BIS 313B: Gaming Culture through Critical Let's Plays

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Winter 2023 | on campus UW1-202 Thursdays with optional online Tuesdays, 3:30-5:30 PM
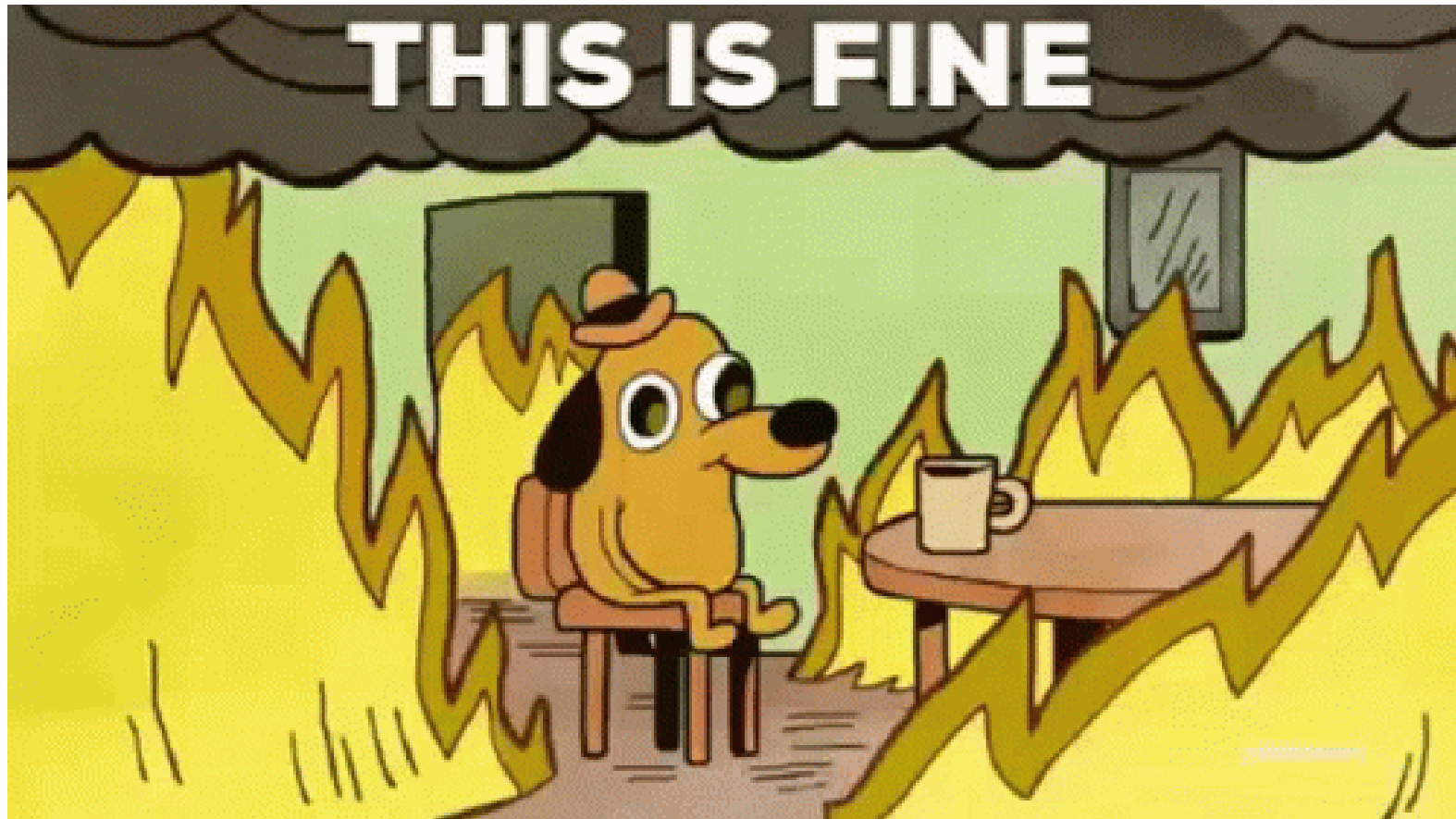
—COURSE INFORMATION—

Dr. Mark Chen, Professor | @mcdanger | markchen@uw.edu | mcdanger#6611

Office Hours: by appointment (prob after class) or just email
HOW TO EMAIL: 1. write a relevant subject, 2. get our names and titles right, 3. provide context for your email, and 4. sign it with who the heck you are. Also, check the syllabus first.

