

Honors 240: The Games We Play

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Introduction

Games — real and metaphorical, formal and informal — are everywhere where humans are: Games are a metaphor for politics, romance, and much in between. There are children's games, war games, and the Olympic Games. In the world of fiction, there are games of thrones and hunger games. People watch and play football; others play it on their XBox and Playstation consoles. Some games seem to have a gender, while some gamers want to exclude one gender from their world. Language is a game. There's the game of life, and college an important part of it.

This Honors Core course introduces you to the social sciences through the concept of games. In the course we will study

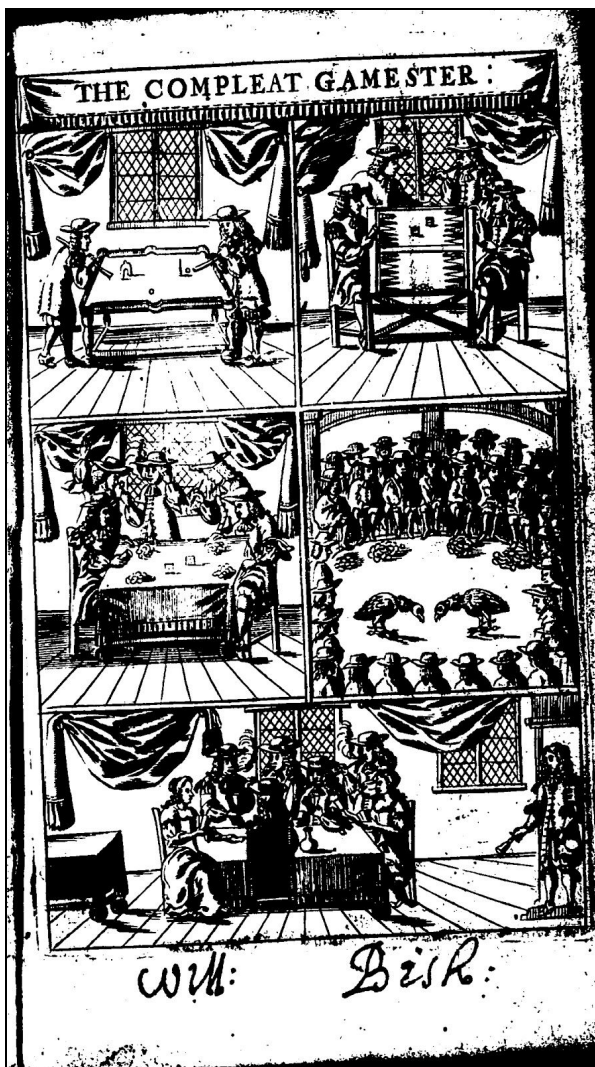
- the problems of social cooperation, conflict, and competition;
- human motivation as well as social action and roles;
- the institutions and rules that affect motivation, action, and roles, both formal institutions such as governments, universities, or sports leagues, and informal ones, such as gender roles, old boys' networks, or the unwritten rules in sports.

In this course, you will learn social science by *doing* social science. You will observe, interpret, and analyze behavior, texts, even your own life and experiences. The course does not

presuppose any prior training or inclination in any particular methods of inquiry, but you will be exposed to the various approaches.

The course also satisfies the First-Year Writing requirement. *If you are a sophomore, you will mainly do the same assignments as the first-year students, although there will be some variants.*

(Image left: Charles Cotton, *The compleat gamester, or, Instructions how to play at billiards, trucks, bowls, and chess* [1674])



This is a weird course!

The structure in this course is unusual. The purpose is to allow you to explore many different types of assignments *and* to focus more carefully on some. Many of the assignments will be new and challenging, and failure — or at least a disappointment — on first try is expected. But those failures will also be safe: you will always have an

opportunity to recover from them. We don't expect you to try everything, and even if a good grade is all you are after, you won't have to. But we hope you will forget grades for now, and simply explore new challenges, maybe even have fun.

Learning Objectives

This course is not about your acquiring more information; it is about you learning new concepts and skills. The information is not irrelevant, but it is in service of your being exposed to and learning what matters in social scientific inquiry. Because this is a writing class, many of the skills have to do with communication.

