Queer Gaming

Fall 2019
ENG 485 A1 - Course Syllabus

Instructor
Prof. Jonathan Cohn
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A deep dive into the vibrant spaces where queer theory and video game studies intersect.

All readings, games, etc. are available on eclass. Most games are free. You can purchase the ones that are not, or watch Let's Plays, etc. I can also arrange for group play times outside of class

OBJECTIVE

Qualitative Analysis · Writing Skills · Critical Thinking · Queer Theory · Historical Connections · Video Games

1. Activism
2. Indigenous and Queer
3. Queer Families
4. Game Design
5. Transgender & Boundaries
6. Crip Theory

UNITS OF STUDY

RAINBOW ARCADE
QUEER GAMING THEORY & PRACTICE

1. What is Queer Theory? What would make a game queer?
2. Intimacy in Games
3. Playing and Performing
4. Emancipatory Affects

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

PREPARED
Be prepared, focused, and ready to learn something new in every class.

RESPONSIBLE
Ensure all assignments are submitted according to deadline. Class attendance is also important to help students benefit from the course.

PROACTIVE
Engagement and participation in class is highly encouraged. Don't be afraid to share your thoughts!

RESPECTFUL
Be respectful towards teacher and classmates. Encourage one another and stay united as a team!

GRADING

Four 1-page Interpretation Papers	40%
Group Video Game Project	30%
Term paper	25%
- Abstract and Annotated Bib.	3%
- Rough Draft & Peer Review	3%
100%	

Office Hours

Floor 4, Room 73
Old Arts

Tuesdays
(or by Appointment)

3:30-4:30

CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY

care

Read hard, play hard. If you need help, ask for it. Circle what you don't understand and star what you like. Read between the lines and connect the dots. Bring your own perspective to your classmates. This stuff is hard, no joke.

Calendar

'prone to sudden changes'
Look to eclass for links to all readings, games, etc.

Week 1: Sept 4 + 6
intro + playing games
4: Intro: The Name Game
5: In Class: MORE Games!

Week 2: Sept 9/11/13
What is Queer Theory?
6: Sedgwick, "Queer and Now"
11: Intro to Queer Video Games
13: The Sims and Queer Life

Week 3: Sept 16/18/20
16: Butler, "Critically Queer"
18: Rubery, "Fun"
20: "Striking Vipers", Black Mirror (S:1)

Week 4: Sept 23/25/27
Intimacy:
23: Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public"
25: Mattie Brice, "What Video Games Can Learn from Kink" (HugPunx, etc. in class)
in class: Mattie Brice, "Consensual Torture Simulator" & Robert Yang, "Radiator"
27: CLIMATE STRIKE, NO CLASS, COME STRIKE!!!

Week 5: Sept 30, Oct 2/4
Playing and Performing
30: Paris is Burning
2: Roderick Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique"
4: Shaw, "Gamers Have Really Identify with Lara Croft?"

Week 6: Oct 7/9/11
Emancipatory Affects
7: Richard Munz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down" In class: "DepressionQuest" and Mattie Brice, "Manichi"
9: Binding of Isaac
11: Jordan Wood, "Romancing an Empire, Becoming Isaac"

Week 7: Oct 16/18
Activism
16: Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens"
Robert Yang, "The Tropism"
18 Peter Wonica, "Ending the Cycle" (In Class: Game Design Day)

Week 8: Oct 21/23/25
Queer and Indigenous
21 Jodi Byrd, "Loving Unbecoming, The Queer Politics of the Transitive Native"
23 Jodi Byrd, "Other Games, Other Histories" + "Red Dead Convention/Curse"
25 Red Dead Redemption + in class: Elizabeth LaPensee Games

Week 9: Oct 28/30/Nov 1
Queer Families
28: Richard Bridgman, "Making Queer Familia"
30: Adrienne Shaw, "The Trouble With Communities"
1. Porpentine, "With Those We Love Alive" + "Cone Home"