DESCRIPTION

THIS IS FINE

We live in crazy times. A trash fire, amirite? You have to wonder, why games? Why now? I mean… our lives must have meaning beyond laying down and letting it happen so escaping to games seems irresponsible... Right?

Well, as it happens, gaming culture is the perfect microcosm of culture writ large, and any thoughts that you can just escape completely are quickly obliterated once you start examining it in detail. Gaming is a part of our lives in a way that's NOT separate from other lived realities. In fact, to call it not real--to assume that just because you don't examine it critically it's not real--is completely ridiculous. To think that gaming is extra, that it doesn't contain political messages, that representations in them, therefore, don't matter, that it isn't art, and to feel "why can't we just have our games?" is total BS. And once we start realizing this, a whole bunch of interesting avenues for self-reflection and self-expression open up.

And we can answer: why games? Pretty readily, in fact. Because they are a part of us and we are them. And learning how to make gaming better is not separate from making the world better. Therefore, engaging in gaming now can be a valid form of--not escapism--but engagement with the world. We are gamers, and we don't take life lying down.

This course will help students develop a critical eye toward game-playing practice and gaming culture. We'll learn how to examine games and their meaning from different academic traditions; we'll engage in that debate and try to elevate our view of gaming to give it the light it deserves. In addition to reading and playing games, *student groups* will create new criticism through recording and editing a Let's Play video.

The creation should capture the essence of the experience they have for a game of their choosing (video game OR tabletop game OR pretty much any game, really) as seen through the lens of particular academic texts and sociological frameworks. Topics will include diversity and inclusion in games (LGBTQA, disability, fat shaming, hypermasculinity, and hypersexualization), developing good play communities and a lusory attitude toward life, and how games are structured to interact with players to build meaning and discover wonder.

─Want inspo before we get started? Go read Critical Distance's [This Year in Videogame Blogging](#)!

Course main through-line? Gaming culture replicates culture writ-large. This comes with all of the bad stuff in everyday life: toxicity, marginalization, harassment, exploitation, sexualization… but gaming in particular comes with some good opportunities to fight all of the bad stuff: powerful meaning-making, identity formation, learning about systems to fight climate change, marginalization, etc., and psychological and sociological methods to treat mental health problems, etc.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Understand various scholarly traditions for examining games and gaming practice.
- Create and edit videos with critical analysis of gameplay.
- Provide constructive and critical peer review and evaluations through iterative work.
- Engage in the academic discourse around a broad range of gaming controversies and issues in historic and current game studies.
- Collaborate in teams that value diversity and empathy through class projects.
- Create and deliver engaging presentations around scholarly topics.

Note: This course is 5 credits. A general guideline for each credit at UW is 2 hours per credit outside of class per week. Therefore this class is meant to take about 10 hours of outside class time per week. The readings and responding to others should take about 5 hours. The remaining time should be spent working on your projects.

This course has a heavy focus on peer learning and group work, devoting much time to projects and student-led presentations, supplemented heavily with online discussions and project work. Success is highly dependent on good participation, agile communication, teamwork, and a willingness to work on new topics quickly and iteratively.

TECH

- **Google Shared Drive** (most of the assignments and course materials will be here): **https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0AAsnM6paZqoeUk9PVA**
- **Canvas** (announcements and grades): **https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/1608222** Turn on notifications!
- **Discord** (discussion board and group work coordination): **https://discord.gg/EK4SRaXy**
- **Perusall** (reading annotations): **https://perusall.com** Use course code: **CHEN-MZZE8**
- **Zoom**: **https://washington.zoom.us/j/92857687991**

Note: This is a course that fully embraces digital media and a connected life. As such, we will be using appropriate tools that will persist and be useful to you outside of UWB. Google Shared Drives should serve as a course archive and be available even after you graduate, and Slack is a business-level discussion platform.
Also note: Read these **tips for how to do online teamwork** and **how to hold teams accountable**.

—ASSIGNMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS—

Assignment	Deliverables	Points
Presentation of Reading Topic Each week, different groups of about 3 students will present topics from one of the readings. This means covering a *brief* summary (main thesis and logical argument) **PLUS** commentary and thoughts and a more comprehensive overview of the topic represented in the reading. Include information and history of the author, show us videos or have us do an in-class activity, and prepare discussion questions, which will be posted to our online discussion.	***Once during the quarter:*** ● draft outline due Thursday, the week before presentation = 3pts ● draft visuals due Sunday = 2pts ● revisions due Tuesday = 1pt ● presentation on Thursday = 2pts ● Slack post due Thursday = 1pt ● team eval due Thursday = 1pt 	**10** **Read more about the Presentation of Reading Topic assignment**
Online Discussions **Note-taking while Reading** Please use **Perusall** to annotate and comment on the weekly course materials, asking questions, adding clarification, and/or generally	***Weekly on Mondays:*** ● using Perusall = 2 x 10wks ● Slack discussion = 2 x 9wks Course code: **CHEN-MZZE8**	**40+** **Read more about the Online**

posting reactions. Each week, a student's Perusall annotations are worth up to 2 or 3 points (2 points is considered full credit, but it's possible to get 3 if you contribute a lot or do the optional readings), depending on a number of factors including quality and quantity of annotations throughout the documents, commenting on and/or upvoting other people's annotations, etc. At least three notes spread throughout the PDF are required, but they need to be high-quality notes so it's safer to post five or six notes to be sure. **Weekly Responses** Students are expected to participate in online discussions about the reading topics on the discussion platform Slack or Discord. We use Slack or Discord because they do a better job than Canvas and are what most tech and media companies use. Each week, students must post at least once, worth 2 points. Bonus for more.		**Discussions assignments**
Critical Let's Play _(Main Quarter-long Project)_ Predating live streaming through Twitch and other platforms, Let's Play videos offer a creative form for expression and sharing game experiences. Like live streaming, these are often videos of game playing, showing in-game action with voice-over narration or inset webcam video of player reactions. The main difference is that they're recorded and uploaded to a site like YouTube. There is an alternate type of Let's Play video, however, that includes edited and polished pieces, sometimes cut with other source video and images, and an extra voice-over that examines specific moments of play. In scholarly tradition, this analysis blends emotional reactions with academic literature and interrogation of in-game events and representation. Sometimes called Academic Let's Plays, sometimes called video essays, we're calling them Critical Let's Plays in this course.	_Project milestones are due Thursdays throughout the Quarter unless otherwise stated._ ● **Team contract**, Jan 12 = 2pts ● **Meeting Notes**, Jan 19, Feb 9, March 2 = 3pts ● **CLP review**, Jan 26 = 4pts ● **Idea and Team Eval 1**, Jan 26 = 4pts ● **Storyboard Slide Deck,** Feb 9 = 5pts ● **Draft CLP, Writeup, and Team Eval 2**, Feb 23 = 9pts ● **Feedback/Response**, Feb 28 (Tues) and March 2 = 8pts ● **Final CLP, Writeup, and Team Eval 3**, March 9 and 14 (Tues) = 10pts	**45** **Read more about the Critical Let's Play assignment**

	Due Thursday, March 16	2
Personal Learning Reflection (individual) Reflecting on experiences and thinking about lessons learned is one of the key components to lifelong learning. Write a half-page or full-page reflection on how the course went overall, what you learned, what you need to work on, and how the course could be improved. Think about all of the different activities, from the readings to the project, and reflect on what you learned through them or what could've gone better for your learning. Full points if it's clear that you're being thoughtful about your reflection. Submit via Canvas.		
Community Engagement Points Students who go above and beyond assignment requirements and generally do things to encourage or develop the whole classroom community will receive extra points. Post (memes) frequently, give good feedback to other teams outside of the required amount, ask others questions, participate in weekly activities, be responsive to your team, help other students, etc. Each week, during presentations, we'll be taking collective notes using a Google doc. Each student is expected to take notes at least once worth 2 points. Doing it more than once may receive extra points. This means more than just writing down what they're saying (we can just look at their slides for that!). Instead, summarize and paraphrase and then **find other resources to link or add visuals or comments to help explain things**. Throw in some questions and thoughts, too! In other words, you want to supplement and enrich their presentation. It's like New Presentation+ and you're providing the +. You've got their backs and extending the experience for	*Ongoing:* ● Introduce yourself in Discord *(due Thursday, Jan 12)* ● General participation. **Tip: Attempt positive interactions with us and your peers in class and online and use your video camera or have a photo of yourself in Zoom so we remember who you are!** ● Take notes at least once during the quarter that extend and enrich the presentation. Thanks for reading the syllabus. I know it's a lot, but this is important stuff. If you email me using the format outlined it a later part of this syllabus, I'll give you 2 extra credit points.	8 intro = 1 comm = 5 notes = 2

