

BIS 236B: Introduction to Interactive Media

Spring 2014 | Mon / Wed 11:00-1:00 | UWBB 230



Text-based and Adventure Games



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INSTRUCTOR DETAILS:

Dr. Mark Chen | @mcdanger | markdangerchen@gmail.com | <http://markdangerchen.net>

Megan Charlton, Peer Facilitator | megancharlton032791@gmail.com

Office Hours: by appointment (Mark usually free after class, Megan usually before 11 on Fridays)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will first give students a brief overview of the rise of hypertext and digital media. This will serve as a background for a deeper study on interactive fiction, text-based games, and small indie adventure 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. Students will engage in numerous readings and other media on games and gaming, write an academic game review, create a “Let’s Play” video of a game of their choosing, and create a simple text-based or adventure game. NO programming skills or previous experience making games necessary.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Online Post and In-Class Presentation on Selected Material (post = 5, presentation = 5) **10 pts**

Each week has a list of required materials that you are expected to consume. We will also divide up the materials so that each student is expected to (1) post a brief summary and starting questions to the course site AND (2) present these in-class. You may use PowerPoint or other presentation software if you wish.

Weekly Reflections and Responses to Materials (2 pts * 8 wks) **16 pts**

Each week (at up to 2 pts per week), students who were not in charge of a summary that week are still expected to consume the materials. Additionally, students must respond to at least one of the weekly 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 are referring to class materials, be explicit about page numbers or timecodes on videos, etc.

Let’s Play or Watch It Played Video (in Pairs) **14 pts**

We’ll watch several Let’s Play and Watch It Played videos during the quarter. You’ll get into pairs and make your own video of a game of your choosing (including a board or card game if you want). Engaging in video reviews allows you to research and explore the growing fan culture around gaming and digital media production. These can be done with screen capture software, with Twitch.tv, with a video camera, etc. You should test out your recording solution (which may have to be of a different game if you want your Let’s Play to be a reaction video of first-time play). When you post your final video, you’ll also post a half-page reflection on the process and game, including what you would do differently if you were to do it again.

Deliverables:

- Pair up by **April 14**. We’ll keep track of this using a Google doc.
- Pick a game by **April 21**. Post your choice to the same Gdoc (2 pts).
- Test out video recording solution by **April 28**.
- Post video by **May 12** (8 pts). Post a half-page reflection, too (4 pts).

Academic Game Review

20 pts

Pick a game and review it as it relates to issues in game studies, the materials from class, an overview of critical responses to the game, and your personal reflections. 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. Students will post drafts of the reviews using Google docs and then comment on each other's drafts before submitting a final version. You may choose to write about the same game that you create a video for if you wish.

Deliverables:

- Pick a game by **April 21** (2 pts). We'll keep track of the games using a different Gdoc.
- Create a new Gdoc (with comments on) of your draft by **May 12** (7 pts).
- Give feedback to others' reviews by **May 19** (2 pts per review reviewed, 2 minimum).
- Post final Gdoc review by **June 9** (7 pts).

Text-based or Adventure Game Design Project (in Pairs)

24 pts

Creating games can be one of the best ways to engage in experimental expression and critique. After pitching game ideas to each other, you will work in pairs on a text-based digital game OR in trios on an experimental adventure game that expresses or explores a particular topic or theme. Each team is expected to maintain a Google doc to facilitate communication and coordination on the game design. The game must be playable through to the end (though does not have to include final art or writing), so be careful about scoping the project. A mod or extension to an existing game may be acceptable. It really depends on the purpose of the design.

Accompanying the game will be a manual, video, or webpage explaining how to play. Additionally, the team is expected to submit a final report of no more than five pages that includes a post-mortem (5 things that went right and 5 things that could have been better), a summary of playtesting notes, and evidence of revisions to the product including design decision notes. Finally, each team member will submit a short reflection on how the design project went, along with strategies taken for any issues that came up and what you'd do differently next time.

Deliverables:

- Pitch a game idea by **April 14** (2 pts, individual).
- Pair up by **April 21** and create a Gdoc for the project that allows comments from others.
- Create a playable test version of the game by **May 19** (6 pts, team).
- Provide feedback on others' games by **May 28** (2 pts per game, 2 minimum, individual).
- Submit a final game and related materials incl. reflection and design notes by **June 9**.
 - a playable game and manual (team) (4 pts)
 - write-up of post-mortem, design notes, playtesting notes (team, <5 pages) (4 pts)
 - reflection on group work (individual, ~half a page) (4 pts)

Participation

(6 pts notes, 10 misc) 16 pts

I will not grade on attendance. Participation includes in-class discussion and engaging in in-class game jams and playtesting, which are all highly predicated on actually being in class (10 pts total for the quarter). Furthermore, for many class sessions, we'll be keeping group notes using Gdocs and asking for three volunteers as that day's note takers (6 pts).

