

CMS.300 / CMS.841 -- Introduction to Videogame Theory
(HASS-H, Elective)
Fall 2013

Mon 11-12:30, room: 26-168

Wed 11-12:30, rooms: 26-168 & 26-142

Instructors: Mikael Jakobsson (mjson@mit.edu) & T.L. Taylor (tltaylor@mit.edu).

Office hours are by appointment.

Course website: <https://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/CMS/fa13/CMS.300/>

Course Content & Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to the academic study of video games. Students read and discuss a substantial number of scholarly texts, applying the theories and thoughts from these sources in the criticism and analysis of video games. After successful completion of the course the student should:

- be familiar with the core areas of the academic field of game studies,
- demonstrate knowledge about the history and emergence of the academic study of video games,
- be able to discuss and explain central concepts within the field,
- be familiar with some of the major debates and developments during the last decade,
- display the ability to formulate video game analysis and criticism orally and in writing within given time frames and maintaining academic standards.

Learning Activities

The scheduled activities consist of lectures, seminar discussions, exercises, and presentations. Students will spend a significant amount of their study time reading academic papers and other texts. Students are also required to play a game for the game criticism essay assignment. The students will have to provide the necessary equipment to fulfill the assignment. Written assignments and oral presentations are a major part of the course. The Writing & Communication Center (<http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc>) provides free professional advice about all types of writing and speaking.

Readings and Other Study Materials

The readings for the course include a variety of academic works. Students are expected to read 3-4 papers (or equivalent) per week and be able to discuss the content, while continuously working on the assignments. The readings will all be made available as PDF files or web links on the course Stellar site.

Statement on Plagiarism from CMS guidelines

“Plagiarism - use of another's intellectual work without acknowledgement - is a serious offense. It is the policy of the CMS Faculty that students who plagiarize will receive an F in the subject, and that the instructor will forward the case to the Committee on Discipline. Full acknowledgement for all information obtained from sources outside the classroom must be clearly stated in all written work submitted. All ideas, arguments, and direct phrasings taken from someone else's work must be identified and properly footnoted. Quotations from other sources must be clearly marked as distinct from the student's own work. For further guidance on the proper forms of attribution, consult the style guides

available in the Writing and Communication Center (12-132) and the MIT Website on Plagiarism located at: <http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc/avoidingplagiarism>.”

Requirements and Grading

Students are graded based on the level to which they fulfill the learning objectives. Assessment is based on the mandatory class components with the following weights:

- Discussion seminar performance 20% of final grade
- Assignment 1: Short paper (1,000 words, due Sept 30) 20% of final grade
- Assignment 2: Game criticism essay (1,000 words, due Oct 28) 20% of final grade
- Assignment 3: Final paper & presentation (2,000 words, due Dec 11) 40% of final grade

Additional directions will be provided about the assignments. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned date. Extensions will only be given with a doctor or MIT student support services note. Exceptions can also be made for religious holidays but we must be notified in advance.

Please also note that discussion seminar participation and performance is a graded component of the course and you are expected to attend all of these sessions. Missing more than three seminars will result in an F for this component of the class.

CMS.841 students: Graduate students are expected to work at a level commensurate with advanced study and their final paper will be 4,000 words.

Electronics policy

Laptops/tablets are allowed in the class but we ask that you refrain from checking email, etc. Your focus should be on the course and discussion. We reserve the right to revisit this policy if needed.

Course Schedule

Please note readings are subject to change.

Week 1 (Sept 4) - Introduction Week (MJ & TLT)

Week 2 (Sept 9 & 11) - Play (MJ)

- **The Definition of Play, The Classification of Games** - Roger Caillois
- **Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon** - Johan Huizinga
- **Play and Ambiguity** - Brian Sutton-Smith
- **Play and Work** - Phillips Stevens Jr.

Week 3 (Sept 16 & 18) - Rules (MJ)

- **Players' Definitions of Cheating** - Mia Consalvo
- **Rules and Fiction** - Jesper Juul
- **Beyond the Rules of the Game** - Linda Hughes
- **Playing with the Rules** - Mikael Jakobsson

Week 4 (Sept 23 only, no seminar Sept 25) - Narratology & Ludology (TLT)

- **Genre Trouble** - Espen Aarseth
- **From Game-Story to Cyberdrama** - Janet Murray
- **Simulation versus Narrative** - Gonzalo Frasca
- **Game Design as Narrative Architecture** - Henry Jenkins

Week 5 (Sept 30 & Oct 2) - Social & Cultural (TLT)

- **The Assemblage of Play** - T.L. Taylor
- **Beyond Play** - Thomas Malaby
- **Beyond Cyberspatial Flaneurie** - Bart Simon

Assignment 1: Short paper (1,000 words) due Monday, Sept 30 by start of class.

Week 6 (Oct 7 & 9) - Method: Game Criticism (MJ)

- **Interaction Criticism** - Jefferey Bardzell
- **The Godfather** - Pauline Kael
- **Game Analysis** - Mia Consalvo & Nathan Dutton
- **Reading Resident Evil** - Susana Pajares Tosca
- **Current example of game criticism** - TBD

Week 7 (No class Oct 14 for Columbus day, lecture on Oct 16) - Method: Ethnography (TLT)

- **Participant Observation in Virtual Worlds & Interviewing** - Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce & Taylor.

Week 8 (Oct 21 only, no seminar Oct 23) - Procedurality (TLT)

- **Procedural Rhetoric** - Ian Bogost
- **Against Procedurality** - Miguel Sicart
- **Rules, Rhetoric and Genre** - Todd Harper

Week 9 (Oct 28 & 30) - Networked Gaming (TLT)

- **The Mangle of Play** - Constance Steinkuehler
- **On the Digital Playing Field** - Emma Witkowski
- **Communication, Coordination, and Camaraderie in World of Warcraft** - Mark Chen

Assignment 2: Game criticism essay (1,000 words) due Monday, Oct. 28 by start of class.

Week 10 (Nov 4 & 6) - Roles & Representation (MJ & Todd Harper)

- **Lara Croft** - Helen Kennedy
- **Not a Hater, Just Keepin' It Real** - David J. Leonard
- **Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades** - Richard Bartle

Week 11 (No class Nov 11 for Veteran's day, lecture on Nov 13) - The Physical Turn (MJ)

- **Game Studies' Material Turn** - Thomas H. Apperley & Darshana Jayemane
- **Gaming Beyond Screens** - Bart Simon
- **Gaming Beyond Screens** - Douglas Wilson

Week 12 (Nov 18 & 20) - Persuasive & Educational Games (TLT & Jason Haas)

- **Purposeful by Design?** - Konstantin Mitgutsch & Narda Alvarado.
- **Scientific Habits of Mind in Virtual Worlds** - Constance Steinkuehler & Sean Duncan
- **Open-ended Video Games** - Kurt Squire, Kurt

Week 13 (Nov 25 & 27) - Game Journalism (MJ)

- **The New Gatekeepers** - David B. Nieborg & Tanja Sihvonen
- **You Played That?** - David Thomas, Jose Zagal, Margaret Robertson, Ian Bogost, William Huber.
- **Current example of game journalism debate** - TBD

Week 14 (Dec 2 & 4) - Presentations (MJ & TLT)

Week 15 (Dec 9) - Presentations (MJ & TLT)

Assignment 3: Final paper due by Wednesday, Dec 11 @ 11:00am.