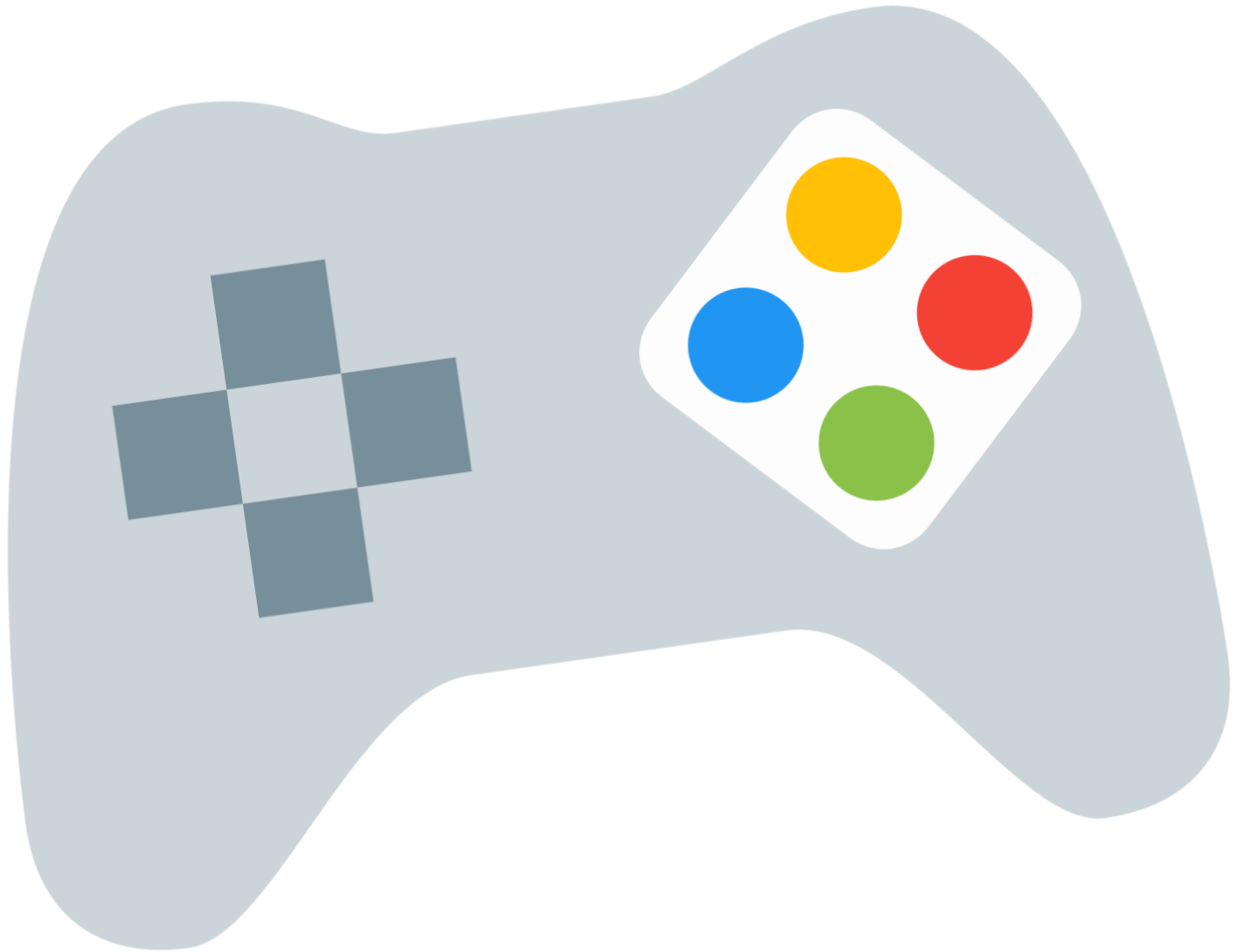# PSC 480: Politics & Video Games

Instructor: Dr. Jess Morrissette
Office Hours: M 9-12, Th 2-4, or by appointment
Office Location: Smith Hall 739
Email: morrissette@marshall.edu

Semester: Spring 2019
Class Location: Smith Hall 435
Class Time: Thursdays, 4:00-6:20
Phone: (304) 696-2760

Course Description: Tutorial Level

An exploration of the power dynamics and politics at play in video games, the video game industry, and gaming culture (3 credit hours, Digital Humanities credit).