Week 10: Nov 4/6/8
Queering Game Design (this week's readings are not required, but "X" worth your time)
4: Anna Anthropy, A Game Design Vocabulary ch 1-2
6: Anna Anthropy, A Game Design Vocabulary ch 3-4
8: Anna Anthropy, A Game Design Vocabulary ch 5-7
+ Final paper abstract and annotated bibliographies due>

Week 11: Reading Week

Week 12: Nov 18/20/22
Transgender and Boundary Making
18: Judith Halberstam, "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM border wars and the Masculine Continuum"
20: Rubery, "Straightwashed UnderTale"
22 Undertale & In class: Anna Anthropy, Dys4ia

Week 13: Nov 25/27/29
Crip Theory
25 Robert McRuer, "Compulsory able-bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence"
27 Rachel Hutchinson, "Representing Race and Disability: GTA: San Andreas as a Whole Text"
29 GTA: SA & In Class: A selection of QWERTY and VR Games

Week 14: Dec 2/4/6
2 Final Paper Peer Review Day
4 Student Papercraft Game Demos
6 Student Papercraft Game Demos

The Fine Print

"You might find it easier to read this via the printable version on eclass.

Course Goals
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
- Analyze the relationship between representation, identity, and sexuality;
- Demonstrate and understand critical, historical, and political contexts in which sexuality subsists;
- Apply techniques of critical analysis as appropriate to video games and other media;
- Develop a critical vocabulary for queer theory;
- Analyze and discuss games and other media at the level of content, form, and politics;
- develop a video game

Reading, Participation Engagement, Classroom Ethics and Accessibility: All students will be expected to complete all readings, play all games, and watch all media before our meetings, and to participate actively in our discussions, whether conducted as a whole class or in smaller groups. Because this is a seminar-style course, participation is essential to your success in this course. I understand that this approach will be new to many students, and that it can be a challenge to participate in a meaningful way for all participants, and/or due to provide accessible descriptions of these materials. In order to promote conceptual/intellectual accessibility, all participants will be expected to contribute to discussions in a respectful, thoughtful, and mindful manner. Our classroom is a safe space, and students should assume shared authority or knowledge. Finally, participants will be expected to engage critically, constructively, and compassionately with one another in and outside of the classroom. Together we will endeavor collectively to produce a space (2) conducive to learning, growth, and mutual respect. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about this policy.

Meeting and Corresponding Outside of Class: Over the twelve weeks we will provide discussions that extend beyond the class (i.e. encourage you to discuss any of the course materials with me during my office hours, I will also set up an online forum where you can post, share, and discuss, etc. Class sizes are relevant topics. For emails, I will try to get back to you within 2 days (after that, feel free to begin bounding me).

Assignments

Interpretation Papers (Due on Following Schedule)
"To interpret," as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, means "To expound the meaning of something, attribute or motivation to something, to explain, to translate, to construe." Interpretation is a fundamental skill in the study of literature and other media. **Goals:** In assigned dates, an Interpretation Paper focuses on one aspect of the text we've been looking at that day and it relates to students. Its explain and/or to make out the meaning of that text. This paper should be an analysis or an interpretation, not a summary. **Length:** 1-page (250-300 words). **Grading:** Interpretation papers will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Students will receive credit for papers that show a thoughtful, well-reasoned, and well-written interpretation of the text. Papers that do not meet this standard will be returned for revision. **Late Policy:** Late papers will be accepted, but will be docked a full letter grade for each day they are late. **Note:** Interpretation papers are not a book report. Your job is to make a biology moon. Help me open up your mind to an aspect of the text you've read. **Note:** Interpretation papers are not a book report. Your job is to make a biology moon. Help me open up your mind to an aspect of the text you've read. **Note:** Interpretation papers are not a book report. Your job is to make a biology moon. Help me open up your mind to an aspect of the text you've read. **As a 1-page paper, I can't expect you to do much more than one or two things well. Focus on one idea, one aspect of the text, and make your argument. Don't try to do too much in this paper, because you don't have the space for it. Focus on one idea, one aspect of the text, and make your argument. Don't try to do too much in this paper, because you don't have the space for it.**

As part of this assignment, you will also write a short bibliography and annotated bibliography for a game that some way reflects an idea from class. More details to come...

