BIS 313 C: Introduction to Game Studies
2013, Fall | Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:15-3:15 | UW2 005

INSTRUCTOR DETAILS:

Mark Chen | @mcdanger | markdangerchen@gmail.com | http://markdangerchen.net
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays after class or through Google Hangout or IM

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed to give students an introduction to game studies topics and issues. It will give students ample opportunity to play and critique games and academic discourse around games. Special emphasis will be placed on the larger culture around games and gaming, as games are always enacted in specific social settings and contexts. Additionally, students will gain experience in team-based game design and writing or producing game reviews.

Prerequisites: Students are required to have taken BIS 236 (Interactive Media) or another advanced MCS course that touches on games specifically.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:
- critique a game's ludic (rule-based) and narrative elements.
- consider gaming as practice that occurs in specific social settings.
- think about games in historical and cultural contexts.
- participate in current academic debates around gaming and game studies through writing academic game reviews and/or producing vlogs or Let's Play videos.
- collaboratively design a game, from idea generation to finished product.
- pitch sophisticated ideas for new games.
- conduct playtesting research sessions.
- present and write critical reflection on game design projects.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Final rubrics for the Game Design Project and Academic Game Review will be provided during class and depends, in part, on the scope and nature of each project.

Game Design Project   **30 pts**
After pitching game ideas to each other, work in development teams of 4 to 6 people to construct a tabletop *or* digital game that accomplishes an identified outcome. The game must be playable through to the end (though does not have to include final art or be polished), so be careful about scoping the project, especially if it is for a digital game. That said, we will spend time at the beginning of this project to figure out team compositions and scope out the work, depending on the type of game you want to make and its design and media requirements.

For a tabletop game, all parts and pieces must be included in the final submission. If it is a digital game, a mod or extension to an existing game may be acceptable. It really depends on the purpose of the design and its format. Accompanying the game will be a manual, video, or webpage explaining how to play. Additionally, the team is expected to submit a formal report of no more than 10 pages explaining design decisions and providing write-ups for any playtesting and evidence of revisions to the product. Finally, each team member will submit a short reflection on how the group project went, its strengths and weaknesses, along with strategies taken for any issues that came up.

Deliverables:
- pitches for game ideas (individual)
- initial 2-page game design spec (team) (2 pts)
- 10-page game design document (team) (7 pts)
- a playable game and manual (team) (7 pts)
- write-up of design notes, playtesting notes, iteration notes (team, no more than 10 pages) (8 pts)
- reflection on group work (individual, about 2 pages) (6 pts)

Academic Game Review   **20 pts**
Pick a game and review it as it relates to issues in game studies. The purpose of this is two-fold: (1) you'll show that you can appreciate and critique games on an academic game studies level, and (2) you'll be able to critique ideas and issues in game studies using a specific game as a case study. We'll read and watch sample articles / reviews so you have an idea of what this looks like.

You may choose to do this review as a formal paper, a review meant for a blog, or as an After Action Report that refers to academic literature, shooting for about 10 pages, *or* as a video, either producing a Let's Play video where you narrate over yourself playing the game or some other format.

Deliverables:
- initial topic ideas
- draft paper or script for the video (and/or a rough cut of a video) (7 pts)
- feedback on other people's drafts / rough cuts (7 pts)
- final paper or video (6 pts)

Weekly Reflections and Responses to Readings and Games   **35 pts**
Each week has a list of required and optional materials, and you are expected to read / watch at least the required material. Furthermore, we'll divide up the weeks so that each student is expected to post a brief summary (worth 5pts) of one of the required *or* optional materials to the course website once during the quarter. Each week (at 3pts per week), all other students are expected to either:

- Respond to at least one of these threads with something substantial. Suggested ways of doing this are to ask questions, provide answers, provide a counter argument, provide extra evidence for particular arguments, link to outside resources that are relevant, give personal accounts of how the topic relates to your gaming history, etc. If you're referring to class materials, be explicit about page numbers or timecodes on videos, etc.

  OR

- Post an elaborated question with substantial background for why you think it's a good one that you think should be discussed in class.

