

**Games and Culture, MIT, Fall 2019**  
CMS.616 / 21W.768 / WGS.125 / CMS.868  
<https://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/CMS/fa19/CMS.616/>

**Instructor:** T.L. Taylor  
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**Office/hours:** E15-327, by appointment

**Class:** W 7p-10p  
**Room:** 56-180

### **Description and Learning Objectives**

This course examines the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of digital games. There are no prerequisites. After successful completion of the course the student should be able to:

- Demonstrate, through discussion and written work, an understanding of major areas within the sociological and cultural study of computer gaming.
- Independently identify critical questions/problems/domains within this domain and be able to select an appropriate method for examination.
- Undertake a scholarly social science literature review relevant to the area.
- Provide evidence, rigorous analysis, and argumentation via discussion and written work.

### **Learning Activities**

The scheduled activities consist of reading research articles, short lectures, seminar discussions, group exercises, presentations, and writing.

### **Assignments & Grading**

Your final grade will consist of the following components. Your hand-ins must reflect your sole work and authorship.

- Participation (inc. weekly reading keywords/questions/exercises and in-class participation): 20%
- Mid-term (Oct 23, 2000 words): 30%
- Final paper (Dec 11, 4000 words): 50%

Graduate students will be expected to perform at a level commensurate with advanced study and will complete additional work if taking the course for graduate credit.

### ***Policies and Expectations***

Engagement & electronics policy: All students are expected to attend the sessions and fully participate in group discussions, come prepared (having done the readings, bringing them to class, and being ready to be involved in our shared time), and be working at a serious level. Full participation means not simply attending, but being truly engaged; not only speaking, but actively listening to fellow class members and engaging in conversation *together*. You may use laptops in the course but please refrain from checking email, social media, etc. and really focus on being present and attentive. *I reserve the right to revisit this policy if needed.*

Late work: Extensions will *only* be given based on a MIT Student Support Services (S<sup>3</sup> – <http://web.mit.edu/uaap/s3/>) note or for religious holidays, if notified in advance.

Writing and presentation assistance: The WCC at MIT (Writing and Communication Center) offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts (MIT lecturers who all have advanced degrees and who are all published writers). The WCC helps you strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as about all aspects of oral presentations (including practicing your presentations & designing slides). No matter what department or discipline you are in, they help you think your way more deeply into your topic, help you strategize to convey your message more effectively to particular audiences, help you polish your style, and help you see new implications in your data, research and ideas. The WCC also helps with everything from understanding genre conventions to analyzing what particular journals require. They also help with all English as Second Language issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice. The WCC is

located in Kendall Square. To make appointments, go to <https://mit.mywconline.com/>. To access the WCC's many pages of advice about writing and oral presentations, go to <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/>. The Center's core hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.; evening hours vary by semester—check the online scheduler for up-to-date hours.

Library and research assistance: The work you do in this course requires you to be able to undertake social scientific literature searches (well beyond just “googling”) and evaluate those materials. The libraries offers useful help and advice for how to find relevant materials. See <http://libraries.mit.edu/research-support/> for assistance. You may also find the research resources I link to on my website of use: <http://tltaylor.com/teaching/research-resources-for-students/>.

Academic integrity: I take academic integrity very seriously and consider it a core foundational principle of the university and research more broadly. As noted in the CMS/W guidelines on plagiarism, “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 and the MIT Website on Plagiarism located at: <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/avoiding-plagiarism/>.” Please don't hesitate to talk to me if you have any questions about this issue.

### **Reading Material**

Articles are available via Stellar course website. *You must bring a copies of all assigned readings with you to class, either in electronic or paper form.*

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## **Schedule**

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### **Sept 4: Introduction**

#### **Sept 11: Games as Cultural & Socio-Technical Artifacts**

- Hughes – “Beyond the Rules of the Game”
- Malaby – “Beyond Play”
- Taylor – “The Assemblage of Play”
- Latour – “Where are the Missing Masses” (p151-159)

#### **Sept 18: Fieldwork Prep, No class**

- Lin & Sun – “The Role of Onlookers”
- Becker – “How I Learned What a Crock Was”
- Light, Burgess, & Duguay – “The Walkthrough Method”

#### **Sept 25: Embodiment & Materiality**

- Witkowski – “Sensuous Proximity in Research Methods”
- Lally – “The Domestic Ecology of Objects”
- Tobin – “I'd Rather Sit and Play”
- Hjorth & Richardson – “Ambient Play”

#### **Oct 2: Co-Creativity**

- Banks & Humphreys – “The Labor of User Co-creators”
- Steinkhueler – “The Mangle of Play”

- Postigo – “The Socio-Technical Architecture of Digital Labor”
- Dovey & Kennedy – “Interventions and Recuperations?”

**Oct 9: Economies and Platforms**

- Gillespie – “The Politics of Platforms”
- Joseph – “The Discourse of Digital Dispossession”
- Nieborg – “App Advertising”
- Partin, W. “Bit by (Twitch) Bit”

**Oct 16: Gender & Sexuality I**

- West & Zimmerman – “Doing Gender”
- Pascoe – “Making Masculinity” and short excerpt from Ch.3

**Oct 23: Gender & Sexuality II**

- Witkowski – “Eventful Masculinities”
- Lin – “Body, Space, and Gendered Gaming Experiences”
- Shaw – “Talking to Gaymers”
- Szardzius – “Playing with Pride”

Mid-term due by start of class

**Oct 30: Race, Ethnicity, and Intersectionality**

- Gray – “Intersecting Oppressions”
- Gray – “They’re Just Too Urban”
- Nakamura – “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game”
- Nakamura – “User Generated Media Campaigns”

**Nov 6: Harassment, Griefing, and Trolling**

- Massanari – “#Gamergate and the Fapping”
- Philips – “The Only Reason To Do Anything”
- Cote – “Curate Your Culture”
- Cross – “Ethics for Cyborgs”
- Pater et. al. – “Characterizations of Online Harassment”

**Nov 13: Performance & Spectatorship**

- N. Taylor – “Now You’re Playing with Audience Power”
- Walker – “Watching Us Play”
- Taylor – selection from *Watch Me Play*

**Nov 20: One-on-one paper review session**

**Nov 27: No class, final paper prep (Thanksgiving break)**

**Dec 4: Esports & Competitive Gaming**

- Witkowski – “On the Digital Playing Field”
- N. Taylor, Jenson, & deCastell – “Cheerleaders/Booth babes/*Halo* hoes”
- Taylor – selection from *Raising the Stakes*

**Dec 11: Final paper due by start of class**