

University of Waterloo
Department of English Language and Literature
ENGL 294-01
Introduction to Game Studies
Fall Term, 2022
Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:00 – 5:20 p.m.

Instructor Information

Instructor: Marcel O’Gorman
Office: Hagey Hall 225
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00 - 3:00 and by appointment
Email: marcel@uwaterloo.ca

Course Description

The UW Course Calendar describes ENGL 294 as follows: “This course introduces students to the field of humanities-based game studies. Topics may include the debate between ludological (rules-based) and narratological (story-based) approaches, procedural studies, platform and software studies, gamification, games and adaptation studies, and games as rhetorical objects.” In this offering of ENGL 294, we will read about and discuss all of these subjects, in addition to playing games, making games, and critiquing games both individually and in gameplay groups. Our primary focus will be on playing critically and playing critical games -- these are sometimes called “serious games,” “newsgames,” “persuasive games,” “social impact games,” or “purposeful games.” The final group project involves the design of a critical game that implements what we have learned throughout the semester.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to the field of Game Studies and provides a specific focus on critical games, critical gameplay, and critical game design. Students will gain strategies for thinking and writing critically about games in diverse contexts, while fostering a more inclusive environment for gameplay. They will also gain basic skills in game design.

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- A. Analyze a game critically:
 - Apply theories of game mechanics and narrative to a written analysis.
 - Apply intersectional theories (race, gender, etc.) to a written analysis.
- B. Understand and implement critical game design:
 - Describe the types of critical game design.
 - Design a simple critical game.

Readings Available on LEARN, open access on Web, or at UW Library

- Bogost, Ian. “Gamification Is Bullshit.” *The Atlantic*, August 9, 2011.
<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/08/gamification-is-bullshit/243338/>
- Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play and Games*. University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Chess, Shira. *Play Like a Feminist*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020.

- Csíkszentmihályi, Mihály. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row, 1990.
- Deterding, Sebastian et al. "From game design elements to gamefulness: defining "gamification." *MindTrek '11 Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, pp.9-15, ACM, New York, 2011
- Dunckley, Victoria L. "This Is Your Child's Brain on Video Games." *Psychology Today* September 25, 2016. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/201609/is-your-childs-brain-video-games>
- Grace, Lindsay D.. *Doing Things with Games : Social Impact Through Play*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. (UW Library)
- Farman, Jason. "Creative Misuse as Resistance." *Surveillance and Society* 12:3 (2014) . <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/misuse/misuses>
- Flanagan, Mary and Helen Nissenbaum. *Values at Play in Digital Games*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014.
- Flanagan, Mary. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.
- Gray, Kishonna. *Intersectional Tech: Black Users in Digital Gaming*. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2020. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. (UW Library)
- Hern, Alex and Rob Davies. "Video Game Loot Boxes Should be Classified as Gambling." *The Guardian* September 12, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2019/sep/12/video-game-loot-boxes-should-be-classed-as-gambling-says-commons>
- Huizinga, John. Chapter 1. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge, 1949.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." *Electronic Book Review*, July 10, 2004. <https://web.mit.edu/~21fms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>
- Juul, Jesper. *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011.
- Lapensée, Elizabeth. "Video Games Encourage Indigenous Cultural Expression." *The Conversation*, March 21, 2017.
- Madigan, Jamie. "The Psychology of Immersion in Video Games." *Gamasutra*. August 25, 2010. http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/120720/Analysis_The_Psychology_of_Immersion_in_Video_Games.php
- Peckham, Eric. "Confronting Racial Bias in Video Games." *TechCrunch* June 21, 2020. <https://techcrunch.com/2020/06/21/confronting-racial-bias-in-video-games/>
- Ratan, R. A., N. Taylor, J. Hogan, T. Kennedy, and D. Williams. "Stand by Your Man: An Examination of Gender Disparity in League of Legends." *Games and Culture*. 2015.
- Rogers, Adam. "The Way the World Ends: Not with a Bang but a Paperclip." *Wired*, Oct. 21, 2017.
- Ruberg, Bonnie. *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/waterloo/reader.action?docID=5703270&query=video+games+have+always+been+queer>

- Sample, Mark. "Location Is Not Compelling (Until It Is Haunted)." *The Mobile Story: Narrative Practices with Locative Technologies*. Ed. Mark Sample. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Sicart, Miguel. *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.
- Yang, Grace S., et. Al. "Effects of Avatar Race in Violent Video Games on Racial Attitudes and Aggression." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 2014 5: 698.

Games

This is a partial list of games and where to access them. Note that many games discussed in course readings are no longer available. In such a case, students are asked to do independent research, watch walkthroughs, and examine screen shots.