Below, you'll see there are three levels of objectives. Exposure is the most basic; practice represents your attempts to start playing with the tools and concepts you have been exposed to; and competence means you can *successfully* use the tools or concepts.

	Exposure	Practice	Competence
Social-scientific Research Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of research questions • Quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical methods • The elements of the research process 	Scaffolding the elements of the research process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying research questions and their significance • Identifying and distinguishing between methodological approaches • Practicing the logic of inquiry • Identifying types of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to formulate a meaningful research question and articulate its significance • Basic ability to use at least one social scientific method
College Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of genres and media of writing in and around the social sciences • Variety of rhetorical practices and reasons behind them 	Scaffolding the elements of the different writing processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing texts from one medium or genre to another ("remediation") • Identifying and practicing different genres and rhetorical choices • Articulating similar claims in different genres and media, including visual and electronic media • Reflecting on one's own communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to communicate successfully a social-scientific argument in at least two different genres or media • The ability to engage constructively and critically others' social-scientific work

		practices (“metacognition”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revising one’s own writing • Engaging with others’ writing (peer review) 	
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Two important observations:

1. We distinguish between the “social-scientific” and “writing” dimensions above, but that is just for clarity’s sake. In the messier reality, the two are inseparable, and you shouldn’t think of this course as having a writing dimension separate from its substance. For example, you shouldn’t think that lectures are about “content” and sections about “writing.”
2. Notice that the highest specified learning goal is **competence**, not **mastery**. The students in this courses are unusually bright and talented, but even for them, we don’t expect anyone to reach mastery. This is early days in your college career; this is just one of the early steps in your path to greater competence. (That’s why it won’t be a problem if you are a sophomore and have already taken one First-Year Writing Requirement course — you can’t ever have enough!)

Challenges (or Assignments)

Here, we describe the assignments in a general outline. We’ll call them challenges, not just to be cute, but because we want you to think of them as challenges you want to try. Detailed and specific prompts are available on Canvas and GradeCraft.

Novice Level

Everyone begins at the novice level, with zero points. Completing two assignments levels you up and unlocks the rest of the assignments for the term.

Remediation Challenge

“Remediation” is a creepy term, but it doesn’t mean what you probably think it does. It means you take a piece of work written in one medium or one genre and express the same idea in a different medium or genre. The “Hunger Games” films are a remediation of the *Hunger Games* books, for example.

For this assignment, you won’t do anything that big. **First-year students** remediate their LSA Honors application essay; **sophomores** select one short piece (max 1,000 words) of academic writing from their first year and remediate it.

This assignment can earn you up to 3,000 points.

Commencement Speech

Graduating seniors are invited to participate in a speech writing competition to be the UM Commencement student speaker. You are not a senior yet, but you will be, and you might as well start practicing. This assignment asks you to write a short speech (student speakers get four minutes) to reflect on how you and your fellow students used their college career to tackle some social or political problem facing the world. **You will complete this assignment in section during the second week of the semester.**

This assignment can earn you up to 2,000 points.

Apprentice Level

Things get complicated at the apprentice level, but your autonomy and freedom of choice increase significantly. At this level, you occupy different roles social scientists occupy: as an **Empiricist**, you engage in your own data collection through different kinds of empirical observation; as a **Quantoid**, you analyze and manipulate data; and as a **Theorist**, you explore conceptual and theoretical relationships. Your assignments come in various forms and each belong to one of these categories. These are the general rules of the game at this level:

- You level up (and receive a 10,000-point leveling bonus) when you have completed **at least one assignment each from the observation domain, data domain, and theory domain.**
- **Before Thanksgiving, you may do as many assignments as you want.** We don't think you should, and you definitely don't need to, even if you want a good grade. But the choice is yours. **After Thanksgiving, you may complete two more assignments from the apprentice-level assignments.**
- Some of the assignments at this level are scaffolded: **you will need to complete part one to unlock part two**, and so on. Each part is evaluated individually, and you can stop at any point.

