

Dr. Kevin Patton
Course: PHIL 3230
Day: Mon / Wed
Time: 1300 - 1415
Location: AH 303

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Office: ASH 205F
Office Hours: M / W 14:30-15:30

Philosophy of Video Games

I want studios that make story-based games to start taking their stories more seriously. And that doesn't mean hiring a big shot writer from Hollywood; it means that story becomes integral to making your game. I don't see how you can achieve that without having an in-house writer that sits next to the designer, helping them make their levels, talking with the engineers about where we can tell the story more dynamically, pushing at technology.

Neil Druckman
President of NaughtyDog Studios

Course Overview

This course examines the philosophy of video games, focusing on their status as a unique and evolving art form. Students will explore how games challenge traditional definitions of art, narrative, and beauty. They'll delve into the ethical complexities of violence and morality within games and consider the broader impact of video games on players and society. Through readings, discussions, and hands-on gameplay, students will analyze the complex philosophical and artistic dimensions of this powerful cultural force.

Required Materials

All course materials will be posted on my website: <https://PHIL3230.kevinjpatton.com>

Course Information

Preparation: This course may be very challenging for you if you are not accustomed to reasoning in a rigorous fashion. If this is true of you, then you will only do well in this class if you dedicate much of your outside-of-class-time to practicing and mastering the relevant topics

covered. Also, the only dumb questions are the ones you don't ask. If you are confused about something, then there is a high likelihood that someone else is too!

Attendance: Attendance is required.

Website: All course material, including the textbook, will be available exclusively on my website. I do **not** post readings to Canvas. The site URL is: kevinjpatton.com

Evaluation

Grading Scale

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|-----------|--------------|----|--------------|
| A+ | 96.7 - 100% | C+ | 76.7 - 79.9% |
| A | 93.3 - 96.6% | C | 73.3 - 76.6% |
| A- | 90 - 93.2% | C- | 70 - 73.2% |
| B+ | 86.7 - 89.9 | D+ | 66.7 - 69.9 |
| B | 83.3 - 86.6% | D | 63.3 - 66.6% |
| B- | 80 - 83.2% | D- | 60 - 63.2% |
| F | | | |
| Below 60% | | | |

Annotated Notes: 20%
Section Summaries Abstracts: 20%
Visual Projects: 15%
Exam 1: 10%
Exam 2: 15%
Exam 3: 20%

Annotated Notes: Each week you will be required to submit annotated notes over one of the readings for that week. As these will be submitted via Canvas, you can either annotate digitally (e.g. edit in Adobe) or you may handwrite your notes and then take pictures of those notes and submit those. A good guide to annotating can be found [here](#).

Section Summaries and Abstracts: Every three weeks you will be required to submit a summary of each section of two readings, and a new abstract for those readings. (**Note:** the Annotated Notes submission and the Abstract submission must be over *different* readings). These will be submitted on Canvas. A good guide to writing an abstract can be found [here](#).

Visual Projects: In addition to writing philosophy, students will also be making their own visual aids over the course of the semester. This can take the form of flow charts, pictures, or even comics (in the style of [Existential Comics](#)). A separate handout will be made explaining this in more detail.

Exams: A total of three exams will occur over the semester. Each exam is hand written and in class (unless testing center accommodations have been granted). The exam consists of a series of writing prompts related to the reading for that section.

Policies

- **Academic Integrity:** The penalty for academic dishonesty (e.g., collaborating on problem sets, cheating on exams) will be failure of the course and the case's being forwarded to Student Judicial Affairs for possible disciplinary action. Make yourself familiar with UNO's Student Code of Conduct, available [online](#). **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – it just isn't worth it.

- **University Policies:** I respect and uphold university policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective university regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

- **ADA:** In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

- **Misc.:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

Assignment Calendar

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| Week 1: Tutorial | Mon: Introduction / Syllabus Wed: Tavinor, Ch1; play Zork. |
| Week 2: Defining video games | Mon: No Class (Labor Day) Wed: Tavinor, Ch2; play Frog Fractions and Clicker Heroes |
| Week 3: Defining art | Mon: Walton, "Categories of art" Wed: Laetz, "Kendall Walton's 'categories of art': a critical commentary; play Passage + read message from creator |
| Week 4: Are video games art? | Mon: Smuts, "Are video games art?" Wed: Tavinor, Ch9 |
| Week 5: Interactivity | Mon: Guest Speaker Dr. Brian Ricks Wed: Smuts, "What is interactivity?"; play Pac-Man |
| Week 6: Choices that matter | Mon: Lopes, "The ontology of interactive art" Wed: Guest Speaker Gabriel Luna (from HBO's <i>The Last of Us</i>) |
| Week 7: Narratives vs. choices | Mon: Tavinor, Ch6 Wed: Livingston, "Narrative" |
| Week 8: Affective fiction | Mon: Walton, "Fearing fictions" Wed: Hartz, "How can we be moved by..." |
| Week 9: Emotional video gaming | Mon: Tavinor, Ch7 Wed: Gendler, "The puzzle of imaginative resistance" |
| Week 10: Morality and video gaming | Mon: Tavinor, Ch8 Kieran, "Art, morality, and ethics..." |
| Week 11: Violence and video gaming | Mon: McCormick, "Is it wrong to play violent video games?" Wed: Guest Speaker Dr. Douglas Gentile (Zoom) |
| Week 12: The gamer's dilemma | Mon: Schultzke, "Defending the morality of violent games" Wed: Luck, "The gamer's dilemma: an analysis..." |
| Week 13: Solving the gamer's dilemma | Mon: Bartel, "Resolving the gamer's dilemma" Wed: Partridge, "Pornography, ethics, and video games" |
| Week 14: The dilemma redux? | Mon: Luck and Ellerby, "Has Bartel resolved the ..." Wed: No class, Thanksgiving break |
| Week 15: Potpourri | Mon: Waddington, "Locating the wrongness in..." Wed: Guest speaker Jared Forsberg (in person) |
| Week 16: Potpourri | Mon: TBD Wed: Cova and Garcia, "The puzzle of multiple endings" |