- Choose Your Own Adventure: Renting!
<https://www.vice.com/en/article/9ke547/choose-your-own-adventure-renting-in-london>
- Colossal Cave Adventure
<https://grack.com/demos/adventure/>
- Coming Out On Top
https://store.steampowered.com/app/642090/Coming_Out_on_Top/
- criticalgameplay.com (multiple games by Lindsay B. Grace)
- Cursor *10
https://archive.org/details/cursor10_flash
- Custer's Revenge
- Depression Quest
<http://www.depressionquest.com/dqfinal.html>
- Dys4ia
<http://www.digiart21.org/art/dys4ia>
- Dream Daddy
https://store.steampowered.com/app/654880/Dream_Daddy_A_Dad_Dating_Simulator/
- Fair Play
<https://fairplaygame.org/>
- Flappy Bird
<https://flappybird.io/>
- Flow
<https://thatgamecompany.com/flow/>
- Flower
<https://store.steampowered.com/app/966330/Flower/>
- Gone Home
<https://gonehome.com/>
- Manhunt
<https://www.rockstargames.com/games/manhunt>

- Never Alone
<http://neveralonegame.com/game/>
- PeaceMaker
<http://www.peacemakergame.com/>
- Pipe Trouble
<https://pipetrouble.com/>
- September 12
<http://www.onseriousgames.com/september-12th-a-toy-world-newsgame/>
- Steer Through the Suez Canal
<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/03/cnnix-steership/>
- Survivance
<http://survivance.org>
- Velvet Strike
<http://www.Opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/about.html>

Course Requirements and Assessment

Assessment	Date of Evaluation	Weighting
Playlog	September 8 - December 6	15
Values at Play Game Analysis	October 6 by midnight	25
Critical Game Group Design Project	November 22, 29 and December 6	30
Critical Game Individual Project Essay	December 9 by midnight	30
Total		100%

1. Playlog – 15% (3% x 5 entries)

Students will maintain an individual playlog in LEARN to document the games they have played over the course of the term. For full points, each entry should be 2 to 3 paragraphs long, explain the game's mechanics and narrative, reference at least one course reading, and serve as a well-informed documentation of your experience playing the game. Recommended games are posted on the syllabus for each week of class, but students can log other games that they find relevant to course topics. Students must document the playing of at least FIVE games listed on different weeks of the syllabus (3% for each entry), and each entry must contain a thoughtful reference to at least one course reading. At least ONE of these games must be played with the assigned gaming group (3%) to document a group gameplay experience. In the case where some games on the syllabus are no longer playable, students can watch playthrough footage or observe screen shots and write their entry based on this information. Playlogs can be submitted at any time throughout the term, and they will be graded from the first day of class to the last day of class (final submission date is December 6).

2. Values at Play Game Analysis – 25%

Each student will choose one of the games listed on the syllabus and write an extended critical review based on the Values at Play (VAP) heuristic outlined by Flanagan and Nissenbaum, as discussed during Week 3. Students may select a game that is not listed on the syllabus, but they must have permission

from the instructor. The essay will be graded on its effective application of the VAP heuristic, accurate understanding of course concepts, effective use of quotations, organization of ideas, and general mechanics such as citation, spelling, and grammar. The essay must be 1500 - 1750 words (6-7 pages, double-spaced), include a formal Works Cited section and appropriate in-text citation (MLA or APA), and reference at least THREE course readings, including Flanagan and Nissenbaum. The essay is due on October 6.

3. Group Game Design Project – 30%

The 3 options below are all Group Projects, and they will be assigned one group grade. The companion essay will be submitted by ALL students, and it will be graded individually. Students will be asked to submit a “functional description” (See Flanagan & Nissenbaum, 86-88) and first iteration on November 22, a second iteration on November 29, and a final iteration on December 6.

Option 1: Critical Game Design

Students will work in groups of 3 or 4 to design a critical game, complete with concept graphics and a detailed Game Design Document (template provided in class). The game must be inspired by course readings and address an important social issue selected by the group. The design will be graded on effective use of course readings and concepts to develop the theme and the “pitch,” mapping of the social issue into game mechanics, narrative, characters, and other elements on the template. Effective use of graphics (photos, colour swatches, style sheet) to convey a look and feel for the game.

Option 2: Critical Twine Game

Students will work in groups of 3 or 4 to design and develop a critical game using Twine. The game must provoke critical reflection on an important social issue. The game will be graded on its playability (technical stability), success in adapting course themes and readings through mechanics and narrative, and demonstration of an argument or specific critical stance.

Option 3: Critical Game on a Platform TBD

Students will work in groups of 3 or 4 to design and develop a critical game in any platform of their choice, from a card game to a 2D scroller. The game must provoke critical reflection on an important social issue. The game will be graded on its playability (technical stability), success in adapting course themes and readings through mechanics and narrative, and demonstration of an argument or specific critical stance.

4. Game Design Project Essay – 30%

This individual essay must provide a detailed description of the game designed by your group and situate the game within the the broad topic of critical games and critical play as covered in course readings and discussions. Would you consider this a newsgame? A persuasive game? A serious game? What’s the difference? You might compare and contrast this game to other critical games or even to film, literature or other media on the same topic. The essay must reference at least FOUR readings from the syllabus and at least ONE reading from independent research. The essay must be 2000 words (8

pages, double-spaced), include a formal Works Cited section and appropriate in-text citation (MLA or APA), and reference at least FIVE course readings, including at least ONE reading that is NOT on the syllabus. The essay is due on December 9 by 11:59 p.m.