Empiricist Challenges

Being able to make observations of social action is important in social-scientific inquiry. In this domain, you have **one major quest** you may engage in. It uses the following three-step process:

Major quest:

O1: Proposal and hypothesis (required to advance to O2): At this first stage, you write a brief proposal to undertake an observational study. Your proposal will include a hypothesis of what you expect to find. You have three different types of observation you may commit to:

- *Quantified Self*: Choose a "life logging" tool or technique to track some aspect of your life for at least for five continuous weeks. No TMI! But it could include learning something new.
- *Participant Observer*: Propose to spend at least four weeks observing some social group you are a member of. (Significant ethics considerations!)

- *Research Crowdsourcer*: You create project on [Zooniverse](#) to study some meaningful human activity. Because of the technical and logistical challenges, this project may be done in groups and be connected to a [Guild Project](#).

You may propose either kind, but you can only pursue one beyond the first stage. (3,000 points)

O2: Observation report (required to advance to O3): At this stage, you write a detailed report on the findings. (6,000 points)

O3: A Reflection: The final stage is a reflection of what you make of the experience and the findings. (6,000 points)

Minor quests:

- All academic research is governed by ethical rules regulating the use of human subjects. Institutional Review Boards (or IRBs) are in charge of this at universities. At the University of Michigan, any scholar — professor, grad student, or an undergrad — must receive a so-called PEERRS certification to be eligible to apply for an IRB approval. If you take the PEERRS certification online tutorial and test, and then submit the certificate of your passing, you will receive an extra 1,000 points.
- Attending publicly open academic talks and presentations and writing brief reports on them may also serve as minor quests. We will provide information on some such events, but you may propose them in advance. They earn you generally 500 points each.

Quantoid Challenges

In the social sciences, “data” comes in many different shapes and sizes. There is quantitative data — the number of voters in an election, for example — and qualitative — how the the voters might describe their reasons for voting in their own words. Sometimes there’s a lot of it (we call it “large- N ”) and sometimes very little. In the assignments in this domain, you have lots of different kinds of assignments in which you work with data.

Major quests:

D1a. Interpreting visual data. This assignment asks you to engage critically with some data visualizations, considering their strengths and weaknesses. (4,000 points, unlocks D3)

D1b. Analyzing quantitative data. This is a techy assignment. You will learn the basics of a powerful statistical software tool called R, and you will use it to analyze quantitative raw data. (6,000 points)

D2. Manipulating quantitative data. In this assignment, you may take the skills you learned in D1b further by analyzing and manipulating some new set of quantitative data. (6,000 points, unlocks D3)

D3. Visual presentation of data. This assignment asks you to create your own visual presentation of data. *(8,000 points)*

Minor quests:

- **Code collaboration and peer review:** You write a piece of code that you share with a fellow quantoid geek, who then comments on it and helps you improve it. (1,000 points)
- **Reference management:** You download the free [Zotero](#) reference management system and begin creating your own library for all the readings from this course and at least one other course this semester. (1,000 points)

NOTE: You can use some of the data you collect yourself in the Observation Domain for your assignments in this domain.

Theorist Challenges

“Theory” means many, many things in academia, even within the social sciences. We’ll cover some of them in the course. In this particular domain, you’ll again have different kinds of assignments, with different degrees of commitment. But no unlocks!

T1-5a. We will encounter several new concepts in the course, some of which we’ll spend a lot of time on, and some of which we’ll just mention. We will encounter texts and images that require interpretation distinct from analysis. You will have five opportunities to write short essays dealing with these themes. These assignments have specific prompts and fixed deadlines, which means once the deadline has passed, you cannot go back to write about an earlier prompt. These assignments come roughly two weeks apart, beginning early fall and ending around Thanksgiving. *(3,000 points each)*

Book Quest. The readings in this course are mainly very short, but if you want, you can select a book from a menu of options we provide and commit to reading over the semester. You’ll have several steps in the process, each with its different demands. The points accumulate from those different steps for a possible total of 15,000 points:

