

Anthropology 140: Games and Society

— COURSE SYLLABUS —

Section 001, Spring 2020 – Face-to-Face Course

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30 pm – 4:45 pm

CLASS LOCATION: Sabin G28

INSTRUCTOR: Thomas Malaby (he/him/his)

Office: Sabin 325 Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3 pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as an introduction to the place of games in human society. With the games industry now vast (its more than \$130 billion in annual revenue makes it approximately equal to the film industry), its power to command the daily attention of increasing number of human beings worldwide is undeniable. To understand where that power comes from, and what is it doing, this course examines several facets of this phenomenon, including: the anthropological foundations of why human beings play, what makes games distinctive as an arena for playfulness, to what extent games are used by human institutions to accomplish certain goals, and how games reflect and engage with other meaningful aspects of human life.

To do this, the course approaches games themselves as artifacts – that is, as things that people make. But, importantly, they are not simply designed and built – in a way, they are performed. That is, games (like music, or theatre), exist only as they are played, and this means, among other things, that they are always at least potentially in the process of changing, much like NBA basketball changed in the 1970s when certain players took it “above the rim.” This processual nature of games creates real challenges for our efforts to interpret and understand them, as we must always keep in view the changing human practices and meanings they generate.

In order to introduce you to how scholars in the social sciences are tackling this challenge, this course is structured to ask four questions about games: **What** is a game? **Why** do we play them? **Where** do games take place, under what kinds of institutional control? **Who** are “gamers,” and how does exploring that rather new social category open up broader questions about identity, privilege, and meaning? These questions serve to organize our introduction, and consider in a broader way how to make sense of games’ increasing economic and social power. We may better understand the power of games, this course suggests, by recognizing that they are a meeting point of several phenomena, including: (1) the human tendency both to notice patterns and to seek to influence them through our own actions, (2) the potential to find in any outcome of a game something meaningful, and (3) the usefulness of games for human institutions (governments, businesses, families, schools) in their capacity to incent and direct human behavior.

At the end of this course, you should have gained a broader understanding of why games command human attention and for what purposes they can be used, as well as to what extent they are sites for potent contests not only over who wins and loses, but even over meaningful identities and social action.

This class will be taught in lecture format, combined with some periods of discussion, media viewing, and other less formal engagement, including playing select games in small groups.

COURSE GOALS

After completing this course, a successful student will be able to:

- Understand basic anthropological theories of play and human attention
- Discuss games from a scholarly, critical perspective (as opposed to the perspective of a player or a fan), both orally and in writing
- Recognize the relationships between games and the institutions that sponsor or create them, and
- Examine claims about identity and meaning as they relate to games, including claims about skill, achievement, fair play, and inclusion, among others.

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course. Having played games (online or offline!) will be helpful background.

COURSE TEXTS & TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Access to the campus course management software system (Canvas) is required for this course. Readings for this course will all be available online on Canvas (or sent out over email); there is no cost for these readings. If you have any problems accessing the course readings, let me know as soon as possible. Apart from online access to our Canvas site, including for these materials, there are no technology requirements for this course.

STUDENT EFFORT

This class meets twice weekly for 75 minutes, for a total of 37.5 hours of required lecture time. You should expect to take at least 60 hours over the course of the semester reading the textbook and other required texts. There are also 3 out-of-class assignments which you should expect to require at least 12 hours each. You should reserve at least 13.5 hours to study for and take the final exam. All told, this class is likely to take at least 147 hours of your time.

Course Component	Required Time in Hours
Lectures	37.5
Course Readings/Viewings	60
Out-of-class Assignments	36
Final Exam & Prep	13.5
Total	147

Important: These estimates are each the minimum for an average student. You may need to spend more time developing your academic skills and knowledge in this field to achieve your goals.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The grading scale and assignment percentages tables below provide at-a-glance information on how your work will be assessed and each component's contribution to your final grade. Be sure to read the subsequent description of each carefully.

