

HISTORY OF INTERACTIVE MEDIA & GAMES



Fitchburg State University
Communications Media Department
COMM 2003
3 credits
Fri 5 Sept—Wed 10 Dec 2025
Conlon Hall 341
Instructor: Dr. Martin Roberts
✉ | [m](#) | [r](#)

"Shibuya Crossing Walkabout," Ben Jones ([Polyducks](#))

Overview

This course examines the history and historiography of interactive media. Students will explore what interactivity has been, is and might become. This class provides a wide-ranging history of the uses, effects and design of interactive media from their beginnings to the present. Students will study the history of the functions and forms of interactive systems thereby better equipping them as users as well as potential designers of interactive media. This course is required for majors and for game design majors. ART. Prerequisite(s): ENGL 1100

Objectives

Sources

- Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort. *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*. MIT Press, 2009.
- Jesper Juul. *Too Much Fun: The Five Lives of the Commodore 64 Computer*. MIT Press, 2024.
- Thomas M. Malaby. *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life*. Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Nick Montfort. *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction*. MIT Press, 2005.
- Robert Pfaller. *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- Allucquère Rosanne Stone. *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. MIT Press, 1995.
- Sherry Turkle. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Simon & Schuster, 1995
- Michele White. *Touch Screen Theory: Digital Devices and Feelings*. MIT Press, 2022.

Assignments / Evaluation

- **Commentary** (Blackboard or Canvas, weekly, 10 required: 100-250-word response to reading/screening assignments): 30%
- **Interactions Panel** (in-class, from week 4; 2-3 students, 15-20 minutes, with accompanying materials, joint grade): 15%
- **Interactions Analysis Paper** (1,000 words / 4 pages double-spaced; due one week after in-class presentation): 20%
- **Special Interest Group (SIG) Paper** (open topic) (1,000 words, 4 pages double-spaced, not including bibliography, letter grade): 20%
- **Special Interest Group (SIG) Presentation** (in-class): 15%

Schedule

Week 1 F 09/05

Introduction: Graceful Degradation

Sandy Stone, "Sex, Death, and Machinery" (in *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*)

Week 2 F 09/12

Adventure Games

- Nick Montfort, "**Adventure and Its Ancestors**" (*Twisty Little Passages*, ch. 3)
 - Lebling, P. David, Marc S. Blank, and Timothy A. Anderson, "**Zork: A Computerized Fantasy Simulation Game**" (*IEEE Computer*, April 1979, pp. 51–59)
-

Week 3 F 09/19

Hyperfiction

- Nick Montfort, "**Zork and other Mainframe Works**" (*Twisty Little Passages*, ch. 4)
 - TWINE
-

Week 4* F 09/26

Chatbots: A Brief History

- Sherry Turkle, selected chs. from *Life on the Screen*
- ELIZA

Interactions Panel 1

Week 5 F 10/03

Habitat: Democracy in Cyberspace

- Chip Morningstar and F. Randall Farmer, "[The Lessons of Lucasfilm's Habitat](#)" (in *Cyberspace: First Steps*, edited by Michael Benedikt, MIT Press, 1991, pp. 273–300)
- Dibbell, Julian. "[A Rape in Cyberspace.](#)" *The Village Voice*, December 21, 1993.
- Martin Roberts et al., *Democracy in Cyberspace*. MIT Communications Forum, 1994.

Interactions Panel 2

Week 6 F 10/10

Myst

Reading TBA

Interactions Panel 3

Week 7 F 10/17

Second Lives

- Thomas Malaby, selected chs. from *Making Virtual Worlds*

Interactions Panel 4

Week 8 F 10/24

Infinite Database

- *Cyberpunk 2077*

Interactions Panel 5

Week 9 F 10/31

VRChat

- Screening: *We Met in Virtual Reality* (documentary, Joe Hunting, 2022)

Interactions Panel 6

Week 10 F 11/07

Interpassive Aggressive

Robert Pfaller, selected chs. from *Interpassivity*

Interactions Panel 7

Week 11 F 11/14

Tap, Pinch, Swipe: Touchscreens

Michele White, selected chs. from *Touch Screen Theory*

Interactions Panel 8

Week 12 F 11/21

Audioreactive: Generative Interactivity

DayDream and other generative tools

Week 13 F 11/28

NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 14 F 12/05

SIG Presentations

DEADLINE: Special Interest Group (SIG) presentations

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 ECOSYSTEMSs, 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/>. 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.
-

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](#)