Student Learning Objectives: Achievement Unlocked

Student Learning Outcome	How we will practice this outcome…	How we will assess this outcome…
Critically appraise the power dynamics and politics at play in video games, the video game industry, and gaming culture.	Lectures, discussions, class activities	Game reflections, essay exam, term paper
Construct original arguments about the political themes embedded in video games, demonstrating multidisciplinary techniques and methods.	Lectures, discussions, class activities	Game reflections, essay exam, term paper
Synthesize the current scholarly discourse in the discipline of game studies.	Lectures, discussions, class activities	Essay exam, term paper
Optional: Design and create an original "political" game.	*Individual gaming experiences*	*"Create Your Own Game" final project*

Required Materials: Inventory

The following books are required for this course:

- Condis, Megan. *Gaming Masculinity: Trolls, Fake Geeks, and the Gendered Battle for Online Culture* (University of Iowa Press, 2018).

- Malkowski, Jennifer and TreaAndrea M. Russworm, eds. *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games* (Indiana University Press, 2017).

- Payne, Matthew Thomas. *Playing War: Military Video Games after 9/11* (New York University Press, 2016).

We will also play the following video games:

- *Civilization* (multiplatform, 1991-present) **OR** *SimCity* (multiplatform, 1989-present)

- *Papers, Please* (multiplatform, 2013)

It is not necessary for you to *complete* these games, but please allow yourself enough play time to fully appreciate the mechanics and relevant themes.

Grading Policy: New High Score

Your grade is calculated based on your performance on the following assignments. You must complete all assignments to pass the course.

10%	Biographical Essay	A =	90-100%
15%	Game Reflection 1	B =	80-89%
15%	Game Reflection 2	C =	70-79%
30%	Exam	D =	60-69%
25%	Final Project	F ≤	59%
5%	Participation		

Attendance & Participation: Gather Your Party

Attendance is required in this class, and students are expected to have read and be ready to discuss all assigned readings prior to class. Students will be graded based on their class participation—engaging in discussion of the readings, asking questions, and so forth. Once again, attendance is clearly important; if you aren't in class, you can't participate. If you feel that you are having trouble getting your voice heard in our discussions, please contact me as soon as possible and we will work together to get you more involved.

The participation grade will be determined as follows: 5 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and make valuable contributions to class discussion on a regular basis; 4 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently and contribute to discussions occasionally; 3 points will be awarded to students who attend class consistently, but seldom participate in class discussions. Attendance grades of 2, 1, and 0 points are reserved for those students who fail to attend class regularly and therefore cannot participate meaningfully in class discussions.

Classroom Conduct: Play Nice, Play Fair

Please turn off your cell phone prior to the start of class.

Classroom discussions will be conducted in an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect. Differences of opinion and the challenging of viewpoints—including those of the instructor—are part of the learning experience, but they should occur in a manner that opens up dialogue without being disrespectful, hostile, or threatening toward others.

Unwelcome conduct directed toward another person based upon that person's actual or perceived race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, political affiliation, disability, age, or veteran status will not be permitted. Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in dismissal from class.

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you go by a different name than what is listed on the class roster, please let me know and I will gladly refer to you by your preferred name and pronouns.

## Academic Honesty: No Hacks Required

Students should adhere to the University's policies concerning academic honesty (please see pages 73-75 of the 2018/2019 undergraduate catalog). Cheating or plagiarism on any exam, quiz, or assignment will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent under University policies. **The penalty for cheating or plagiarism is a failing grade for the course.**

Cheating is defined by the University as "[a]ny action which if known to the instructor in the course of study would be prohibited" (Undergraduate Catalog, p. 73). This includes, but is not limited to, the use of any unauthorized materials or assistance during an academic exercise.