1. *Explain your choice.* You will write a very short explanation for why you chose the book. We will be particularly interested in intellectual reasons, and evidence showing you tried to make your choice informed (by, e.g., reading reviews) will help you. *(1,500 points)*
2. *First impressions.* When you are about quarter of the way into the book, you will write a short and informal report on how you are finding the book so far. *(1,000)*
3. *Revisiting first impressions.* When you have finished the book, you’ll write a longer reflection of your personal response to the book and how it is different from the first impressions (if it is). *(3,500)*
4. *A review essay, first draft.* This is a substantial review essay that puts the book you’ve read into the context of this course. We will provide examples of academic and non-academic review essays so you will know what we are looking for. *(4,000)*

5. *A review essay, second draft.* Even the best academic work can benefit from feedback, revision, and possible expansion. You can (and should) revise your review essay on the basis of the feedback your GSI gives you. (5,000)

There is no strict timeline to the book quest, except that **step 4 must be completed before Thanksgiving for you to be eligible for step 5.**

Revisions and the Writing Process

In the Book Quest, a revision is designed into the assignment structure. Because of the importance of revision in any kind of creative work, you should expect to do quite a bit of it, anyway. We expect *everything* you turn in to be at least proofread, so everything should be at least your second draft. But even more importantly, we want you to think of academic work as a process. Here are some of the ways in which it is possible in this course.

Integrating challenges. You may integrate assignments. For example, you may make learning R your Empiricist quest, as we mentioned above. Or you may use some of the conceptual analyses you've written in the theory domain assignments in your Book Quest review essay. Or you may use work done as an Apprentice in your Guild Member project.

All of this is not only legitimate, but commendable. All we need is that you make it clear when you incorporate earlier material. We will know, but it is an academic convention, part of ethical practice in academia.

The right of revision. We want you to take risks and try new things, things which you might not be adept at yet. So you can **revise any one assignment** before December 1.

Partial revisions. Your GSI may allow you to revise **elements** from more assignments.

Peer Reviews

You can, of course, get feedback on your work *before* you turn it in. We recommend talking to your GSI, the professor, or going to the [Sweetland Center for Writing](#). But you may also submit it for peer feedback from your fellow students in this class. We encourage all students to take advantage of this, both in terms of getting feedback and giving it. Giving it may earn you up to 1,000 points per review.

Additional Minor Quests

Be a planner. Successful students — successful people! — work with plans. If you come up with a plan for your assignments in this *and all your other courses this semester*, you'll earn a 1,000 points.

Watch a movie with other Honors students. On the evening of November 30, we'll get together with Honors 232 (the natural science course) and watch the classic film "Inherit the

Wind.” If you can’t make the viewing, the DVD is on reserve at Askwith. If you watch it and either participate in a discussion or write a short reflection, you can earn 1,000 points.

Guild Member Level

Once you have completed at least one assignment from each of the domains and gotten 8,000 points in one domain at the Apprentice Level, you earn your 10,000-point leveling bonus and you become a Guild Member and become eligible for the final assignment type.

Guild Project

The Guild Project is a collaborative effort. You create a small team with at least one other student and ideally a few more, for a group of at most six students. The members can come from any section of this course. You are responsible for finding your group members.

Your team may produce an **academic report**, a **website**, or a **podcast**. The process is as follows:

1. *Initial proposal.* You outline your project in a pitch, which includes the division of labor among the team members. (2,000 points)
2. *Progress report.* You submit a progress report, with a sample of the final deliverable. (8,000)
3. *Final deliverable.* That’s it. (20,000)

Like every other assignment, the Guild Project is optional. You are welcome to incorporate elements from your other assignments in the course into it, but note that it will likely require a substantial amount of time and effort.

Double Your Points!

