**Game Studies and Design**

Spring 2025

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Office location: EL-B008D

Office hours: MWF 12:15-2:00pm; T 11:15am-1:00pm; R 3 hours by appointment

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Laptop w/ Windows or MacOS

Games and texts made available by the instructor.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Games are both one of the most ancient forms of culture, dating back far into antiquity, as well as being one of the most vibrant (and fraught) sectors of contemporary cultural production. From chess to kriegspiel to computer role-playing games, we can trace a line of descent linking the earliest ludic diversions to digital worlds that bring together thousands, connections between ‘the game of kings’ and the morass of free-to-play apps.

This course will speak on games in this broad, historical sense, while taking advantage of our contemporary glut; we will play both digital games and material games, using keyboards as well as pencil and paper. We will read seminal works from the academic discipline of game studies, and develop a critical mindset that allows us to ask deeper questions about what we do with games, and what games do to us.

Central to the course will be the track you, the student, will choose to pursue. After sharing readings and playings for the first half of the course, each student will opt for one of two tracks: game studies or game design. Game studies students will focus on playing games and pursuing research, with the object of creating an analytical project, drawing insight from your experience of a game or games. Game design students, who may form groups with one another, will be tasked with designing and completing a prototype game.

COURSE GOALS

* Develop critical thinking skills in relation to games and their rhetorics.
* Understand the history of games and a clearer sense of the new and the old.
* Encounter and engage with a variety of games, expanding experiences of play.
* Identify and analyze game mechanics both for their ludic and their meaning-making function.
* Design games that reflect this acquisition of knowledge and experience.
* Become conversant in the academic discourse of game studies.

**Topics by Week**

Week 1 Games and Narrative

Week 2 Games and Realism

Week 3 Games and Rhetoric

Week4 Choosing a track: studies or design

Weeks 5 & 6 Read, Play, Design (as per track)

Week 7 Project Development

Week 8 Project Completion & Presentation

\*\*\*\***Project due before finals week\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**ASSIGNMENTS/GRADING**

In-Class Participation - 20%

Reflections & Applications - 40%

Interpretive Project - 40%

Grading: A 95-100, A- 90-94, B+ starts at 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D\* 69 and below

**In-Class Participation (20%):** Your participation in each class session will be vital for the overall experience. Come to every class on time, prepared with your reading notes and the means to engage with our texts, and be ready to contribute to our discussion. You will be expected to play an active role in each session, sharing your ideas, building on those of other students, and asking questions that contribute to our discussion. Participation is mostly based on you verbally engaging in class discussion. Behaviors that damage your participation grade include lateness, disruptiveness, absences, not bringing your texts to class, and not regularly participating in class discussion or other class activities.

**Reflections and Applications (40%):** The groundwork for class discussion is laid through sharing reflections about the assigned texts, both games and readings. You will reflect on the assigned texts by presenting an interpretation and/or engaging in an application of the concepts we’re grappling with on a given day; you should seek to be clear and persuasive, using direct textual reference/visual aids when possible. Keeping pace with the playing and reading, completing the written assignments promptly and engaging actively with the texts will secure this part of your grade.

**Final Project (40%):** The latter half of the quarter will be dedicated to pursuing a final project in line with your chosen track. For **game studies** students, your task will be to **compose an** **analytical project**; this can be a written essay, a video analysis, a podcast or some other critical treatment of a game or games. For **game design**students, your take will be to **create a game** that incorporates, addresses or otherwise engages with a topic we’ve tackled in the course; this can be digital or physical, as long as there is a completed prototype by the end of the course. In addition, game design students may form **development teams**, combining forces with other students to make a game together. The grade will be shared with all group members.

All projects will be graded on a simple scale of A (100), B (85), C (70) with an adapted rubric, focusing on effort and sophistication evident in the product.

Where applicable, projects will need to use **MLA citation** to cite the literary works both in-text and in a Works Cited page. We will go over this in class, but if you have questions please ask me or visit the OWL Purdue website. **Most importantly, make sure the words and ideas in your paper are your own.**

**COURSE POLICIES**

ATTENDANCE: Regular and punctual class attendance is expected and required of all students. If you are not in class when it officially begins, you will be marked tardy. If you show up to class ten or more minutes late, you will be marked absent for the day. You will also be marked absent if I see you sleeping.