WEEKLY TOPICS AND READINGS:

All items to consume are to be done for the week they're listed. Materials that don't have urls will be in the Files section of our Canvas site.

Week 01, March 31 and April 2: Intros (to each other, course, LPs, IF and text adventures)

Produce:

- Create a Steam account.

- Introduce yourself and your creative writing and/or gaming history to the Canvas discussion thread.

Week 02, April 7 and 9: Hypertext, Death of print

Consume:

- Birkerts, Sven. (1994). *The Gutenberg elegies: The fate of reading in an electronic age*. Ballantine Books.
 - Chapter 8: Into the electronic millennium
 - Chapter 11: Hypertext: Of mouse and man

Produce:

- Select and play a game. Pay attention to game mechanics, how you feel while playing, etc.
- Post about the game you played in the class discussion board.

Week 03, April 14 and 16: Convergence culture

Consume:

- Jenkins, Henry. (2007). [Transmedia storytelling 101](#). *Confessions of an aca-fan*.
- Jenkins, Henry. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*.
 - Chapter 3: Searching for the origami unicorn

Produce:

- **Video project:** Pair up for Let's Play or Watch It Played video by **this Monday!**
- **Game design project:** Pitch a game idea by **this Monday!**

Week 04, April 21 and 23: New literacies, Game definitions

Consume:

- Gee, James Paul. (2003). Semiotic domains: Is playing video games a “waste of time?” *The game design reader: A rules of play anthology* (pp. 228-267).
- Juul, Jesper. (2003). [The game, the player, the world: Looking for a heart of gameness](#). *Level up: Digital games research conference proceedings* (pp. 30-45).
- Chen, Mark. (2014). [A new definition for games](#). *Mark Danger Chen: Sporadic ramblings of a gamer in academia*.

Produce:

- **Video project:** Pick a game by **this Monday!**
- **Academic game review:** Pick a game to review and put it in our Gdoc by **this Monday!**
- **Game design project:** Create a new Gdoc in the class folder to manage the project by **this Monday!**

Week 05, April 28 and 30: Interactive fiction, Adventure games

Consume:

- Montfort, Nick. (2003). *Twisty little passages: An approach to interactive fiction*.
 - Chapter 1: The pleasure of the text adventure
 - Chapter 2: Riddles
- Gilbert, Ron. (2004). [Why adventure games suck](#). *Grumpy Gamer*.

Produce:

- **Video project:** Test recording solution by **this Monday!**
- **Academic game review:** Create a new Gdoc in the class folder and post your review draft by **May 12**.
- **Game design project:** Create and be prepared to share in-class a playable test version of your game by **May 19**.

Week 06, May 5 and 7: Gaming for radical transformation, Gamification

Consume:

- Frasca, Gonzalo. (2004). Videogames of the oppressed: Critical thinking, education, tolerance, and other trivial issues. *First person: New media as story, performance, and game* (pp. 85-94).

- Bogost, Ian. (2011). [Gamification is bullshit](#). *Kotaku* (Aug. 10, 2011).
- Nicholson, Scott. (2012). A user-centered theoretical framework for meaningful gamification. Paper Presented at *Games+Learning+Society 8.0*, Madison, WI.

Produce:

- **Video project:** Post final video and half-page reflection by **May 12**.
- **Academic game review:** Create a new Gdoc in the class folder and post your review draft by **May 12**.
- **Game design project:** Create and be prepared to share in-class a playable test version of your game by **May 19**.

Week 07, May 12 and 14: Gaming culture

Consume:

- Chen, Mark. (2012). *Leet noobs: The life and death of an expert player group in World of Warcraft*.
 - Chapter 1: Individual vs. group expertise
- Mäyrä, Frans. (2008). *An introduction to game studies: Games in culture*.
 - Chapter 2: Game culture: Meaning in games

Produce:

- **Video project:** Post final video and half-page reflection by **this Monday!**
- **Academic game review:** Create a new Gdoc in the class folder and post your review draft by **this Monday!**
- **Game design project:** Create and be prepared to share in-class a playable test version of your game by **May 19**.

Week 08, May 19 and 21: Games critique and critical gaming

Consume:

- Read at least one article on the [Critical Gaming Project](#) blog.
- Read at least one article linked to from [This Week in Videogame Blogging](#).

Produce:

- **Academic game review:** Post feedback as comments for other teams' reviews by **this Monday!**
- **Game design project:** Create and be prepared to share in-class a playable test version of your game by **this Monday!**

Week 09, May 28: Violence

Consume:

- Dibbell, Julian. (1998). [A rape in cyberspace](#). In *My tiny life*.
- Albrecht, Matt. (2014). ["A rape in cyberspace" gets remade for the IRL era](#). *Killscreen* (Mar. 4, 2014).

