

POLITICS AND **VIDEO GAMES**

Political Science 478, Fall 2021 (Thursdays, 4:00-6:20)

Power Up!

Unlock the Secrets of Video Games

Syllabus!

It Tells You What to Do When

Policies and Grading Scales!

*Valuable
hints and
tips inside!*



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PSC 478: Politics and Video Games

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Semester: Fall 2021
Class Location: Smith Hall 433
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
<i>Optional: Design and create an original "political" game.</i>	<i>Individual gaming experiences</i>	<i>"Create Your Own Game" final project</i>

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).
- Payne, Matthew Thomas. *Playing War: Military Video Games after 9/11* (New York University Press, 2016).
- Payne, Matthew Thomas and Nina Huntemann, eds. *How to Play Video Games* (NYU Press, 2019).

We will also play these 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 the online 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.” 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.” 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.”

Late Policy: Insert Coin to Continue

Late assignments will receive a 10% penalty. 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, December 3.** After that date, you will receive a zero on any work that hasn’t been submitted.

COVID-19 Information: Extra Life

Marshall's COVID-19 protocols are online at www.marshall.edu/coronavirus. Policies may change over time as we respond to changing conditions. The website will always contain the most recent information.

Key policies at the start of the Fall 2021 semester include the following:

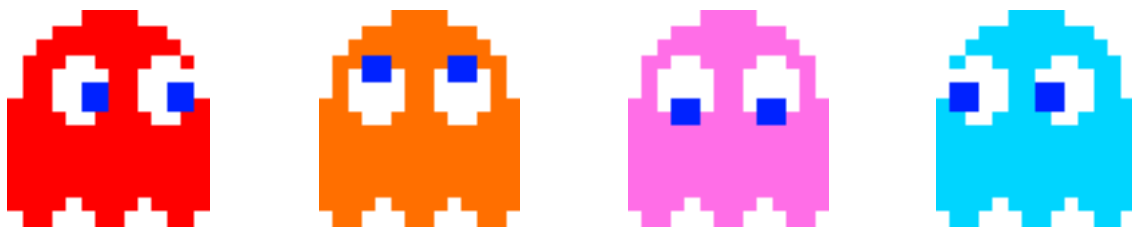
- Masks are required for everyone in all public indoor spaces on university property, regardless of one’s vaccination status. These spaces include classrooms, labs, office suites, hallways, lobbies, stairwells, etc. Instructors may choose to teach either while wearing a mask or face shield or while standing behind the plexiglass barrier in the classroom.
- To remain in in-person classes, students must sign the Marshall Return to Campus Student Agreement outlining public health expectations and University COVID-19 policies: bit.ly/2VP3Naa
- To remain in in-person classes for the Fall 2021 semester, students must submit their current vaccination status in the Student Vaccination Registry: mubert.marshall.edu/vaccinerecord.php. The registry offers several responses, including an option to not disclose vaccination status.
- Students will disinfect their personal workspaces and virtual learning hubs with disinfectant wipes provided nearby.
- Students who are unable to follow University requirements due to a disability should seek reasonable accommodations from the Office of Disability Services (ODS) during the first week of class.

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 game and write a brief essay (three pages long) analyzing its political themes. 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 ten pages long) 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 game industry or gaming culture, or any number of other topics. These papers should cite at least six scholarly sources. Also, please note that the primary goal of this assignment is engaging in original analysis—not simply providing a summary of your topic.

Create Your Own Game: Alternatively, students can create their own “political” games. If you choose this option, you can work in groups of up to five students. Feel free to work in any genre, but please make sure your game is playable on Windows. If you’re interested in this option and don’t have much (or any) experience with coding, I recommend Twine (at twinery.org), “an open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories.” In addition to your game, each team should submit a single one-page essay 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 Hints: Strategy Guide

- 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.

Protips for success!

1. Complete the readings prior to class. You'll understand the material better and be ready to participate in discussions.

2. Keep notes on the readings. It's easy to get the readings mixed up once you're in class. Take notes and bring them along with you to help keep everything straight.

3. Aren't familiar with a concept or game you stumble across in the readings? Look it up! This is where Wikipedia and Let's Play videos are your friends.

4. Participate in class discussions. It's five percent of your grade! Even asking a question counts.

5. Work on assignments ahead of time. I'm happy to provide feedback on rough drafts.

6. Proofread, proofread, proofread. Seriously, proofread.

7. Come see me. I'm always willing to offer help, brainstorm ideas, or provide feedback.



Course Schedule: Walkthrough

Week of August 23: Welcome to Politics and Video Games!

- Mäyrä, "Introduction: What Is Game Studies?"

