

GAME STUDIES SEMINAR



Overview

In this seminar, students will read, discuss and write about the major questions, developments and movements in the study of games. Readings will be interdisciplinary and heterodox and drawn from classic works on games and play as well as the contemporary digital wave. In this course students will explore the histories of video games as well as the key ways in which video games, games in general and play have been theorized in the humanities and social sciences. Over the course of the semester the class will come to define play and how it relates to games, work, war, sociability, learning and other key concepts. Students will write a series of short commentaries as well as a final paper. Prerequisites: GAME 1100, ENGL 1200, and Junior/Senior Status.

Fitchburg State University
Communications Media Department
COMM 4000
3 credits
Fri 5 Sept–Wed 10 Dec 2025: 12:30pm–1:45pm
Conlon Hall 341
[Dr. Martin Roberts](#)
Office hrs: Mondays 15:00-17:00
[Blackboard](#)

Objectives

Course texts

Andrew Schartmann, *Koji Kondo's Super Mario Bros. Soundtrack*. 33 1/3 series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Readings assignments will usually be available either as PDFs linked from the course syllabus or links to online sources. Nevertheless, you are encouraged to purchase your own copies of the above texts.

Assignments / Evaluation

- **Ludomusicology research report** (open topic) (1,500 words, 6 pages double-spaced, with bibliography, letter grade): 30%

- **Soundtracks group presentation** (in-class, 2-3 students, 15-20 minutes, with accompanying materials, joint grade): 15%
- **Soundtrack analysis** (1,000 words / 4 pages double-spaced; due one week after in-class presentation): 20%
- **Scene report** (1,000 words / 4 pages double-spaced): 20%
- **Scene report presentation** (in-class): 15%

Resources

- Ludomusicology
- Society for the Study of Sound and Music in Games [SSSMG]
- TOPLAP

Documentaries

- *8-Bit Generation: The Commodore Wars* (Tomaso Walliser, 2016)

Schedule

Week 1 F 09/05

I. HISTORIES

Introduction: Ice Cream Music

- Daniel T. Neely, “Ding, Ding! The Commodity Aesthetic of Ice Cream Truck Music”
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Week 2 F 09/12

Arcade Soundscapes

- Andy Hofle, “Arcade Ambience Project Info”
 - Martin Roberts, “By Pressing Down This Special Key / It Plays A Little Melody”
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<https://youtu.be/x6aNPsjNwFo>

Week 3 F 09/19

Afterlives of Mario

- Andrew Schartmann, *Koji Kondo's Super Mario Bros. Soundtrack* [Excerpt]
 - “The Ludomusicology Research Group” (interview with Mark Sweeney)
 - Ludomusicology website
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Week 4 F 09/26

Toys

- Roger Moseley and Aya Saiki, "Nintendo's Art of Musical Play"

https://youtu.be/49ZK_EVWIBM

<https://youtu.be/porGUuyxvJ4>

Soundtracks group 1

<https://youtu.be/xvrlcoLBW0o>

Week 5 F 10/03

MIDI

- Winifred Phillips, "Interactive Music in Games: Music Data" (in *A Composer's Guide to Game Music*)
- Thom Holmes, Thom, and Terence M. Pender, "MIDI" in *Electronic and Experimental Music: Technology, Music, and Culture*
- Peter Kirn, "MIDI Piano Roll Turned Into Platformer: Adventures of General MIDI" (*Create Digital Music*, 27 May 2014)

<https://youtu.be/eQSAwuRf-Ng>

Soundtracks group 2

Week 6 F 10/10

Indie Game Music

Alex Kane, "Spending five years composing a game: The music from 'Below'" (*Polygon*, 24 December 2018)

- Jim Guthrie
- Lena Raine
- Will Bedford

https://youtu.be/1Br9tnV9j_0

<https://youtu.be/JDMWIMcV6Gc>

Soundtracks group 3

Week 7 F 10/17

II. PLATFORMS

Commodore

- Collins, Karen. "'Loops and Bloops': Music of the Commodore 64 Games"
- C64 history (Jahtari site)
- Gamebase64 (C64 games)
- Commodore 64 (portal)
- HVSC website
- Viva Amiga: The Documentary (2017)
- cTrix, A for Amiga
- cTrix modules

<https://youtu.be/O2rlvAyj2PA>

https://youtu.be/nqsrWwa_GZE

<https://youtu.be/6BOXR008V2I>

<https://youtu.be/YsorGbKwNLA>

Soundtracks group 4

Week 8 F 10/24

Famicom

- Nathan Altice, “[Family Computer](#)” (*I Am Error*, chapter 0)
- Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, “[Afterword on Platform Studies](#)”
- [My Famicase Exhibition](#)

DEADLINE: Ludomusicology research report

Week 9 F 10/31

III. SCENES

Chipmusic

- McLaren, Malcolm. “[8-bit Punk](#)” <https://youtu.be/iRkZcTg1JWU>
 - Driscoll, Kevin, and Joshua Diaz. “[Endless Loops: A Brief History of Chiptunes](#)”
 - Carlsson, Anders. “[Chip Music: Low-Tech Data Music Sharing](#)”
 - Israel Márquez, “[Playing new music with old games: the chiptune subculture](#)”
 - [Moleman 2—Demoscene—The Art of the Algorithms](#) (YouTube)
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Week 10 F 11/07

8bit Reggae

- Nicolas Nova, [8-Bit Reggae: Collision and Creolization](#)