The University defines plagiarism as "[s]ubmitting as one's own work or creation any material or an idea wholly or in part created by another" (Undergraduate Catalog, p. 74). It is "the student's responsibility to clearly distinguish his/her own work from that created by others. This includes the proper use of quotation marks, paraphrase and the citation of the original source. Students are responsible for both intentional and unintentional acts of plagiarism" (p. 74).

Late Policy: Insert Coin to Continue

Late essays will be assessed a 10% penalty per day after the deadline (including weekends), with a maximum penalty of 50%. Please keep in mind that you must complete all assignments in order to receive a passing grade in the course, regardless of the point values of those assignments. The final day to submit missing assignments for the semester is Friday, May 3.
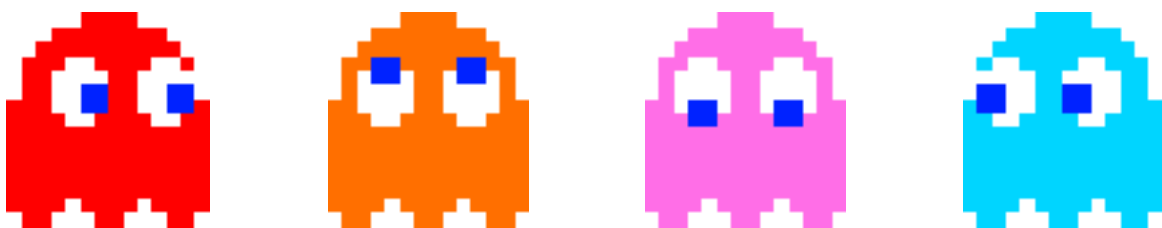
Other Policies: Bonus Stage

Important announcements, readings, and assignments may be sent to your "@marshall.edu" email address during the semester, so be sure to check it regularly. If you prefer to use a different e-mail service, please contact Computing Services for assistance with forwarding your Marshall e-mail to your preferred address.

By enrolling in this course, you agree to the University Policies listed below. The full text of each policy is available at http://www.marshall.edu/academic-affairs/policies/.

- Academic Dishonesty, Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates, Computing Services Acceptable Use, Inclement Weather, Dead Week, Students with Disabilities, Academic Forgiveness, Academic Probation and Suspension, Academic Rights & Responsibilities of Students, Affirmative Action, Sexual Harassment.

Assignments: Quest Log

- **Biographical Essay:** Write a biographical essay describing your personal experience with video games (approximately three pages long). Please follow these guidelines from Mäyrä (2012):

  > *Write a text where you describe your personal relation to games and playing. It might be impossible to fit all the key moments, highlights and phases into a short account, but try to focus on creating an accessible summary, where you reflect on the kind of gamer you represent—or, alternatively, explain why games have not played such a major role in your life personally. Have you noticed that age correlates with interest in certain kinds of games? Have you been similar to, or different from other people you know in terms of your game playing? Do you have some particular field of expertise or certain favorites among games?*

- **Game Reflections:** Play an assigned video game and write a brief essay (approximately three pages long) analyzing the political themes in the game. How does the game simulate politics, incorporate political values, or reflect relationships of power and authority? What aspects of "real world" politics are omitted from the game, and why?

  For the first gaming reflection, students can choose to play a game from either the *SimCity* or *Civilization* series. Both franchises span multiple decades and platforms, including mobile. Any iteration will work for the assignment.

  For the second gaming reflection, students will play *Papers, Please*. It is available for purchase on multiple platforms, including mobile.

If you don't have a device capable of playing these assigned games (or are otherwise unable to obtain them), please let me know ASAP, and we'll work out a solution.

- **Exam:** Students will complete a take-home essay exam. This exam will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on course readings, as well as your own gaming experiences. I will distribute questions and provide additional details on the exam in advance of the due date.

- **Final Project:** Students have two options for their final projects.