In other words, help me out here. I'm trying to see evidence that you're engaging with the course material. Provide that evidence and you'll do fine! :p

Participation   **20 pts**
I will not grade on attendance. Participation includes in-class discussion and team-based game design, however, and this is highly predicated on you actually being in class. Participation means helping others, as well as being open to assistance from people who can help you. Participation means interactions with the entire range of "stuff" in our class not just me, but also peers, relevant outsiders, texts (from many sources), tools, places, and objects used in class.

All assignments (materials to consume, activities to do) are due on Monday of the week listed. On the first day of class, we'll choose a game to play together for the rest of the quarter. Likely *Terraria*, but it depends on what everyone has access to, etc.

Week 1, Sep 26: Intro
Intro to course, Nerd Cubed Plays *Kerbal Space Program* [YouTube]

Week 2, Oct 1 and Oct 3: What is Game Studies?
Definition of games and play, historical debates: narratology v ludology and the magic circle.
Materials:
- Mäyrä. Chapter 1.
- Murray, J. (2007). Games as joint attentional scenes. In S. de Castell & J. Jenson (Eds.), *Worlds in play: International perspectives on digital games research* (pp. 11-20). Peter Lang.
- Salen, K., and Zimmerman, E. (2003). *Rules of play: Game design fundamentals* (pp. 1-27, 71-83). The MIT Press.

Optional:
- Murray, J. (2005). The last word on ludology v narratology in game studies. Keynote at Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) conference 2005.
- Rodriguez, H. (2006). The playful and the serious: An approximation of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*. *Game Studies, 6*(1).
- Zimmerman, E. (2012). Jerked around by the magic circle: Clearing the air ten years later. *Gamasutra: The Art & Business of Making Games* (Feb. 7 2012).
- Browse *Game Studies*.

Activities:
- Select and play a game. Pay attention to game mechanics, how you feel while playing, etc.
- Create a Steam account.
- Introduce yourself, gaming history, and which game you played in the class forums.
- Start thinking about a game idea that addresses an area of interest for you. If you're having a hard time thinking of something, you can either brainstorm the *craziest* idea or talk to me about it.

Week 3, Oct 8 and Oct 10: Gaming Culture
New Games Journalism, Let's Plays, AARs, participatory culture
Materials:
- Mäyrä. Chapter 2.
- Chen, M. (2008). Moral ambiguity in *The Witcher*: A game review. *E-Learning, 5*(3), 358-365.
- always_black. Bow nigger.

Optional:
- In the Shadow of Certain, Painful Doom: *Crusader Kings 2* After Action Report
- Check out *Rock Paper Shotgun, Killscreen*, and *Quarter to Three*.

Activities:
- Explore Steam's library. Install the game we decided to play and start playing.
- Prepare a 1 or 2 minute pitch for your game idea to be delivered in class on Tuesday Oct 8. By Thursday, we'll be divided up into teams to work on a game for the rest of the quarter.

Week 4, Oct 15 and Oct 17: Game Genres
History of digital and tabletop genres, alternate reality games, indie games, etc.
Materials:
- Mäyrä. Chapters 3 and 4.
- Browse Board Game Geek Advanced Search to see how they categorize games.
- How do they do it at Gamespot, IGN, etc?
- McGonigal. Gaming can make a better world. [TED Talk].

Optional:
- Castronova, E. (2005). The Horde is evil. *Terra Nova blog.*

Activities:
- Play *Terraria* or whatever game we've chosen with others!
- Select and play a tabletop game with family or friends (or go to a Meetup group). Pay attention to social dynamics, game mechanics and balance, etc.
- Check out InkleWriter, a tool for making choose-your-own adventure games and/or prototyping branching conditions in games.
- Write a 2-page game spec with your team using Google Docs and post the url to the course forums by Monday Oct 14.
- Pick a game to review and announce this on the forums to get it approved by Mark.

Week 5, Oct 22 and Oct 24: Game Design
The Game Design Document, lenses, and IDE cards.
Materials:
- Rogers, S. (2010). *Level up! The guide to great video game design* (pp. 57-82). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Kultima. IDE cards.

