Video Games and Latin American Culture

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University of Delaware
LLCU 352-010
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Office hours: MWF 8:15-9:00 am or by appointment
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Description

This course explores the relationship between video games and Latin American culture, examining the many ways games impact society in this region and throughout the globe. While game scholars frequently focus on audiences in the United States, western Europe, and Asia, an examination of how games impact culture in regions like Latin America—considered "peripheral" relative to the mainstream video game market—shows how the products of new media are affected by the cultural environments in which they are created, distributed, consumed, and otherwise put to use. Over the course of the semester, students will gain an appreciation for the many ways video games affect Latin American culture today.

Objectives

Upon completing this course, the student will be able to:
- Interpret and analyze video games in terms of their content, contexts of production, interface and platform, tone, aesthetic approach, and place within the history of the medium, as well as their economic, socio-political, and cultural impact on multiple spheres of society
- Recognize and situate the cultural impact of video games globally, as well as within the specific cultural contexts of Latin America
- Relate video games to the broader spectrum of contemporary cultural production in Latin America, from the visual arts to film and literature
- Make connections between cultures through analysis of regional gaming practices and cultural representation within games
- Contextualize the ways video games and other forms of media can serve different purposes in human society, including not only leisure and entertainment, but also education, political protest, and artistic expression

Required Materials

- **Readings**

All required readings are available in PDF format on the course Canvas site, in the "Texts" folder under "Resources." Students should have a paper or electronic copy of the text in hand for class discussion each day, and are encouraged to take notes on the reading assignments.

- **Games**
  In this course, we study video games from Latin American designers that have been developed using a variety of different mediums and platforms. Students must vary their approach to these different games, and are not required to play all games in their entirety—the time dedicated to playing each game will depend on its balance within the range of assignments for the week.

  Nearly all of the games we study in the course are freely available to play (at least partially), however there are several games that students are strongly urged to purchase:
    o *Dandara* ($15, Steam for Windows / Mac OS X, PS4, Switch, Xbox Live)
    o *Mulaka* ($20, Steam for Windows / Mac OS X, PS4, Switch, Xbox Live)
    o *Guacamelee!* ($15, Steam for Windows / Mac OS X, PS4, PS Vita, Switch, Wii U, Xbox Live)
    o *Papo & Yo* ($15, Steam for Windows / Mac OS X, PS3)
    o *Kerbal Space Program* ($40, Steam for Windows – Mac OS X, PS4, Wii U, Xbox Live)

  All of the required games for the course are accessible in one form or another using the equipment at Morris Library's Film and Media Collection (which houses the library's Game Lab). Alternatively, students may use their own devices to access the games. Over the course of the semester, each student will be required to access games using all of the following (see below for details):
  1) a Windows PC
  2) online services such as Steam, Google Play, Playstation Network, and/or Xbox Live
  3) a mobile device capable of running iOS or Android applications
  4) a web browser for YouTube videos and online play (often requiring an updated version of Adobe Flash Player and other software)

Work

- **Participation and Preparation (30%)**
  - **In-Class Participation and Preparation (15%)**
    In order to prepare for each day of class in this 300-level course, it is expected that students will spend at least one to two hours on reading, gameplay, and other assignments. Engaging with class materials is essential in this course, whether we are reading a written text or playing an interactive game. Students are expected to read, watch, and play attentively and critically, to take careful notes and to come to class prepared to share their own perspective on the materials studied.

  - **Facebook Group Participation (15%)**
    This course uses a [Facebook Group](#) as a supplement to in-class discussion and as a platform for sharing materials related to the course. Each student is expected to look at the group daily, and to contribute to the group at least once a week. Possible contributions include:
      - A comment, question, or response related to one of the readings or games
      - A link to a useful web site, article, etc. related to the course materials
      - A comment elaborating on other members' posts
      - Discussion of one of the homework questions for the week
      - An observation about the relationship between the week's assigned readings and games

- **Exams (3 exams x 10% = 30%)**

There will be two partial exams throughout the semester, as well as a cumulative final exam. The exams will consist of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answers, and IDs of games, authors/developers and key terms.

- **Written Homework Responses (30%)**
  There will be five (5) homework assignments over the course of the semester. Homework responses are due by **11:59 pm** the assigned day—no late homework will be accepted. Responses to the homework prompts represent the bulk of the written work for the course, and therefore students should respond to each question with a well-developed and carefully written paragraph, approximately 100-150 words in length.

  Homework responses will be graded on a scale of 1-3:
  - 3 = excellent, thorough, critical and thoughtful responses, all in the student's own words
  - 2 = well done, but lacking in terms of writing, information, detail, etc.
  - 1 = inaccurate or careless responses; significant improvement required

- **Group Presentation (10%)**
  In groups of 3, students will prepare and present a concise, dynamic and informative 7-10 minute audio-visual presentation on an assigned topic. Group members are responsible for dividing these responsibilities and for evenly contributing to group work across the board. Slides should be visually appealing and not too wordy, with key information conveyed orally in class.