You may decide to invest heavily in one type of assignment more than on others. We want to acknowledge this investment effort and reward you for it. You may select **one** of the following assignment **types** and multiply all points you earn on assignments in that type by two:

- The Theorist’s biweekly conceptual analyses and interpretations.
- The Book Quest
- The Quantoid Major Quest
- The Empiricist Major Quest

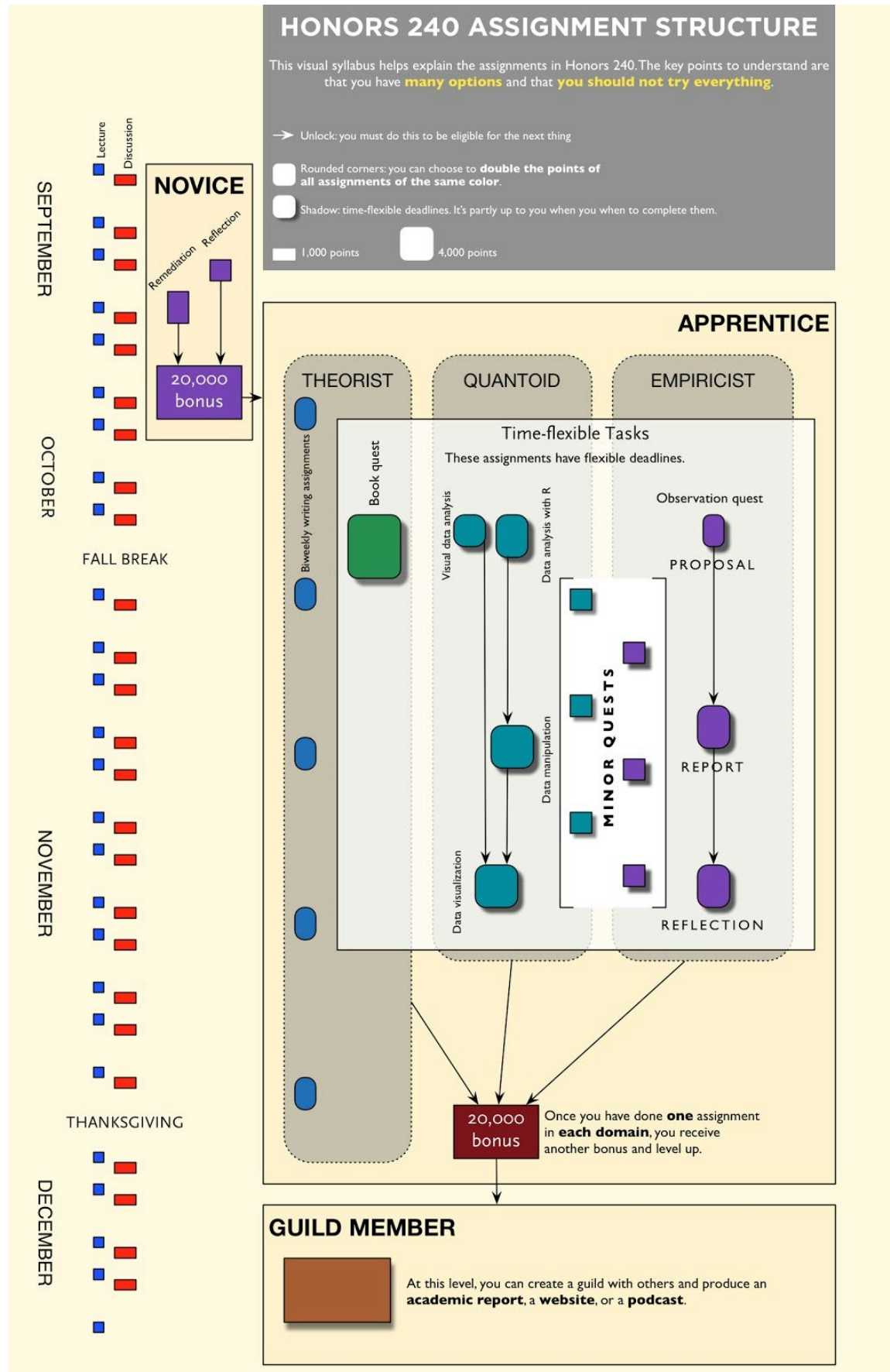
In other words, if you earn 12,349 points for the Book Quest and choose to invest your Doubler on it, your actual points will be 24,698.

The color coding will become clear in the next section.

You will have to make this choice around the Fall Break.

Assignment Structure Overview

Whew! That's complicated. Here we explain how these different elements build up to a letter grade, and how you might think about choosing what to do. The image below visualizes the assignment structure.