Week of August 30: Making Sense of Game Studies

- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, et al., "What Is a Game?"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Introduction: Payne and Huntemann, "A Game Genie for Game Studies"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 1: Conway, "FIFA: Magic Circle"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 2: Nohr, "Tetris: Rules"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 3: Salter, "King's Quest: Narrative"
- Mäyrä, "Preparing for a Game Studies Project"

Biographical Essay Due Friday, September 3

Week of September 6: 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"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 18: Sicart, "Papers, Please: Ethics"
- Rose, "The Value of Art in *BioShock*: Ayn Rand, Emotion, and Choice"
- Castor, "Life After an El Presidente: *Tropico* Through a Post-Colonial, Post-Martial Law Lens"
- Parkin, "*The Division 2* and the Severing of Politics from Video Games"
- Morrissette, "Playing with Power"

Week of September 13: Simulating Yesterday and Tomorrow/The Retrofuturism of *Fallout*

- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 5: Krapp, "*Sid Meier's Civilization*: Realism"
- Peterson, et al., "Same River Twice: Exploring Historical Representation and the Value of Simulation"
- Mir and Owens, "Modeling Indigenous Peoples: Unpacking Ideology in *Sid Meier's Civilization*"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 9: Wolf, "*BioShock Infinite*: World-building"
- November, "*Fallout* and Yesterday's Impossible Tomorrow"
- Milner, "Beyond the Virtual Realm: *Fallout* Fans and the Troublesome Issue of Ownership"
- Morrissette, "Dark as a Dungeon: *Fallout 76* and the Coal Mining Industry"

Game Reflection 1 Due Friday, September 17

Week of September 20: War Games

- Payne, *Playing War* (Intro and Chapters 1-3)
- Nieborg, "Training Recruits and Conditioning Youth: Soft Power of Military Games"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 29: Mirrlees, "*Medal of Honor*: Militarism"
- Murray, "The Rubble and Ruin: Race, Gender, and Sites of Inglorious Conflict in *Spec Ops: The Line*"

Week of September 27: 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 October 4: Gender and Sexuality in Video Games

- Malkowski and Russworm, "Introduction: Identity, Representation and Video Game Studies"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 11: Chess, "Kim Kardashian: Hollywood: Feminism"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 12: Murray, "The Last of Us: Masculinity"
- Corneliussen, "World of Warcraft as a Playground for Feminism"
- Chess, "Introduction: Contextualizing Player Two"
- Stang, "Big Daddies and Their Little Sisters: Postfeminist Fatherhood in the *BioShock* Series"
- Morrissette, "Politics of Passionate Patti: Sex Positivity and the Problematic Past of Patriarchal Play"

Game Reflection 2 **Due Friday, October 8**

Week of October 11: Gender and Sexuality in Video Games

- Lauteria, "Assuring Quality: Nintendo Censorship and the Regulation of Queer Sexuality and Gender"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 13: Shaw, "Leisure Suit Larry: LGBTQ Representation"
- Deshane and Morton, "The Big Reveal: (Trans)Femininity in *Metroid*"
- Evans and Tarver, "Sex Workers and Video Games"
- Evans, "Queer(ing) Game Studies: Reviewing Research on Digital play and Non-Normativity"
- Ruberg, "Playing to Lose: The Queer Art of Failing at Video Games"

Week of October 18: Race and Nationality in Video Games

- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 15: Russworm, "NBA 2K16: Race"
- Leonard, "Virtual Gangstas, Coming to a Suburban House Near You"
- Dietrich, "Worlds of Whiteness: Race and Character Creation in Online Games"
- Gray, "'They're Just Too Urban': Black Gamers Streaming on Twitch"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 19: Mukherjee, "Age of Empires: Postcolonialism"
- Langer, "The Familiar and the Foreign: Playing (Post)Colonialism in *World of Warcraft*"
- Šisler, "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games"

Week of October 25: Class Cancelled

- Play some video games!

Week of November 1: Virtual Economies and the Political Economy of the Video Game Industry

- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 20: Payne and Fleisch, "Borderlands: Capitalism"
- Rettberg, "Corporate Ideologies in *World of Warcraft*"
- Fest, "Mobile Games, *SimCity BuildIt*, and Neoliberalism"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 23: O'Donnell, "Game Dev Tycoon: Labor"
- Schreier, "The Horrible World of Video Game Crunch"
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 30: Nichols, "Pokémon Go: Globalization"
- Allison, "Portable Monsters & Commodity Cuteness: *Pokémon* as Japan's New Global Power"

Week of November 8: Violence and Video Games

- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 37: Kocurek, “*Night Trap: Moral Panic*”
- *How to Play Video Games*, Chapter 17: Phillips, “*Sniper Elite III: Death*”
- Goldstein, “Immortal Kombat: War Toys and Violent Video Games”
- Carnagey and Anderson, “Violent Video Game Exposure and Aggression: A Literature Review”
- Coulson and Ferguson, “The Influence of Digital Games on Aggression and Violent Crime”
- Madigan, “Why Do We Like Violent Games So Much? And Should We Be Worried That We Do?”
- Wilcox, “Procedural Realism: The Political Representation of Reality in Videogames”

<p style="text-align: center;">Take-Home Exam Friday, November 12</p>

Week of November 15: 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 Games”
- Gironi, “Gaming’s Hidden Toxicity: What is Salt-Mining?”

Week of November 22: Thanksgiving Break!

- Play some video games!

Week of November 29: Gaming Culture

- Condis, *Gaming Masculinity* (Introduction and Chapters 3-4 and Epilogue)
- Myers, “The Cost of Being a Woman Who Covers Video Games”
- DeWinter and Kocurek, “Aw Fuck, I Got a Bitch on My Team!”: Women and Exclusionary Cultures”
- Voorhees and Orlando, “Performing Neoliberal Masculinity: Reconfiguring Hegemonic Masculinity in Professional Gaming”
- Huntemann, “Attention Whores and Ugly Nerds: Gender and Cosplay at the Game Con”

<p style="text-align: center;">Final Project Due Thursday, December 9</p>
