

## INST 1550-5: Social and Cultural Impacts of Video Games

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**2 CREDITS, PASS/FAIL, Mondays 6-8pm**

**Overview:** From its development in the 1970s through today, the video game industry has exhibited extraordinary growth. The industry grosses billions of dollars a year and recent reports indicate that over 70% of the US population plays video games at least occasionally. The MMORPG World of Warcraft alone has over 11 million monthly subscribers. As the comic below points out with its humorous reference to early Nintendo games, it is impossible to deny that the presence and popularity of video games has had extensive effects on our society and culture. This course attempts to explore a number of these effects briefly and provide students with the opportunity to explore their particular interests in greater depth with their final projects. Each week's readings and discussion will cover a different topic, ranging from social issues like gender roles and interpretations of race to the ways in which video games either combat or reinforce broader cultural power structures like education and religion.



### **Grading:**

Participation/Attendance- 10%

Comment Papers- 40%

Paper Presentations- 10%

Final Paper- 40%

Comment papers—Students will be responsible for completing five 1-2 page papers discussing their responses to the reading. These papers will be graded on a credit/no credit basis and a student will only receive credit if their writing demonstrates that they have done the required reading and if five papers are completed by the end of the semester. However, students are free to choose any five weeks in which to write their responses.

Paper Presentations—The last two classes of the term will be devoted to 5-10 minute presentations from each student regarding the subject of their final paper. Students will be expected to explain their thesis and supporting evidence, as well as indicate how their

exploration goes beyond earlier class discussions

Final Paper—This assignment will allow students to explore their particular areas of interest in greater depth. They will be expected to research beyond the required reading of the class in order to complete a 5-6 page paper on a topic of their choosing. The paper must demonstrate an academic basis and present a well-supported and well-founded argument.

Note-- INST courses are taught only on the CR/NC basis and a student may count no more than 3.0 credits of INST course work among the 120 credits offered for the B.A. and B.S. in the College.

### **Texts**

Cassell, Justine, and Henry Jenkins, eds. From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games. Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1998. Print.

Meadows, Mark Stephen. I. Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life. New York: New Riders, 2008. Print.

The Wired Homestead: An MIT Press Sourcebook on the Internet and the Family. New York: The MIT, 2003. Print.

Wolf, Mark J. P., and Bernard Perron. The Video Game Theory Reader. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

### **Schedule**

Jan. 20- Intro to class and topics- Why do you think video games are significant to society as a whole?

Jan. 27 and Feb. 3- Community-building or isolating?

Readings: The Wired Homestead Ch. 17-“Virtuality and its Discontents” by Sherry Turkle

“Computer Games Drive Social Ties”- BBC News

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7619372.stm>

“Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?” By Alexandra Alter-

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118670164592393622.html?mod=pj\\_main\\_hs\\_coll](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118670164592393622.html?mod=pj_main_hs_coll)

“Problems with the Concept of Video Game Addiction” by Richard T. A. Wood

Feb. 10- Race within games

Readings: *SIMILE: Studies In Media & Information Literacy Education* article

“Live in Your World, Play in Ours” by David Leonard

“Walk Like an Orc, Talk Like an Orc” by Chris Ritter

“Jade is Black? Racial Ambiguity in Games” by Chris Kohler-

[http://www.wired.com/gamelife/2007/02/jades\\_black\\_rac/](http://www.wired.com/gamelife/2007/02/jades_black_rac/)

Feb. 17- Globalization and colonial behavior

Readings: CAD Comic and blog entry- <http://www.ctrlaltdel-online.com/comic.php?d=20090907> and <http://www.ctrlaltdel-online.com/news.php?i=1929>

- “World of Warcraft”- <http://kotaku.com/148839/world-of-whitecraft>  
*Journal of Communication Inquiry* article “Playing at Colonization” by Shoshana Magnet
- Feb. 24- Sexism- Females as Characters  
 Readings: *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* pg. 59-60 “Characters”  
 “Our Princess is in Another Castle: Feminist Media Theory and Female Video Game Characters” by Amanda Cote  
*Mass Communication and Society* article “Still a Man’s Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games” by James D. Ivory
- Mar. 3- Sexism- Females as Gamers  
 Readings: *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat* Chapter 1 “Chess for Girls” (pg. 2-36) and Chapter 14 “Voices from the Combat Zone” (pg. 328-341)  
 “Gamer Girls vs. Female Gamers” by Owen Good- <http://kotaku.com/5074007/the-difference-between-female-gamers-and-gamer-girls>
- Mar. 10- Spring Break- NO CLASS
- Mar. 17- Video Games and Violence  
 Readings: *Aggression and Violent Behavior* article “Video Game Violence: A Review of the Empirical Literature” by Karen E. Dill and Jody C. Dill  
 “Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions” by Craig A. Anderson- <http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html>  
 “The Link Between Video Games and Violence” by John M Grohol PsyD- <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2008/05/17/the-link-between-video-games-and-violence/>
- Mar. 24- Video Games in Education  
 Readings: *Science* article “The Scientific Research Potential of Virtual Worlds” by William Sims Bainbridge  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/317/5837/472>  
 “PC Games and the Teaching of History”- Andrew McMichael- <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/40.2/mcmichael.html>  
*Nature* article “Action video game modifies visual selective attention” by C. Shawn Green & Daphne Bavelier- <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v423/n6939/full/nature01647.html>
- Mar. 31 and Apr. 7- Religion and Video Games  
 Readings: “The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change” by Stig Hjarvard  
 Winter-een-mas- <http://www.wintereenmas.com/> and <http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Winter-een-mas/id/1981951>  
 “God in the Console” by Tom Loftus- <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3078392/>  
 “Halo 3 Used to Recruit Christians” by Joe Williams- <http://www.bit->

[tech.net/news/gaming/2007/10/08/halo\\_3\\_used\\_to\\_recruit\\_christians/1](http://tech.net/news/gaming/2007/10/08/halo_3_used_to_recruit_christians/1)

List of Religious References in Halo-

[http://halo.wikia.com/wiki/List\\_of\\_References\\_to\\_Religion\\_in\\_Halo](http://halo.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_References_to_Religion_in_Halo)

“The Values in Video Games”-

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week639/cover.html>

Apr. 14- Reality vs. Virtual Reality

Readings:

XKCD Comic “Aeris Dies”- <http://xkcd.com/299/>

I. Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life by Mark Stephen Meadows pg. 69-88

“Video Games Aren't Real Life, Even For NASCAR Drivers” by Mike Fahey-

<http://kotaku.com/5056328/video-games-arent-real-life-even-for-nascar-drivers>

“Video Games vs. The Real World” by Charlie Barratt-

<http://www.gamesradar.com/f/videogames-versus-the-real-world/a-2009021811152244033>

Apr. 21 and Apr. 28- Presentations of final projects