  Each presentation will explore a topic related to the production and/or reception of video games in Latin America, and should focus on:
  - An overview of the basic concerns relevant to the topic
  - Socio-cultural dimensions (local vs. global) / what is unique about the topic
  - Key game examples (with publisher, date), developers, studios, etc.
  - "Real world" concerns (economics, development context, means of distribution, etc.)
  - Some key takeaways about this topic, as related to the course at large

  Each presentation should incorporate a minimum of 4-6 academic and journalistic sources, cited using MLA style—parenthetically throughout the presentation, and in a properly-formatted list of works cited.

  Please sign up for your presentation topic and date using this document.

Grade Scale

93-100 ------------A	80-82-------------B-	67-69-------------D+
90-92--------------A-	77-79--------------C+	63-66--------------D
87-89--------------B+	73-76--------------C	60-62--------------D-
83-86-------------B	70-72-------------C-	0-59---------------F

Policies

- **Mutual Respect**
  The most basic policy of this course is for students and the professor to approach each other with mutual respect, in terms of ideas, time, and attention.
- **Electronic Devices**
  Laptop computers, tablets, smartphones and other devices are permitted in class *only when being used for purposes directly related to class*. Please disable all message alerts and updates during class time. It is highly distracting to students *and especially to the professor* when students use their electronic devices for purposes other than the material at hand.

- **Attendance and Punctuality**
  Participation and preparation are a major component of this course, and attendance and punctuality are necessary in order to participate. Students are expected to arrive to class on time, and will be excused for a maximum of two absences over the course of the semester. After that point, there will be a penalty to the student's overall grade for each additional tardy arrival or absence.
- **Academic Honesty**
  Students are expected to produce their own original work on all individual and group assignments, and to properly cite any information from other sources. These sources should be documented using MLA-style parenthetical citations and a properly formatted list of works cited.

Calendar

[Please sign up for your presentation topic and date using this document.]

Date	Reading	Game(s)	Work Due / In Class
Week 1: Defining Video Games and Game Studies			
2/10			Introduction: Video Games and Latin American Culture
2/12	- Clara Fernández Vara, "The Whys and Wherefores of Game Analysis" (*Introduction to Game Analysis*, 2014)	- *Truco*	
2/14	- Gonzalo Frasca, "Ludology Meets Narratology"(1999)		
Week 2: Video Games' Role(s) in Latin American Culture			
2/17	- Beatriz Sarlo, "Video Games" (*Scenes from Postmodern Life*, (1994) - María Luján Oulton, "The Nuances of Video Game Curation: Lessons from Argentina" (*Video Games and the Global South*, 2019)	- *Capoeira Legends: Path to Freedom*	
2/19	- Jesús Martín Barbero, "Between Technology and Culture: Communication and Modernity in Latin America" (2003)		
2/21	- Phillip Penix-Tadsen, "Latin American Ludology: Why We Should Take Video Games Seriously (and When We Shouldn't)" (2013)	- *Dandara*	- Presentation 1
Week 3: Cultural Context and Video Games			
2/24	- Luis Wong, "Mr. Byte: The 'Gang' Leader of Gaming in Peru" (2014) - Eduardo Marisca, "Reconstructing a Technological History" (*Developing Game Worlds*, 2014)	- Bamtang Games - *King of Peru 2*	- Presentation 2
2/26	- Tom J.P. Wolf, Ed., *Video Games Around the World* (2015) - Argentina - Brazil	- *Coca Kolector* - *Al Grito de Guerra* - *La Trinitaria*	**- Homework I**

	- Colombia - Mexico - Peru - Uruguay - Venezuela		
2/28	- Jerjes Loayza, "Ludic Solidarity and Sociality: The Impact of *Dota 2* on Lima's Youth" (*Video Games and the Global South*, 2019)	- *Kerbal Space Program*	
Week 4: Culture and Race in Electronic Media			
3/2	- Néstor García Canclini, "Identities as a Multimedia Spectacle" (*Consumers and Citizens*, 1995)	- *Mayan Pitz* - *Pok ta Pok*	- Presentation 3
3/4	- Lisa Nakamura, "Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction" (*Cybertypes*, 2002)	- *Huni Kuin*	
3/6	- Lauren Woolbright, "Tarahumara Apocalypse and Endogenous Meaning in *Mulaka*" (*Ecofictions, Ecorealities and Slow Violence in Latin America*, 2020)	- *Mulaka*	
Week 5: Software Modification and Independent Game Development			
3/9	- Luis Wong, "*Feeling Blue*" (2011) - Penix-Tadsen, "Software Modification and Independent Game Development" (*Cultural Code*, 2016)	- *Horizon Chase Turbo*	- Presentation 4
3/11	- Penix-Tadsen, "Latin American Game Design and the Narrative Tradition" (*Technology, Literature, and Digital Culture in Latin America*, 2015)	- *Today I Die* - *I Wish I Were the Moon*	- Presentation 5 **- Homework II**
3/13			**EXAM I**
Week 6: Gender and Games: Stereotypes vs. Reality			
3/16	- Penix-Tadsen, "Intersections of Gender and Gaming in Latin America" (*The Routledge Companion to Gender, Sex and Latin American Culture*, 2018)	- *Flappy Drag Queen* - *The Shade Forest* - *Becoming Dragon*	- Presentation 6
3/18	- Jon Beaubien, "Save the Princess: Depictions of Gender in Indie Video Games" (2017)	- *Guacamelee!*	- Presentation 7
3/20	- Penix-Tadsen, "*Pioneras*: Three Generations of Women Developing Games in the Southern Cone" (2020)	- *Big Fat Awesome House Party* - *Ship Ahoy!* - *Last Carnival* - *The Interactive Adventures of Dog Mendonça and Pizza Boy* - *Causa, Voices of the Dusk*	
Week 7: Localization and Translation			
3/23	- Miguel Á. Bernal-Merino, "Games, Markets, and Translation" (*Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 2015)	- *Guevara*, a.k.a. *Guerrilla War*	- Presentation 8
3/25	- Verónica Valdivia Medina, "National Cultures and Digital Space: Interpersonal Communication in *World of Warcraft*, from	- *Preguntados*	