Group Video Game Project: Over the course of the term, students will be asked to work in groups of 3-4 to create a game that some way reflects an idea from class. More details to come...

TERM PAPER: Term papers (approx 1-2000 words), you will use the texts and discussions from class to analyze a film or text of your choice in terms of its ideological dimensions. You should not just use class readings to explain the film, but also consider how the film/text/game/etc. reflects/challenges/etc. the ideologies we've been looking at. Instead of detailing how Undertale's Mettaton, consider what aspects of Mettaton (Undertale's Mettaton).

The term paper extends the style of writing that you'll be developing in your one-page responses. I'd like you to capitalize on the ideas you've developed in those writings to be done over the semester in order to present an interpretation that is more thorough, more sophisticated and more persuasive than you could achieve in our shorter work. You might choose to just two or more of our readings and use them to analyze a film, or you might choose to use one reading and use it to analyze a film, or you might be spending a lot of time looking at the ideologies of social class and how those ideologies manifest themselves in media, you might choose to use Marx, Bourdieu, Ehrenreich, etc. to analyze a film. Be creative, but be sure to stay focused on your argument.

Abstract and Annotated Bibliography: This assignment is designed to get your papers off to a great start. In your abstract, you will briefly outline your argument, your sources, and your methodology. Your annotated bibliography will be a list of the texts you are planning to use. Your abstract and annotated bibliography will be due on the dates listed on the schedule. Both will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Your abstract should be 1-2 paragraphs, explain the text's argument, use of evidence (and analytical, and, most important, how you plan to use their work in your argument. Your annotated bibliography should be at least 5 sources (or half of them if they are "popular" sources, how well you are using their evidence, and how you will use it.

You will also be **Peer Editing** your fellow students papers the last week of class. If you are there, have a full draft to share and give helpful criticism to your peers, you will get credit.

Rough Draft: Rough drafts are not required, but they are highly encouraged. Term Paper Rough drafts conform to traditional term paper standards. It should be double-spaced, have one inch margins, have numbered pages and use MLA citation style. We can cover these specifics in class. Rough drafts are due on the dates listed on the schedule. Rough drafts are meant to be a "rough" draft, not a finished product.

Respect This classroom is a community. It is crucial that we treat each other with the appropriate level of courtesy and respect. No one should be made to feel unwelcome. Failure to treat others with respect will lower your grade. Any disparaging remarks regarding a project at any stage of development and/or peer feedback and peer feedback will **lower your grade**.

Office Hours and Appointments: I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss your assignments before they are due and give you as much feedback as I can. To get this help, you must come to office hours or make a scheduled appointment with me at another time.

Statement on Accessibility: I assume that all of us are here to different ways and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can be shaped to help you learn. I'm here to help you learn, and I want to do what I can to help you better access the materials in this course, and I want to hear from you. Your success in this class is important to me.
If there are circumstances that may impact your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss how to address those circumstances. Please also let me know if you have a disability that requires accommodation. If you have or think you may have a disability, you may want to let me know. If you choose to do so, I encourage you to address any resources or accommodations you may need at the beginning of the semester so as to ensure your full participation in our course. Please also consult the University's Accessibility Services website: http://www.uab.ca/ferrari.ca/

If you have a traumatic experience during the term of any kind and would like to talk or get help, please contact the Office for Safe Communities at http://www.uab.ca/ca/osc-resources/reporting-and-analysis/office-of-safe-discussion-human-rights. Also, if you wish to be called by a different name or address with a different pronoun than the one with which you are officially registered, please let me know and I will gladly oblige.

Grading Scale
The grading scale for this course is as follows:
A+ 97-100% A 93-96% A- 90-92%
B+ 87-89% B 83-86% B- 80-82%
C+ 77-79% C 73-76% C- 70-72%
D+ 67-69% D 63-66% D- 60-62%
F 59-0%

Policy about course outcomes can be found in 422.6.2 of the University Calendar

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