GRADING SCALE

Grade	Range
A	94.0 – 100.0
A-	90.0 – 93.9
B+	87.0 – 89.9
B	84.0 – 86.9
B-	80.0 – 83.9
C+	77.0 – 79.9
C	74.0 – 76.9
C-	70.0 – 73.9
D+	67.0 – 69.9
D	64.0 – 66.9
D-	60.0 – 63.9
F	< 60.0

ASSIGNMENT PERCENTAGES

Assignment	Percentage
In-class Writing	25% (5% x 5)
Critical Essay 1	15%
Critical Essay 2	15%
Critical Essay 3	15%
Final Exam	30%
Total	100%

Reading & Other Media

For each course meeting you are expected to have read, viewed, played, and/or listened to the assigned reading or other media, available on or through Canvas. In written pages, your average assigned reading per week is approximately 50 pages. Attend to this material thoroughly and critically, taking notes and preparing any questions or comments you may have. While this preparation is not graded directly, you will periodically be asked to complete in-class writing exercises (see below) based on your knowledge of this course material.

In-Class Writing

At six of our class meetings over the course of the semester, without prior notification, you will be asked to complete a brief, hand-written in-class assignment, responding to some aspects of the course material (reading or other media, see above) for that day. These exercises will *not* be difficult – they are intended to ensure that everyone is prepared for the day's lecture and/or discussion; because of this, they will be graded on a simple check system. These assignments cannot be made up. I will drop one of these assignments when calculating their contribution to your final grade. [5% of final grade per assignment, 25% total.]

Critical Essays (3)

Students will write three papers in this class, each responding to some aspect of our explorations of games and their relationship to society. More details about specific essays will be made available in class.

1. *Games and Play*: Summarize in your own words how different scholars we have read make sense of play and being human. The full prompt is on Canvas. [Due Week 6]
2. *Games as Artifacts*: Consider one game with which you are familiar and write a paper that considers the game's structure as a product of design and/or tradition. The full prompt is on Canvas. [Due Week 9]
3. *Games and Context*: Pick one game, beyond those discussed in the course material, and discuss how it connects to institutions in and around it. The full prompt is on Canvas. [Due Week 12]

Each essay should be around 800 words in length. Use a standard, business-like font, size 10 or 12 pt. At the top of the paper, be sure to include your name and page number. Including a title for the essay is optional (but recommended!). You may include any images you deem necessary.

Your essay should not have footnotes or a references section. If you quote one of the readings, use the format (Turkle 1995) to cite it in text. If you refer to another work (which is not required but is welcome), cite it in text using a format similar to (Ross, J., 2011, "Secrets of citing references", Journal of Made-Up Papers).

All essays are due at **12 midnight** on the specified date. Essays should be uploaded to the appropriate Canvas drop box in **.pdf** format. [15% of your final grade per essay, 45% total.]

Final Exam

Your last assignment for the class will be a final exam. The format will be a mix of identifications, short answers, and an essay. In the final week of class one course meeting will be devoted to a review in preparation for the final exam. [30% of your final grade.]

COURSE POLICIES

No Griefing

This class may involve in-class, or online, discussion of topics on which you and your classmates may have differences in opinion. Please be respectful of others at all times. Although we are interested in seeking out assumptions and flaws in arguments, we are also all here to help each other learn.

Discussion Etiquette

Some of class will be spent talking about games and practicing analyzing them as a group. As students in this class, you are responsible for participating in these discussions—for sharing your ideas, experiences, and views with the rest of us. At the same time, allow other students to contribute as well, and be willing to consider alternate points of view.

Email Etiquette

When emailing me, please try to use proper grammar and make sure to sign your emails. This will help me to better answer any questions. Also include “Anthro 140” in the subject line to make sure I see your email!

Course Announcements

I may send out course announcements by email to the official course mailing list, so you should check your email daily. Note that this mailing list goes to the email address that the registrar has for you (your UWM ID).

Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory – you will get the most out of in-class discussions, and the lectures will contain material not otherwise covered in course readings. While attendance will not be taken, the in-class assignments are unscheduled, and as a consequence your mandatory attendance is checked by the possibility of missing an in-class assignment.

Technology In Class

Please turn off all cell phones/pagers/etc. before the beginning of each class. No computers or other digital devices may be used for any purpose in class, even for taking notes, without special permission granted by the instructor, based on certification from the student accessibility office.