This table shows how your final points are converted to a letter grade at the end of the semester:

POINTS	LETTER GRADE
125,000	A
110,000	A-
100,000	B+
90,000	B
80,000	B-
70,000	C+
65,000	C
60,000	C-
55,000	D+

Note that the total POSSIBLE points is 183,000 — 58,000 points more than you need for an A. Our message is that you should not try to do everything. It won't be necessary (or possible).

Is it possible to get an A+? Yes, but not by points alone. Trying to get a maximum number of points will not guarantee an A+, and actively trying to get to A+ just to get to A+ may in fact make it impossible. Asking about an A+ may also hurt your chances of getting it.

GradeCraft

To make it possible for you and us to manage the complicated structure, we are using a specialized tool called [GradeCraft](#) in this course. You will receive a lot of details about it.

Schedule of Readings

The readings in this course represent a variety of genres, from academic writing in multiple social science disciplines to journalism, essays, and fiction.

- **All but one of the readings are in digital format only.** If this poses a *significant* hardship to you, please contact us, and we will see about accommodating you.
 - The one book you will need to acquire is John Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*. Any version is fine.

- Complete the reading assigned for a particular date by the lecture on that date.
- Bring the reading to *both* lecture and the following discussion section.

In many courses, different topics appear in *blocks*: “Now we’ll focus on integrals” or “The next three weeks will be about the Renaissance.” In this course, there is a little bit of “blocking,” but we won’t tell you what the blocks are. One of your open-ended assignments for you as a budding social scientists is to look for patterns, to group uncategorized input into something that makes sense. But be aware that the groupings are not perfect. That’s because pedagogical research suggests that *interleaving* is more effective than blocking for learning: you’ll learn better if you don’t just focus all on your attention on one thing and then another, but instead learn to see familiar themes show up in a new setting. So you should expect to say, several times this semester, “This reminds me of...” And remember, we deal with more than just one thing; instead, we’ll deal with **substance** (the actual content of what we talk about) and **approach** (how whatever we talk about is talked about)

Below is a tentative schedule of the readings. The details and the texts are available via Canvas and GradeCraft. *If there are any changes to the schedule, they will be made on GradeCraft, not here.*

9/9/2015	Introduction: No Reading
9/14/2015	Louis Menand, “Live and Learn: Why We Have College” Lito Tejada-Flores, “Games Climbers Play”
9/16/2015	Johan Huizinga, “Magic Circle,” from <i>Homo Ludens</i> Claudia Rankine, “The Meaning of Serena Williams”
9/21/2015	Anne Curzan, “Says Who? Teaching and Questioning the Rules of Grammar” John McWhorter, “Missing the Nose on Our Face: Pronouns and the Feminist Revolution”
9/23/2015	Stanley Milgram, “Behavioral Study of Obedience”
9/28/2015	Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”
9/30/2015	Stephen Garcia <i>et al.</i> , “Ranks and Rivals: A Theory of Competition”

10/5/2015	Benjamin Baumer and Andrew Zimbalist, <i>The Sabermetric Revolution</i> (excerpt)
10/7/2015	Guest lecture by Dean Andrew Martin. Reading: Andrew Martin, Kevin Quinn, and Lee Epstein, "The Median Justice on the United States Supreme Court"
10/12/2015	Niccolo Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i>
10/14/2015	R. Harrison Wagner, "Uncertainty, rational learning, and bargaining in the Cuban missile crisis"
10/19/2015	Fall break — no class
10/21/2015	John Le Carré, <i>The Spy Who Came In From the Cold</i>
10/26/2015	Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll, "Unpacking the Gender System"
10/28/2015	Michael Kimmel, "'Bros Before Hos': The Guy Code"
11/2/2015	T.L. Taylor, "Where the Women Are," from <i>Play Between the Worlds</i>
11/4/2015	Zachary Jason, "Game of Fear: The Story Behind GamerGate"
11/9/2015	Deji Bryce Olukotun, "We Are the Olfanauts" Moirá Weigel, "Fitted"
11/11/2015	Tim Pachirat, <i>Every Twelve Seconds</i> (excerpt)
11/16/2015	Michael Sandel, <i>What Money Can't Buy</i> (excerpt)
11/18/2015	Peter Huang and Ho-Mou Wu, "More order without more law: A theory of social norms and organizational cultures"
11/23/2015	Mika LaVaquer-Manty, "The Political Theory of Doping"
11/25/2015	Thanksgiving
11/30/2015	Robert Axelrod, "Evolutionary Approach to Norms" Elinor Ostrom, James Walker, and Roy Gardner, "Covenants With and Without a Sword: Self-Governance is Possible" Special additional evening event: the viewing of "Inherit the Wind"
12/2/2015	Joan B. Silk, "The Strategic Dynamics of Cooperation in Primate Groups"