Optional:
- Dunnigan, J.F. (2011). Simulation game design. In G. Costikyan and D. Davidson (Eds.), *Tabletop: Analog game design* (pp. 27-31). ETC Press.
- Kuittinen, J., and Holopainen, J. (2009). Some notes on the nature of game design. Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) conference 2009.
- Selinker, M. (2011). *Kobold guide to board game design*. Open Design LLC.

Activities:
- Play *Terraria* or whatever game we've chosen with others!
- Work on game and related documents with your team, working prototype and draft 10-page GDD (using Gdocs) due Nov 4.
- Work on game review (in Gdocs), first draft due Nov 18.

Week 6, Oct 29 and Oct 31 (Halloween!): Controversies and issues
Violence, addiction, gender, and sexuality
Materials:
- Cover, R. (2006). Gaming (ad)diction: Discourse, identity, time and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth. *Game Studies, 6*(1).
- Sarkeesian, A. (2013). Tropes vs Women. *Feminist Frequency.* [video series].
- PBS Game/Show. (2013). Has *League of Legends* tamed trolls forever? [YouTube].
- Edidin, R. (2013). Why I'm never going back to Penny Arcade Expo. *Wired* (Sep. 5, 2013).

Optional:
- Flood, J. (2012). Playing *Assassin's Creed 3* on the Pine Ridge Rez. *Killscreen* (Nov. 28, 2012).

Activities:
- *A Closed World*, *Dys4ia*, *Depression Quest*, *Lim*, etc.
- Check out *The Border House* blog.
- Work on game and related documents with your team, working prototype and draft 10-page GDD (using Gdocs) due Nov 4.
- Work on game review (in Gdocs), first draft due Nov 18.

Week 7, Nov 5 and Nov 7: Players
Engagement, player types
Materials:
- Chen, M., Kolko, B.E., Cuddihy, E., and Medina, E. (2011). Modeling but NOT measuring engagement in computer games. *Proceedings from the Games Learning Society (GLS) conference 2011* (pp. 63-71). ETC Press.
- Yee, N. (2005). A model of player motivations. *The Daedalus Project.*

Optional:
- Koster, R. (2000). Declaration of Rights of Players. [blog post].
- A *TableTop* episode, like this one on *Pandemic* [YouTube].

Activities:
- Check out the modding scene: ModDB, *Skyrim* Nexus, and the Steam Workshop.
- Working prototype and draft 10-page GDD due this week! Post the url for the GDD to the course forums. Bring the working prototype game to class on Tuesday, Nov 4.
- Work on game review (in Gdocs), first draft due Nov 18.

Week 8, Nov 12 and Nov 14: Playtesting
Materials:
- Fullerton, T. (2008). *Game design workshop: A playcentric approach* (pp. 248-276). Elsevier.
- Leone, M. (2012). Data entry, risk management, and tacos: Inside Halo 4's playtest labs. *Polygon* (October 24, 2012).

Optional:
- Falstein, N. (2012). Evolution of storytelling. [slides]
- Morningstar, C., and Farmer, F.R. (1990). The lessons of Lucasfilm's *Habitat*. In M. Benedikt (Ed.), *Cyberspace: First Steps*. The MIT Press.

Activities:
- Play stuff! Find cool games and share! Suggested game: *FTL: Faster Than Light*.
- Make sure game is ready to playtest by class on Tuesday, Nov 12!
- Work on game review (in Gdocs), first draft due Nov 18.

Week 9, Nov 19 and Nov 21: Gaming Research
Ecology of gaming, WoW stuff, the rights of avatars
Materials:
- Stevens, R., Satwicz, T., and McCarthy, L. (2008). In-game, in-room, in-world: Reconnecting video game play to the rest of kids' lives. In K. Salen (Ed.), *The ecology of games: Connecting youth, games, and learning*.
- Check out Elitist Jerks and WoWWiki.
- Browse *Games and Culture*.

Optional:
- Schell. The art of game design: A deck of lenses. [app].

Activities:
- Play stuff! Find cool games and share! Suggested game: *The Walking Dead*.
- Write-up playtest notes, iterate on the game, iterate on the GDD, and write reflection notes. Final game and all related materials due Friday, Dec 13!
- First draft game review due Monday, Nov 18.