Late Work

Essays turned in late will lose one third of a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B) for every day past the deadline. Papers will not be accepted more than 3 days after the original deadline.

UWM Policies

Please note that the Dept. of Anthropology subscribes to UWM's Uniform Syllabus Policy regarding student rights and responsibilities. The complete Uniform Syllabus Policy may be accessed online at the following url: www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf. Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are not sure what constitutes either, refer to plagiarism.org's helpful website: <https://www.plagiarism.org/understanding-plagiarism>. The simple rule is: do not claim anyone else's words or ideas as your own. If you're in doubt, come talk to me in advance.

Special Accommodations

Any student who feels he or she needs an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Student Accessibility Office as soon as possible for support, and also contact me privately to discuss specific needs.

I encourage all students having difficulty, whether or not due to a disability, to consult privately with me at any time.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**(Note: Canvas has readings and assignments organized for you.
In-class writing assignments [see above] are unscheduled.)**

– Introduction –

Week 1 – The Tutorial

Tuesday Lecture (1/21): Course Overview & Expectations

Reading: Syllabus and Canvas Course Information Documents
Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play”

Thursday Lecture (1/23): Games and Us

Reading: Peter Gray, “Hunter-Gatherers and Play”

– Unit I: Why Do We Play? –

Week 2 – Create Your Character

Tuesday Lecture (1/28): Human and Animal Play

Reading: Konrad Lorenz, “On Feline Play”

Thursday Lecture (1/30): Play & Human Development

Reading: Peter Smith & Anthony Pellegrini, “Learning through Play”

Week 3 – Leveling Up

Tuesday Lecture (2/4): Attention & Learning

Reading: M. Csikszentmihalyi & Stith Bennett, “An Exploratory Model of Play”
Jenova Chen, “Flow in Games”

Thursday Lecture (2/6): Puzzles & Problems

Reading: Stephen Miller, “Ends, Means, and Galumphing”

Week 4 – Choose Your Own Adventure

Tuesday Lecture (2/11): Make it Up as You Go Along: Contriving Play

Reading: Thomas Malaby, “Anthropology and Play”

Thursday Lecture (2/13): Playing Culture

Assignments: 1st Critical Essay Assigned

– Unit II: What’s in a Game? A Chinese Case Study –

Week 5 – Not All Fun & ...

Tuesday Lecture (2/18): Ante Up: Games Beyond Play

Reading: Thomas Malaby, “Beyond Play”

Thursday Lecture (2/20): Sh*t Happens: Life & Contingencies

Week 6 – Games & Ethics in Context I

– *Essay #1 Due Sunday 2/23 by Midnight* –

Tuesday Lecture (2/25)

Reading: Ellen Oxfeld, “Profit, Loss, and Fate”

Thursday Lecture (2/27)

Week 7 – Games & Ethics in Context II

Tuesday Lecture (3/3)

Reading: Hans Steinmüller, “The Moving Boundaries of Social Heat”

Thursday Lecture (3/5)

Assignments: 2nd Critical Essay Assigned

– **Unit III: Where Are We Gaming?** –

Week 8 – Power Up: Video Games & Cultural Contexts

Tuesday Lecture (3/10): Culturally Charged: China – Postscript

Reading: Julian Dibbell, “The Life of a Chinese Gold Farmer”

Thursday Lecture (3/12): Culturally Charged: South Korea

Reading: Florence Chee, “The Games We Play Online and Offline: Making *Wang-tta* in Korea”

~ **UWM SPRING RECESS** ~

Week 9 – Loot: Games & Virtual Economies

Tuesday Lecture (3/24): Games and Nation-States, Part 1: Olympian Achievements

Reading: Julian Dibbell, *Play Money*, Selection 1

Thursday Lecture (3/26): Games and Nation-States, Part 2: Civics Lessons

Reading: Julian Dibbell, *Play Money*, Selection 2

Week 10 – Just a Game: Surrounded by Institutions

– *Essay #2 Due Sunday 3/22 by Midnight* –

Tuesday Lecture(3/31): House Rules, Part 1: Sandboxes & Playhouses

Reading: T.L. Taylor, *Watch Me Play*, Selection 1

Thursday Lecture (4/2): House Rules, Part 2: Institutions & Labor

Reading: T.L. Taylor, *Watch Me Play*, Selection 2

– Unit IV: Who Games? –

Week 11 – Making a Gamer

Tuesday Lecture (4/7): Exploits & Cheats

Reading: Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*, Selection 1

Thursday Lecture (4/9): Disruptive Play, Disrupted Selves?