12/7/2015	Geetha Ramani and Robert Siegler, “Promoting broad and stable improvements in low-income children’s numerical knowledge through playing number board games”
12/9/2015	Claude Steele, “A threat in the air: how stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance”
12/14/2015	No reading

General Policies

Religious, Disability, and Other Accommodations

Because of the way the course is structured, everyone can miss some lectures and discussions without jeopardizing his or her course grade. If you anticipate missing more than a few for reasons of religious observance, disability, or representing the University of Michigan, **please contact as early as possible and no later than the drop/add deadline** (September 28) to discuss accommodations needed.

If you have disability that requires an accommodation, we will need a form from the [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) specifying the needed accommodations. We encourage you to discuss your needs with your GSI or the professor. Because this is an unusual course, the most common accommodation needs may be moot — such as extra time on exams — but you may need something else. We are more than happy to work with you.

In general, because of the course structure, we encourage you to **plan your semester early**, deciding which challenges you want to try, and when. That way, in most cases, you can simply navigate around most of the scheduling conflicts you already know about.

Of course, some conflicts arise as emergencies, and you can’t plan everything. In making accommodations in general, we follow the policy of the Office of the Provost: we will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with legitimate reasons to miss classes or assignments. However, all students are expected to complete the work required to achieve the grade they hope for. LSA policy prevents us from adjusting the grading scale as an accommodation for any individual student.

Technology Policy

As you probably have noticed already, this course uses a lot of technology. You are not required to use any, but you are welcome. Portable technology is welcome in both lecture and discussion.

With this freedom comes the responsibility to behave in a professional way with your technology. Communication unrelated to class is disruptive, distracting — to you, your peers, and your instructors — and, in short, assholish. Please don't be an asshole.

Office Hours

Please take advantage of the instructors' office hours. We get paid, whether you show up or not, but we enjoy getting to know you personally, and they help you, both on your particular challenges and down the line. Your GSI will specify his or her office hour practices on your section syllabus.

Academic Integrity

Engaging in academic work is a tricky business. On the one hand, it is important that individuals do the work that is assigned to them, even if it means reinventing the wheel. On the other hand, all scholars stand on the shoulders of others — in other words, all meaningful academic work is collaborative in one way or another — so it is sometimes hard to draw the line.

There is another reason why citations are so prevalent in academic writing. For all their bloviating, academics are a modest bunch, and when they “Joe Schmoe says this,” they think it's possible they've gotten Joe's idea all wrong. So they want to give their readers a chance to get it out for themselves.

Putting this simply, the idea of citations in academic work is to

1. give credit where credit is due, and
2. allow the reader to check things out and pursue things further.

That's why us academics take the practices of proper citation extremely seriously. We are sure you will have lots of questions about the specifics of citation, and you may even get things wrong sometimes. We all do. But if it's determined you have engaged in any form of academic misconduct, you will fail this course. As the [LSA Academic Judiciary Manual of Procedures](#) specifies, [a student may be expelled from the university for academic misconduct](#). So that we're clear on this, for the purposes of this class, plagiarism will mean

submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

In this course, we want you to use the citation style of the [Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition](#).

Meeting the learning objectives in this course requires that you apply your current knowledge and skills to the questions and exercises and, through them, improve that knowledge and those skills. Shortcuts won't get you there, however appealing they might seem. Because of this, the

use of commercial study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparknotes.com, and other similar resources outside this course counts as academic misconduct. (They also won't do you any good in this course.)