Week 10, Nov 26: Persuasive Games
Embodied action, analogy, games for health, iCivics, games for change
Materials:
- Kahne, J., Middaugh, E., and Evans, C. (2008). *The civic potential of video games*. Civic Engagement Research Group, Mills College.
- Bogost, I. (2011). Gamification is bullshit. *Kotaku* (Aug. 10, 2011).

- Galloway, A. (2006). Allegories of control. In *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture* (pp. 85-106). University of Minnesota Press.

Optional:
- Davidson, D. (Ed.). *Well Played* series. ETC Press. Volumes 1, 2, and 3.

Activities:
- Check out Games for Change and iCivics.
- Write-up playtest notes, iterate on the game, iterate on the GDD, and write reflection notes. Final game and all related materials due Fri, Dec 13!
- Provide feedback on two game reviews by Mon, Nov 25. Do this by commenting on their Gdoc and sign your name in the comments.

Week 11, Dec 3 and Dec 5: Games for Learning
Gamification vs. gameful play, critical thinking, systems thinking, subversion
Materials:
- Chen, M. (2013). A statement on games and expert gaming and the tl;dr version. *Mark Danger Chen: Sporadic ramblings of a gamer in academia.*
- Floyd, D. (2008). Video games and learning. [YouTube].
- Zimmerman, E., & Chaplin, H. (2013). Manifesto: The 21st century will be defined by games. *Kotaku* (Sep. 9, 2013).

Optional:
- Chen, M. (2012). *Leet noobs: The life and death of an expert player group in* World of Warcraft (pp. 1-10). Peter Lang.
- Consalvo, M. (2008). Cheating can be good for you: Educational games and multiple play styles. In D. Davidson (Ed.), *Beyond fun: Serious games and media* (pp. 72-29). ETC Press.
- Klopfer, E., Osterweil, S., Groff, J., and Haas, J. (2009). *Using the technology of today, in the classroom today: The instructional power of digital games, social networking, simulations and how teachers can leverage them*. MIT: The Education Arcade.

Activities:
- Check out *Refraction, Pox: Save the People*, BrainPOP, and Filament Games.
- Work on game review revisions.
- Play stuff! Find cool games and share! Suggested game: *Digital: A Love Story*.
- Write-up playtest notes, iterate on the game, iterate on the GDD, and write reflection notes. Final game and all related materials due Fri, Dec 13!
- Final game reviews due Mon, Dec 9!

COURSE RESOURCES AND MATERIALS:

Required books
- Mäyrä, F. (2008). *An introduction to game studies: Games in culture*. Sage Publications.

Paid digital games (we might pick one of these as required but not all)
- *Terraria*. Re-Logic.
- *The Walking Dead*. TellTale Games
- *FTL: Faster Than Light*. Justin Ma and Matthew Davis.

Free digital games
- *A Closed World*. MIT Gambit.
- BrainPOP.
- *Card Hunter*. Blue Manchu.
- *Depression Quest*. Zoe Quinn, Patrick Lindsey, and Isaac Schankler.
- *Digital: A Love Story* Christine Love.
- *Dys4ia*. Auntie Pixelante.
- *Foldit*. Center for Game Science.

- *Lim*. Merritt Kopas.
- *Lost Pig*. Admiral Jota.
- *Pox: Save the People.* Tiltfactor.
- *Refraction*. Center for Game Science.

Cheap fun tabletop games (many can be found on iOS or Android for much cheaper)
- *Carcassonne*. Klaus-Jürgen Wrede.
- *Citadels*. Bruno Faidutti.
- *Death Angel*. Corey Konieczka.
- *Forbidden Island*. Matt Leacock.
- *Lost Cities*. Reiner Knizia.
- *Love Letter*. Seiji Kanai.
- *Pocket Civ*. Scott Slomiany. Print n play!
- *The Resistance*. Don Eskridge.
- *Saboteur*. Frederic Moyersoen.
- *Small World*. Philippe Keyaerts.
- *Ticket to Ride*. Alan R. Moon. iPad is pretty good!
- *Zombie in my Pocket*. Jeremiah Lee. Print n play!