	Latin to North America" (*Video Games and the Global South*, 2019)		
3/27	- Yuri Takhteyev, "The Wrong Place" (*Coding Places*, 2012)	- *Zeno Clash*, *Rock of Ages* & *Abyss Odyssey*	
SPRING BREAK			
Week 8: Video Games of the Oppressed			
4/6	- Frasca, "Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance and Other Trivial Issues" (2004)	- *September 12th* - *Madrid*	
4/8	- Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games* (2007)	- *Tropical America*	- Presentation 9 **- Homework III**
4/10	- Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Heide Smith and Susana Pajares Tosca, "Serious Games—When Entertainment Is Not Enough" (*Understanding Video Games*, 2013)	- *NarcoGuerra*	
Week 9: Video Games of the Oppressed II: Border Games			
4/13	- Rafael Fajardo, "Pixels Politics and Play: Digital Video Games as Social Commentary" (2003)	- *La Migra* - *Crosser*	- Presentation 10
4/15	- Osvaldo Cleger, "Procedural Rhetoric and Undocumented Migrants: Playing the Debate Over Immigration Reform" (2015)	- *Borders*	
4/17	- Claire Taylor, "Monopolies and Maquiladoras: The Resistant Re-encoding of Gaming in Coco Fusco and Ricardo Domínguez's Turista Fronterizo" (2012)	- *Turista Fronterizo*	
Week 10: Political Controversy and Video Games			
4/20	- Kishonna L. Gray and David J. Leonard, "Introduction: Not a Post-Racism and Post-Misogyny Promised Land: Video Games as Instruments of (In)Justice" (*Woke Gaming*, 2018)		
4/22	- Penix-Tadsen, "Video Games and Political Controversy in Latin America" (*Cultural Code*, 2016)	- *Gesta Final*	- Presentation 11 **- Homework IV**
4/24			**EXAM II**
Week 11: Newsgames, Parodies and the Politics of Modding			
4/27	- Bogost, Simon Ferrari, and Bobby Schweizer, "Newsgames" (2010)	- *Portillo Tontillo* - *La Mordida*	- Presentation 12
4/29	- Penix-Tadsen, "Trajectories in Latin American Game Design" (*Cultural Code*, 2016)	- *Nación Motorizada*	
5/1	- José Messias, Diego Amaral and Thaiane Oliveira, "Playing Beyond Precariousness: The Political Dimension of Brazilian Modding in Pro Evolution Soccer" (*Video Games and the Global South*, 2019)		
Week 12: Casual Games, Mobile Applications and Social Media Games			
5/4	- Jesper Juul, "What Is Casual?" (*A Casual Revolution*, 2010)	- *Taco Master* (PS Vita, Android) - *Kingdom Rush*	- Presentation 13

		- *Flappy Quetzal* - *NicaBird*	
5/6	- Juul, "What Is Casual?" (cont.)	- *Mundo Gaturro* - *Brasil Quest* - *Cidade Maravilhosa Rio* - *Colheita Feliz*	- Presentation 14
5/8	- Marisca, "The Entrepreneurial Republic" (Part I; *Developing Game Worlds*, 2014)	- *Time Machine VR*	- Presentation 15
Week 13: Current Trajectories: Work-for-Hire, Edugames, Gamification and Therapeutic Games			
5/11	- Marisca, "The Entrepreneurial Republic" (Part II; *Developing Game Worlds*, 2014)	- *Lucha Libre AAA* - *El Chavo Kart* - *Atrévete a Soñar*	- Presentation 16
5/13	- James Paul Gee, "Semiotic Domains: Is Playing Video Games a "Waste of Time"? (*What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, 2007)	- *Pueblo Pitanga* - *1811* - *D.E.D.* - *Súbete al SITP*	- Presentation 17
5/15	- Jane McGonigal, "Introduction: Reality Is Broken" (2010)	- *Papo & Yo*	**- Homework V**
Week 14: Boss Battle			
5/18			**EXAM III – FINAL**

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