Soundtracks group 6

Week 11 F 11/14

Black MIDI

- Michael Connor, “[The Impossible Music of Black MIDI](#)”
- Martin Roberts, “[Beautiful Data: From the Touhou Project to Black MIDI](#)”

Soundtracks group 7

Week 12 F 11/21

Vocaloid

- Linh K. Le, "Examining the Rise of Hatsune Miku: The First International Virtual Idol"
- Peter Kirn, "With Japan's latest Vocaloid characters, another song from the future"
- [OpenUtau](#)

Soundtracks group 8

Week 13 F 11/28 NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 14 F 12/05

Scene Reports

DEADLINE: Scene report paper

Week 15

W 12/10 Last day of classes

R 12/11 Reading Day

F 12/12-18 Exam period

Policies

Late Policy

Assignments that are late will lose 1/2 of a grade per day, beginning at the end of class and including weekends and holidays. This means that a paper, which would have received an A if it was on time, will receive a B+ the next day, B- for two days late, and so on. Time management, preparation for our meetings, and timely submission of your work comprise a significant dimension of your professionalism. As such, your work must be completed by the beginning of class on the day it is due. If you have a serious problem that makes punctual submission impossible, you must discuss this matter with me before the due date so that we can make alternative arrangements. Because you are given plenty of time to complete your work, and major due dates are given to you well in advance, last minute problems should not preclude handing in assignments on time.

Mandatory Reporter

Fitchburg State University is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and harassment. Please be aware all FSU faculty members are "mandatory reporters," which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I am legally required to share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, FSU has staff members trained to support you. If you

or someone you know has been impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, please visit <http://fitchburgstate.edu/titleix> to access information about university support and resources.

Health

Health Services

Hours: Monday-Friday 8:30AM-5PM Location: Ground Level of Russell Towers (across from the entrance of Holmes Dining Hall) Phone: (978) 665-3643/3894

Counseling Services

The Counseling Services Office offers a range of services including individual, couples and group counseling, crisis intervention, psychoeducational programming, outreach ALTERNATIVE ECOSYSTEMS, and community referrals. Counseling services are confidential and are offered at no charge to all enrolled students. Staff at Counseling Services are also available for consultation to faculty, staff and students. Counseling Services is located in the Hammond, 3rd Floor, Room 317.

Fitchburg Anti-Violence Education (FAVE)

FAVE collaborates with a number of community partners (e.g., YWCA Domestic Violence Services, Pathways for Change) to meet our training needs and to link survivors with community based resources. This site also features [resources](#) for help or information about dating violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship or has been a victim of sexual assault, there are many places to go for help. Many can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. On campus, free and confidential support is provided at both Counseling Services and Health Services.

Community Food Pantry Food insecurity is a growing issue and it certainly can affect student learning. The ability to have access to nutritious food is incredibly vital. The Falcon Bazaar, located in Hammond G 15, is stocked with food, basic necessities, and can provide meal swipes to support all Fitchburg State students experiencing food insecurity for a day or a semester.

The university continues to partner with Our Father's House to support student needs and access to food and services. All Fitchburg State University students are welcome at the Our Father's House Community Food Pantry. This Pantry is located at the Faith Christian Church at 40 Boutelle St., Fitchburg, MA and is open from 5-7pm. Each "household" may shop for nutritious food once per month by presenting a valid FSU ID.

Academic Integrity

The University "Academic Integrity" policy can be found online at [http:// www.fitchburgstate.edu/offices-services-directory/office-of-student-conductmediation-education/academic-integrity/](http://www.fitchburgstate.edu/offices-services-directory/office-of-student-conductmediation-education/academic-integrity/). Students are expected to do their own work. Plagiarism and cheating are inexcusable. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating will automatically result in a zero on the assignment and may be reported the Office of Student and Academic Life at the discretion of the instructor.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to: - Using papers or work from another class. - Using another student's paper or work from any class. - Copying work or a paper from the Internet. - The egregious lack of citing sources or documenting research.

If you're not clear on what is or is not plagiarism, ASK. The BEST case scenario if caught is a zero on that assignment, and ignorance of what does or does not count is not an excuse. That being said, I'm a strong supporter of Fair Use doctrine. Just attribute what you use—and, again, ASK if there's any doubt.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with the instructor, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform the faculty member as soon as possible.

Technology

At some point during the semester you will likely have a problem with technology. Your laptop will crash; your iPad battery will die; a recording you make will disappear; you will accidentally delete a file; the wireless will go down at a crucial time. These, however, are inevitabilities of life, not emergencies. Technology problems are not excuses for unfinished or late work. Bad things may happen, but you can protect yourself by doing the following:

- Plan ahead: A deadline is the last minute to turn in material. You can start—and finish—early, particularly if challenging resources are required, or you know it will be time consuming to finish this project.
 - Save work early and often: Think how much work you do in 10 minutes. I auto save every 2 minutes.
 - Make regular backups of files in a different location: Between Box, Google Drive, Dropbox, and iCloud, you have ample places to store and backup your materials. Use them.
 - Save drafts: When editing, set aside the original and work with a copy.
 - Practice safe computing: On your personal devices, install and use software to control viruses and malware.
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Grading

Grading for the course will follow the FSU grading policy below:

4.0: 95-100
3.7: 92-94
3.5: 89-91
3.3: 86-88
3.0: 83-85
2.7: 80-82

2.5: 77-79

2.3: 74-76

2.0: 71-73

0.0: < 70

Academic Resources

[Writing Center](#)

[Academic Policies](#)

[Disability Services](#)

[Fitchburg State Alert system for emergencies, snow closures/delays, and faculty absences](#)

[University Career Services](#)