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMERS AND INFO:

IAS Portfolio:
Students majoring in any degree offered by IAS begin the process of creating a capstone portfolio in BIS 300: Interdisciplinary Inquiry and conclude it in BIS 499: Capstone Portfolio. IAS students should maintain an archive of all of the work they have done in (or in relation to) their undergraduate education, preferably through their UW Google Site. For more information about the IAS portfolio, visit the IAS webpage: http://www.uwb.edu/ias/iasdegreeportfolio. For help on the technical or rhetorical development of your IAS portfolio, visit the Writing Center (www.uwb.edu/writingcenter or 425-352-5253) or Learning Technologies (learningtech@uwb.edu or http://www.uwb.edu/learningtech/eportfolios).

Writing Proficiency:
When you submit a formal paper for this class you are expected to:
- check spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- work within the assignment parameters
- construct logical, organized, cohesive propositions.
- reference all quoted material.
- eschew paraphrasing other people's work.

Late Policy: Most of the activities for this course are done in teams or have certain milestones so that you give and receive feedback from peers. As such, it's quite difficult to get the same experience if you turn in late assignments. They become meaningless if they arrive after someone is able to provide you with feedback. That said, extreme circumstances sometimes do occur, so if that happens, please let me know and we can figure something out. The final game review and final game design projects have to be turned in early enough so that I can turn in grades. If you find you need more time, we can negotiate something. Just let me know!

Academic Integrity:
Academic integrity: See http://www.uwb.edu/studentservices/academicconduct for crucial information regarding academic integrity. The library also has an extremely useful website with resources at http://libguides.uwb.edu/ai. You are responsible for knowing what constitutes a violation of the University of Washington Student Code, and you will be held responsible for any such violations whether they were intentional or not.

Syllabus Revisions:
You are responsible for all materials, updates and announcements covered during class sessions. The course calendar will most likely change over time due to unforeseen circumstances; please be sure you are using the most recent version. I also expect you to use your UW email account regularly, so that I can communicate with each of you electronically between classes. If you wish to use another email address as your primary account, set up your UW account to forward to your other address.

Respect for Diversity:
Diverse backgrounds, embodiments and experiences are essential to the critical thinking endeavor at the heart of university education. In IAS and at UW Bothell, students are expected to:

- respect individual differences which may include, but are not limited to: age, cultural background, disability, ethnicity, family status, gender presentation, immigration status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and veteran status.
- engage respectfully in discussion of diverse worldviews and ideologies embedded in course readings, presentations, and artifacts, including those course materials that are at odds with personal beliefs and values.

Students seeking support around these issues can find more information and resources at http://www.uwb.edu/diversity.

Classroom Technologies:
Electronic devices are welcome, **so long as you stay on task.** I'll trust you to do that and be disappointed if you don't. I'm going to assume you're adults, and we'll go from there. We'll set up a twitter channel for in-the-moment questions, etc.

Please speak up or see me privately if you have any issues that come up.

Disability Accommodations:
Americans with Disabilities Act: Accommodation for disabled students is a campus priority. If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact the Disability Resources for Students Office (DRS) at 425.352.5307, 425.352.5303 TDD, 425.352.5455 FAX, or at drs@uwb.edu. http://www.uwb.edu/studentservices/drs.

Inclement Weather:
Please check if the campus may be closed due to weather. Information on suspension of operations will be made public and available through the media. Students can learn of campus operations status from the website or by calling the Campus Information Hotline 425.352.3333. You may also sign up with an alert system that will contact you via email or text message if classes are canceled. For more information on the alert process, please see http://www.uwb.edu/alert. Class activities will be rescheduled as needed.

Student Support Services:
Library: http://library.uwb.edu, 425-352-5340; *Writing and Communication Center*: http://www.uwb.edu/wacc, 425-352-5253; *Quantitative Skills Center*: http://www.uwb.edu/qsc, 425-352-3170; *Student Success and Career Services*: http://www.uwb.edu/studentservices/success-services, 425-352-3776; *Student Counseling Services*: http://www.uwb.edu/studentservices/counseling, 425-352-3183.