

GAME STUDIES

Instructor: **Charles Pratt**

Overview:

Games are as old as human society, if not older, and the past thirty years has seen an explosion of creativity from this once 'invisible' art form. With the popularization of the computer, games have come to occupy a larger and larger part of the mind-share of modern culture. This in turn has inspired the range of voices that have stepped forward to examine the phenomenon of games and its artifacts. In this class we will survey the major work that has been done to understand games, both digital and traditional, in the past sixty years. Starting with foundational texts by historian Johan Huizinga and sociologist Roger Caillois, up to the present day where movements like 'New Games Journalism' seek to place games in the more personal context of a single human life. While the class seeks to understand games from theoretical and historical perspectives, the focus will be on students bringing their own interpretations to bear. Through short essays and presentations students will connect theory to real world examples and develop their own opinions and perspectives through discussion with other students. This class is for anyone interested in understanding the history of games and the enormous world of thought that surrounds them.

Class Structure:

The class will be broken into two parts. For the first part, we will discuss the reading for the week. For the second part of the class, we will discuss a selection of micro papers from the students.

Assignments:

MICRO PAPERS

Every week each student will be required to play one game, any game, and write 300 words about their experience. The game can be as simple as Tic-Tac-Toe or Sudoku, or as complex as Chess or Basketball, and the micro paper can be as specific or as general as the author wishes. I will select a few of these micro papers each week and their discussion will make up the latter part of the next class.

FIRST PAPER

Student's first paper will be due during the 7th week of class and should be a response, in agreement or disagreement, to one of the class's readings up to that point. The paper should be between 1500 and 2500 words, double-spaced.

SECOND PAPER

The second paper is much like the first. It will be due on the 14th and final week of class. The paper itself should be an attempt to answer one of the 'big questions' that we will develop in class and should clock-in at around 2500 words, double-spaced.

ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION

Because this is a seminar the quality of the class is closely linked to the contributions of every student. Each student will be expected to read the material for each class and participate in the discussion of both the reading and the student's papers.

Grading:

- 25% - MICRO PAPERS
- 25% - PAPER ONE
- 25% - PAPER TWO
- 25% - ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION

Schedule:

WEEK 1

We will spend our time during the first week introducing ourselves and going over our syllabus.

WEEK 2

- Johann Huizinga: *Homo Ludens* (p. 1-13 & p. 195-213)

WEEK 3

- Roger Caillois: *Man, Play, and Games* (p. 3-36)

WEEK 4

- Brian Sutton-Smith: *Ambiguity of Play* (p. 1-17)

WEEK 5

- Clark C. Abt: *Serious Games* (p. 3-34 & p. 103-109)

WEEK 6

- Richard Bartle: *Hearts, Club, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs*
- David Sirlin: *Playing to Win* (p. 89-98)

WEEK 7

- Marie-Laure Ryan: *Beyond Myth and Metaphor*
- Jesper Juul: *Games Telling Stories?*

WEEK 8

- Stephen Sniderman: *Unwritten Rules*
- Linda Hughes: *Beyond the Rules of the Game: Why are Rooie Rules Nice?*

WEEK 9

- Ian Bogost: *Unit Operations* (p. 55-71 & p. 111-127)

WEEK 10

- Alex Galloway: *Gaming* (p. 85-106)
- Chris Sullentrop: *Playing With Our Heads*

WEEK 11

- MacKenzie Wark: *Gamer Theory* (para. 26-50 & para. 101-125)

WEEK 12

- Thomas M. Malaby: *Beyond Play: A New Approach to Games*

WEEK 13

- Tim Rogers: *Life, Non-Warp*
- Alex Kierkegaard: *Arcade Culture*

WEEK 14

- Nis Bojin: *Language Games/Game Languages*