Course Outline

Readings and games are due on the date indicated in preparation for the weekly Tuesday meeting.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings, Games, Workshops
1 THURS	September 8	Introduction to Course Discussion: "What is a game?" and "What games do you play?"	Course Syllabus Rogers, "The Way the World Ends" Paperclips One Red Paperclip
1 TUES	September 13	Game Studies Foundations Form Groups Discussion: Dead white guys?	Caillois, Chapter 1 Huizinga, Chapter 1 World of Warcraft Risk Dodgeball Fortnite
1 THURS	September 15	Workshop: Agon, Alea, Mimicry, Ilinx	Select games that illustrate Caillois' concepts.
2 TUES	September 20	Narrative and Procedure Guest: Aleks Franiczek Discussion: Is a text-based interactive story a game?	Jenkins Juul Collosal Cave Adventure Depression Quest
2 THURS	September 22	Workshop: Make a Twine Game Guest: Aleksander Franiczek	Design and develop a text- based game in one class.
3 TUES	September 27	Value Sensitive Game Design Discussion: What is the point of value sensitive game?	Flanagan and Nissenbaum, Ch. 1,2, and 4 Choose Your Own Adventure: Renting Pipe Trouble September 12 Steer through the Suez Canal
3 THURS	September 29	Workshop: Discovering Values in Games (Practice for Assignment 1)	Select a game and analyze it with the VAP Heuristic.
4 TUES	October 4 ONLINE CLASS	Ethical Gameplay	Sicart, Intro and Ch. 2 Manhunt Velvet Strike Cursor * 10
4 THURS	October 6 ONLINE CLASS	Workshop: Designing Games to Promote Ethics Guest: Aleksander Franiczek	Play a game on responsible innovation and discuss it with the designer.
	October 8-16	READING WEEK	
5 TUES	October 18	Playing Critically 1: Feminist Play What does it mean to play games critically?	Flanagan, Ch. 1 Chess, Intro, Ch 4 Ratan et al. Gone Home Life is Strange
5 THURS	October 20	Workshop: Playful Protest	Select a social cause and design a play-based protest for it.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings, Games, Workshops
6 TUES	October 25	Playing Critically 2: Queer Play Discussion: What does it mean to “queer a game”?	Ruberg, Intro and Ch 5 Dys4ia Dream Daddy Coming Out on Top
6 THURS	October 27	Workshop: Failing to Play/Playing to Fail	Select up to three games and practice “failing against” them.
7 TUES	November 1	Games, Race, Representation Discussion: How do games represent race?	Gray, Ch. 1 Eric Peckham Elizabeth LaPensée Custer’s Revenge Survivance Never Alone
7 THURS	November 3	Workshop: Gamifying Implicit Bias	Play the game Fair Play and discuss the experience.
8 TUES	November 8	Failure in Experimental Games	Jagoda, Ch. 6 SPENT Thresholdland Little Inferno
8 THURS	November 10	Workshop: Experimental Game Design Sprint.	Use the Grow-a-Game playing cards to design a critical game.
9 TUES	November 15	Designing Ethical Games	Flanagan, Ch. 8 Sicart, Ch. 5 Play anything at criticalgameplay.com
9 THURS	November 17	Workshop: Develop Game Concept for Final Project	Work in groups to draft a game concept statement.
10 TUES	November 22	Present Game Design -- Iteration 1	Group Work, if time allows.
10 THURS	November 24	Present Game Design -- Iteration 1	Group Work, if time allows.
11 TUES	November 29	Present Game Design -- Iteration 2	Group Work, if time allows.
11 THURS	December 1	Present Game Design -- Iteration 2	Group Work, if time allows.
12 TUES	December 6	Present Final Game Design	

Assignment Submissions

With the exception of the Gamelogs posted to LEARN, assignments will be submitted in appropriately labeled LEARN dropboxes on or before the due date. Essays are due by 11:59 p.m. on the submission date. Work that is submitted late will be graded with a reduction of 10% per day. If you want an extension, and you have a good reason, do not hesitate to ask the instructor.

Alternate Course Arrangements

In the event that COVID-19, instructor travel, or other reasons make it impossible for the class to meet in person, the instructor will arrange for online course sessions via Zoom at the same time as the

scheduled in-person meetings. For students who must miss class due to self-isolation related to a documented case of COVID-19, accommodations for a lecture recording or live video will be arranged with the instructor.

Institutional-required statements for undergraduate course outlines approved by Senate Undergraduate Council, April 14, 2009

Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. Check the [Office of Academic Integrity webpage](#) for more information.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](#) for more information. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71 - Student Discipline](#). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](#).

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances](#), Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department’s administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72 - Student Appeals](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities

The [AccessAbility Services](#) office, located on the first floor of the Needles Hall extension (NH 1401), collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS office at the beginning of each academic term.