Reading: Mia Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*, Selection 2

Assignment: 3rd Critical Essay Assigned

Week 12 – Multiplayer

Tuesday Lecture (4/14): Regulating Play: Boundary-Setting

Reading: TBA

Thursday Lecture (4/16): Regulating Play: GamerGate as Symptom

Reading: A. Shaw, “Putting the Gay in Games”

Week 13 – Outplaying

Tuesday Lecture (4/21): Contest in the Making: Queering Game Production

Reading: Anna Anthropy, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*, Selection

Thursday Lecture (4/23): Engines of Meaning: Games and Context

Reading: Bonnie Ruberg, *Videogames have always been Queer*, Selection

Week 14 – Elsweyr

– *Essay #3 Due Sunday 4/26 by Midnight* –

Tuesday Lecture (4/28): Games in New Places

Reading: TBA

Thursday Lecture (4/30): Checkpoint: Looking Forward

Reading: TBA

– Conclusion –

Week 15 – Conclusion

Tuesday Lecture (5/5): Press W

Assignments: Review Lecture Notes, Prepare Questions

Thursday Lecture (5/7): Review Lecture for Final Exam

Assignments: Review Lecture Notes

Final Exam – Date & Time: Thursday, May 14th, 3:00-5:00 Location: Sabin G33

READING & VIEWING LIST

- Anthropy, Anna. 2012. Selections from *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Dropouts, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You are Taking Back an Art Form*. Seven Stories Press.
- Chee, Florence. 2006. The Games We Play Online and Offline: Making Wang-tta in Korea. *Popular Communication* 4(3): 225-239.
- Chen, Jenova. 2007. Flow in Games (and Everything Else). *Communications of the ACH* 50(4): 31-34.
- Consalvo, Mia. 2007. Selections from *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Video Games*. MIT Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Stith Bennett. 1971. *American Anthropologist* 73(1): 45-58.
- Dibbell, Julian. 2007. Selections from *Play Money*. Basic Books.
- Festa, Paul. "Mahjong agonistics and the political public in Taiwan: Fate, mimesis, and the martial imaginary." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2007): 93-125.
- Geertz, Clifford. 2005. Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Daedalus* 134(4): 56-86.
- Greenspan, Bud. 1986. *16 Days of Glory* (film). Cappy Productions.
- Lorenz, Konrad. 2002 (1954). On Feline Play. *Man Meets Dog*. Routledge.
- Malaby, Thomas. 2007. Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games. *Games & Culture* 2(2): 95-113.
- Malaby, Thomas. 2009. Anthropology and Play: The Contours of Playful Experience. *New Literary History* 40: 205-218.
- Miller, Stephen. 1973. Ends, Means, and Galumphing: Some Leitmotifs of Play. *American Anthropologist* 75(1): 87-98.
- Oxford Basu, Ellen. 1991. Profit, Loss, and Fate: The Entrepreneurial Ethic and the Practice of Gambling in an Overseas Chinese Community. *Modern China* 17(2): 227-259.
- Parrott, W. G., & Gleitman, H. 1989. Infants' expectations in play: The joy of peek-a-boo. *Cognition and Emotion* 3(4): 291-311.
- Ruberg, Bonnie. 2019. Selections from *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. MIT Press.
- Shaw, A. 2009. Putting the Gay in Games: Cultural Production and GLBT Content in Video Games. *Games and Culture* 4(3): 228-253.
- Steinmüller, Hans. 2011. The Moving Boundaries of Social Heat: Gambling in Rural China. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17(2): 263-280.
- Taylor, T.L. 2009. Selections from *Play Between Worlds*. MIT Press.
- Taylor, T.L. 2018. Selections from *Watch Me Play*. MIT Press.