement weather that closes school—we'll pick up where we left off when we return, so keep up with the syllabus

Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule on the last two pages has important dates marked. Students are responsible for not only knowing course deadlines but also knowing UNC Charlotte deadlines (drop/add, billing,

vacation, etc.). Please visit the following link for the registrar's calendar:
<http://registrar.uncc.edu/calendar>.

Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, or to make our lives easier.

Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(Have readings and assignments done before class.)

August 25	Introduction to the course Asimov, Isaac. "A Cult of Ignorance." <i>Newsweek</i> . 21 Jan 1980.
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*August 29th—Big day for the semester:

- Last day to add, drop with no grade * 11:59 PM
If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course
- Last day to submit a grade replacement request * 11:59 PM

September 1	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Introduction, Ch. 1, & 2 <i>The Video Game Debate</i> Ch. 1: "A Brief History of Video Games"
September 8	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 3 <i>Critical Theory</i> pp. 1-55
September 15* **Workshop**	Toward a Theoretical Lens Essay Workshop <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 4 "History" <i>Critical Theory</i> pp. 56-111

*September 19th— Deadline for ALL students to apply for December 2016 graduation

September 22 **DUE**	Toward a Theoretical Lens Essay DUE <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 5 <i>Critical Theory</i> pp. 112-165
September 29	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 6
October 6	NO CLASS—Check Canvas for Activity

Midterm Grades Due by Noon on Friday, 10/07

October 10th & 11th: No Class—Fall Break

October 13	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 7 <i>Cultural Studies</i> pp. 1-55
October 20*	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 8 <i>Cultural Studies</i> pp. 56-111

*October 25th: Last day to withdraw from courses with a "W" grade

Please review the new Withdrawal Policy before considering withdrawing from any course: <http://provost.uncc.edu/policies/withdrawals>

October 27 **Workshop**	Video Game Essay Workshop <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 9 <i>Cultural Studies</i> pp. 112-165
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November 3 **DUE**	Video Game Essay Due <i>The Video Game Debate</i> Ch. 2 & 3
November 10	<i>The Video Game Debate</i> Ch. 4 & 5
November 17	<i>The Video Game Debate</i> Ch. 6 & 7

November 23rd – 27th: Thanksgiving Break

December 1 **Due**	Last Day of Class —Final Presentation Workshop Multimodal Project Due
December 15 5:30-8:00pm	FINAL Presentations Let me know ASAP of any conflicts you may have with our Final Exam time.

Commencement December 17th (congratulations)