   Final Paper: Students will write an original research paper (approximately <u>ten pages long</u>) exploring some aspect of politics and video games. This might include an in-depth analysis a single game or game franchise, tracing a common political theme across multiple games, analyzing some aspect of the video game industry or gaming culture, or any number of other topics. These papers should cite <u>at least six scholarly sources</u>. Also, please note that the primary goal of this assignment is engaging in <u>original analysis</u>—not simply providing a summary of your topic.

   Create Your Own Game: Alternatively, students can choose to create their own "political" games. If you choose this option, you can work in <u>groups of up to five students</u>. Feel free to work in any genre, but please make sure your game is playable on Windows. If you're interested in pursuing this option and don't have much (or any) experience with coding, I recommend exploring Twine (at <u>twinery.org</u>), "an open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories." In addition to your game, each team should submit a single <u>one-page essay</u> explaining why their game is political. I will grade each team based on originality, creativity, and how effectively their game depicts its political content.

Writing Protips

- Submit all assignments via MUOnline.

- Cite your sources! You can choose any widely used citation style (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago), but stay consistent. Also, be sure to make it clear where you found any "outside" information in your essay. This includes not only citing direct quotations, **but also any paraphrased material or statistics**. As a rule of thumb, any information those you decide to include in the paper and didn't know before you began working on the project merits a citation. Also, include a "works cited" page at the end of your essays and exams. Failure to properly cite your sources constitutes PLAGIARISM.

- Be judicious in choosing your online sources, and **do not cite Wikipedia or other online encyclopedias**.

- Write your papers in 12-point Times/Times New Roman, double-spaced with 1" margins and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner. Title pages and works cited pages do not count toward the suggested page length.

Course Schedule: Walkthrough

Week of January 14: Welcome to Politics and Video Games!
- Mäyrä, "Introduction: What Is Game Studies?"

Week of January 21: Making Sense of Game Studies
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., "What Is a Game?"
- Frasca, "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology"
- Mäyrä, "Getting into the Game: Doing Multidisciplinary Game Studies"
- Mäyrä, "Preparing for a Game Studies Project"
- Phillips, "Game Studies for Great Justice"

Biographical Essay
Due January 24

Week of January 28: A Brief History of Video Games/Are Video Games Political?
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., "History"
- Winner, "Do Artifacts Have Politics?"
- Flanagan and Nissenbaum, "Groundwork for Values in Games"
- Fest, "Mobile Games, *SimCity BuildIt*, and Neoliberalism"
- Taylor, "Ubisoft Massive COO: 'We Don't Want to Take a Stance in Current Politics'"
- Stuart, "Ubisoft Games Are Political, Says CEO – Just Not the Way You Think"
- Frank, "*Overwatch*'s Gamer Girl Hero Inspires a Feminist Movement"

Week of February 4: Simulating History/The Retrofuturistism of *Fallout*
- Peterson, et al., "The Same River Twice: Exploring Historical Representation and the Value of Simulation in the *Total War*, *Civilization*, and *Patrician* Franchises"
- Mir and Owens, "Modeling Indigenous Peoples: Unpacking Ideology in *Sid Meier's Colonization*"
- Schulzke, "Refighting the Cold War: Video Games and Speculative History"
- November, "*Fallout* and Yesterday's Impossible Tomorrow"
- Milner, "Beyond the Virtual Realm: *Fallout* Fans and the Troublesome Issue of Ownership in Videogame Fandom"
- Charleston Gazette-Mail, "*Fallout*: WV Victim of Yet Another Outside Industry"

Game Reflection 1
Due February 7

Week of February 11: War Games
- Payne, *Playing War* (Intro and Chapters 1-3)
- Nieborg, "Training Recruits and Conditioning Youth: Soft Power of Military Games"

- Murray, "The Rubble and the Ruin: Race, Gender, and Sites of Inglorious Conflict in *Spec Ops: The Line*" (in *Gaming Representation*)

Week of February 18: War Games (continued)
- Payne, *Playing War* (Chapters 4-6 and Conclusion)
- Blackburn, "Army Men: Military Masculinity in *Call of Duty*"
- Huntemann, "Playing with Fear: Catharsis and Resistance in Military-Themed Video Games"