Produce:

- **Academic game review:** Post final review by **June 9**.
- **Game design project:** Provide feedback on others' games by **this Wednesday!**

Week 10, June 2 and 4: Gaming futures

Consume:

- Zimmerman, Eric, & Chaplin, Heather. (2013). [Manifesto: The 21st century will be defined by games](#). *Kotaku* (Sep. 9, 2013).

Produce:

- **Academic game review:** Post final review by **June 9**.
- **Game design project:** Post final games by **June 9**.

COURSE RESOURCES AND MATERIALS:

Let's Plays and Watch It Played videos:

- [TableTop](#) episodes, like this one on [The Resistance](#).
- [In the shadow of certain, painful doom](#): *Crusader Kings 2* After Action Report
- [Nerd³ Plays... Kerbal Space Program](#) [YouTube].
- Rainy Day Let's Play. [Let's Playing As An Art – Episode 1: Let's All Let's Play](#) [YouTube].
- Rainy Day Let's Play. [Lim ~ A Loving Review](#) [YouTube].
- [Shut Up & Sit Down](#) episodes, like this one on [Going Going Gone](#).

Sample game reviews:

- always_black. [Bow nigger](#).
- Chen, M. (2008). Moral ambiguity in *The Witcher*: A game review. *E-Learning*, 5(3), 358-365.
- Davidson, D. (Ed.). *Well Played* series. ETC Press. Volumes [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#). ← *there is a ton there!*
- Flood, J. (2012). [Playing Assassin's Creed 3 on the Pine Ridge Rez](#). *Killscreen* (Nov. 28, 2012).

Resources on game design:

- Tiny Game Design Tool <http://tinygdtool.urustar.net/>

Text-based game design:

- [InkleWriter](#), a tool for making choose-your-own adventure games and/or prototyping branching conditions in games.
- [Ren'Py](#), for making visual novels.
- [Twine](#), a popular web-based choose-your-own adventure game making tool.
- A [how to play IF card](#).
- Rees, Gareth. [Distinguishing between game design and analysis: One view](#). *XYZZYnews* #6.
- Short, Emily. [Conversation](#), [Getting Started](#), and [Reading IF](#). *Emily Short's Interactive Storytelling*.

Adventure game design:

- [Adventure Game Studio](#), for making point-n-click adventure games.
- [Construct 2](#), for simple 2D games (Windows).
- [Stencyl](#), for simple 2D games (MacOS).
- Cifaldi, Frank. (2013). [The technique LucasArts used to design its classic adventure games](#). *Gamasutra*.
- Tiller, Bill, & Ahern, Larry. (2006). 21 adventure game design tips. *Adventure Developers*.

Post-mortems and reflections:

- Garfield, Richard. (2006). The design evolution of *Magic: The Gathering*. In *The game design reader* (pp. 538-555).
- [Gamasutra's post-mortem list](#).

Further readings:

- [Games and Culture first issue](#).
- [Gamestudies.org](#)
- [Bogost's UCSC talk on procedural rhetoric](#) [YouTube].

Interactive texts:

- [Poems that Go](#).

Interactive Fiction and Text-based games:

- [Analogue: A Hate Story](#). Christine Love. (not free)
- [Depression Quest](#). Zoe Quinn, Patrick Lindsey, and Isaac Schankler.

- [Digital: A Love Story](#) Christine Love.
- [Fallen London](#). Failbetter Games.
- [Lost Pig](#). Admiral Jota.
- [Save the Date](#). Paper Dino Software.
- [Sorcery!](#) InkleStudios. (not free)
- Anything and [everything by Emily Short](#).

Adventure and art/experimental games:

- [A Closed World](#). MIT Gambit.
- [Dys4ia](#). Auntie Pixelante.
- [Façade: A One Act Interactive Drama](#). Procedural Arts.
- [Gone Home](#). The Fullbright Company. (not free)
- [Lim](#). Merritt Kopas.
- [The Stanley Parable](#). Galactic Café. (not free)
- [The Walking Dead](#). TellTale Games. (not free)

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMERS AND INFO:

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.

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.

Academic Integrity:

Academic integrity: See <http://www.uwb.edu/student-services/academic-conduct> 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:

This syllabus is subject to change during the quarter to accommodate the needs of the class. You are responsible for all materials, updates and announcements covered during class sessions. I also expect you to use your UW email account regularly, so that I can communicate with each of you electronically between classes.

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 be using Google docs for shared class notes, and participation in co-creating the notes is highly recommended.

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/student-services/drs>.

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/student-services/success-services>, 425-352-3776; *Student Counseling Services:* <http://www.uwb.edu/student-services/counseling>, 425-352-3183.