LATE WORK: Late assignments will not be accepted without an in-person discussion and a clear plan for timely submission. I will collect your reading assignments in class and major papers will be turned in electronically, unless otherwise stated; if I do not have your assignment when it is due, and we do not discuss a plan for, you risk receiving no credit for it. Please make every effort to make sure assignments are timely, and that you meet the deadlines as outlined in the syllabus. **If you must miss a class, plan ahead to get your work in before the deadline.** In the rare case of an excused absence (those deemed so by the school), you will need to contact me via email to make arrangements to get your missed work in.

TECHNOLOGY: Please render your cell phones silent before you enter class, put them out of sight, and refrain from using them in class. Keep other electronic devices, such as laptops and iPads, in your bag and off your desk. **Exceptions can be made upon request.**

# ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT

You are responsible for the integrity of your work and you are required to produce work that is academically honest. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. Submitting someone else’s paper, including papers you obtain online, as your own writing is fraud. Attempting to take credit for someone else’s words or ideas without properly citing them is plagiarism. Direct and indirect plagiarism, both of which we will discuss in class, are unacceptable and have serious academic consequences. If you are even remotely uncertain about whether or not any part of your work is academically honest, contact me and we can sort it out. Please refer to the student handbook for additional information, including information that is new this year.

**APPROPRIATE USE OF LLM/‘AI’ TECHNOLOGY**

**Official Humanities Division Statement:**

The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.

**Instructor Statement:**

Large language models (more colloquially known as AI chatbots) are powerful tools which are rapidly altering the landscape of humanities scholarship. As with many such devices, there are benefits and drawbacks. Take for example motorized transport: automobiles made remarkable things possible for transit and logistics. It has also fostered a sedentary lifestyle, with all the concomitant health problems (i.e. driving instead of walking causes your legs to wither, your heart to weaken, your lifespan to contract).

Similarly, while large language models can accelerate a number of tasks, **it risks replacing invaluable skills and leading to the atrophy of the very capacities this class is meant to exercise and refine**. Letting an LLM write for you will not only produce mediocre, intellectually vacuous work, it will also cause your own abilities to shrivel precisely when they should be developing. It is also a priori plagiaristic: **all the words a LLM uses are drawn from uncredited, uncompensated sources**. It is not a voice from nowhere; it is stolen language. I want you to use your own words and ideas, and credit the words and ideas of others when you use them.

For the purposes of this class, **LLM/AI chatbots can be legitimately used for research purposes**: you can ask them questions (though always double check, since they frequently ‘hallucinate’) to increase your awareness of a topic, with the understanding that proper sourcing and citation must follow. **They may not be used to produce prose that represents itself as your own**. If you have doubts about the appropriate use of this technology, simply get in touch with me and we can clarify.

**LITERATURE NOTE**

Important literature is often about the deepest and most difficult struggles of humans to live authentically in a complex world. Through the thoughts and experiences of literary characters, we can examine and evaluate our personal responses to life’s mysteries, complexities, disappointments, and joys. In addition, we begin to understand how a writer, in his or her own struggle to experience creatively, has responded to the social, political, and artistic environment of his/her times. The English Department at the Academy selects reading material that reflects these human struggles, has endured the test of time, and has earned a respected place in the universe of letters. The instructors will often include recently published poems, stories, and articles that reflect the diversity of contemporary cultures and experiences.

**If, because of the powerful nature of the reading experience, you are unable to read and study a specific text with reasonable analytic objectivity, please confer with your instructor.** Alternative texts are available.

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY**

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as expressed in our Beneficence Pledge and through university resources found at <http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/multiculturalcenter>. As such, it is important to ensure that your comments and behavior in class is respectful and inclusive. Discriminatory comments or behavior will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with Indiana Academy and Ball State University policy.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The [Office of Disability Services](https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/disability-services) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at **765-285-5293** or **dsd@bsu.edu.**