Week of February 25: Gender and Sexuality in Video Games
- Malkowski and Russworm, "Introduction: Identity, Representation and Video Game Studies beyond the Politics of the Image" (in *Gaming Representation*)
- Corneliussen, "*World of Warcraft* as a Playground for Feminism"
- Mussett, "Berserker in a Skirt: Sex and Gender in *Dungeons & Dragons*"
- Chess, "Introduction: Contextualizing Player Two"
- Soderman, "No Time to Dream: Killing Time, Casual Games, and Gender" (in *Gaming Representation*)

Game Reflection 2
Due February 28

Week of March 4: Gender and Sexuality in Video Games
- Lauteria, "Assuring Quality: Early 1990s Nintendo Censorship and the Regulation of Queer Sexuality and Gender"
- Chang, "A Game Chooses, a Player Obeys: *BioShock*, Posthumanism, and the Limits of Queerness" (in *Gaming Representation*)
- Consalvo, "It's a Queer World After All: Studying *The Sims* and Sexuality"
- Ruberg, "Playing to Lose: The Queer Art of Failing at Video Games" (in *Gaming Representation*)
- Trépanier-Jobin, "Video Game Parodies: Appropriating Video Games to Criticize Gender Norms" (in *Gaming Representation*)

Week of March 11: Race and Nationality in Video Games
- Leonard, "Virtual Gangstas, Coming to a Suburban House Near You: Demonization, Commodification, and Policing Blackness"
- Russworm: "Dystopian Blackness and the Limits of Racial Empathy in *The Walking Dead* and *The Last of Us*" (in *Gaming Representation*)
- Dietrich, "Worlds of Whiteness: Race and Character Creation in Online Games"
- Šisler, "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games"
- Langer, "The Familiar and the Foreign: Playing (Post)Colonialism in *World of Warcraft*"

Week of March 18: Virtual Economies
- DeHaven and Hendrickson, "The Vox Populi Group, Marx, and Equal Rights for All"
- Rettberg, "Corporate Ideologies in *World of Warcraft*"

- Bowman, "*Fallout 4* and the End of History"
- Hart, "Using Casual Sex as Currency within Video Games"

Week of March 25: Spring Break
- Play some video games!

Week of April 1: Violence and Video Games
- Ellison and Keogh, "The Joy of Virtual Violence"
- Carnagey and Anderson, "Violent Video Game Exposure and Aggression: A Literature Review"
- Goldstein, "Immortal Kombat: War Toys and Violent Video Games"
- Coulson and Ferguson, "The Influence of Digital Games on Aggression and Violent Crime"
- Ferguson, "Blazing Angels or Resident Evil? Can Violent Video Games Be a Force for Good?"

Week of April 8: Political Economy of the Video Game Industry
- Schreier, "The Horrible World of Video Game Crunch"
- Dibble, "The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer"
- Allison, "Portable Monsters & Commodity Cuteness: *Pokémon* as Japan's New Global Power"
- Vysotsky and Allaway, "The Sobering Reality of Sexism in the Video Game Industry"

Week of April 15: Class cancelled for PCA/ACA Conference

Take-Home Exam
Due April 19

Week of April 22: Gaming Culture
- Shaw, "What is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies"
- Condis, *Gaming Masculinity* (Introduction and Chapters 1-2)
- Salter and Blodgett, "Come Get Some: Damsels in Distress and the Male Default Avatar in Video Games"
- Gironi, "Gaming's Hidden Toxicity: What is Salt-Mining?"

Week of April 29: Gaming Culture
- Condis, *Gaming Masculinity* (Introduction and Chapters 3-4 and Epilogue)
- DeWinter and Kocurek, "Aw Fuck, I Got a Bitch on My Team!": Women and the Exclusionary Cultures of the Computer Game Complex" (in *Gaming Representation*)
- Huntemann, "Attention Whores and Ugly Nerds: Gender and Cosplay at the Game Con" (in *Gaming Representation*)

Final Project
Due May 3