everyone. Also, be sure to note down whatever class discussions we have regarding the presentation topic!		

—GRADING—

To calculate your grade, **ignore the percentage columns in Canvas**.
Instead, just add up your points and consult this table.

Points	Grade		Points	Grade
>=99	4.0		80	3.0
98-97	3.9		79	2.9
96-95	3.8		...	...
94-93	3.7		70	2.0
92-91	3.6		...	...
90-89	3.5		60	1.0
88-87	3.4		...	...
86-85	3.3		57	0.7
84-83	3.2			
82-81	3.1			

—WEEKLY TOPICS AND READINGS—

Week	Topics and Activities	Readings
01 Jan 5	**Game Definitions and Let's Plays** crash course on Let's Plays: ● Nerd³ Plays… Kerbal Space Program ● Rainy Day Let's Play. Let's Playing As An Art – Episode 1: Let's All Let's Play ● Solon Scott - "Let's Play: The New Media Phenomenon" (Lecture) ● Last year's playlist: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqMt8w5YgAQrjVKYJeKBqJUuKEBs7aQqO	● Salen & Zimmerman. (2004). *Rules of play.* Chapter 7. **Mark** ● Bogost, Ian. (2013). Fun in Games. *UX Week 2013* [video]. **Mark** ● Chen, Mark. (2014). A new definition for games: Meaningful play. **Mark** Also, read Wallace, Chris. (May 6, 2019). How YouTube let's plays are preserving video game history. *Rock, Paper, Shotgun.* And check out this presentation Mark gave at a conference about this course: Mark's foray into Critical Let's Plays
02 Jan 12	**Critical Let's Plays and Gaming Identities** individually watch a bunch of LPs (hint: change the speed setting in YouTube): ● 10 Gaming Let's Plays You Should Watch ● Let's Play: *Journey* - Meskeram and Rainer ● *Journey* and Mental Health - Screen Therapy ● Lim ~ A Loving Review - Solonface ● *The Stanley Parable, Dark Souls,* and Intended Play - Folding Ideas	● Gee, James Paul. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy* Chapter 3: Learning and identity. ● Quantic Foundry. (2016). Our gaming motivation data distilled into a 20-minute talk. *GDC.* (If you're interested in this type of research, go and read Players Who Suit MUDs, too. Quantic Foundry partly were dissatisfied with that earlier work since it was grounded on a limited dataset.) ● Fordham et al. (2020). Stereotype threat in a video game context and its influence on perceptions of

	- In depth look at *Far Cry 3*, An Idiot plays - Kulmeet Singh *Hack N Slash* - Matt Jones - Well Played Let's Play *Fallout 4*: Succumbing to the Simulacra - Mark Chen *The Witness* - A Great Game That You Shouldn't Play - Joseph Anderson *The Stanley Parable* - Errant Signal - The Artist is Absent: Davey Wreden and *The Beginner's Guide* - Innuendo Studios - The Villain of Edith Finch - Joseph Anderson - The Morality of *Shadow of the Colossus* - Folding Ideas	STEM: Avatar-induced active self-concept as a possible mitigator. *American Behavioral Scientist, 64*(7). https://doi.org/10.1177/000276422091 **← Watch at least one of those videos!** Also, go play this: https://doors.gua-le-ni.com/ Also, read Nguyen's "How we can understand ourselves through games."
03 **Jan 19**	**(New) Games Journalism** watch these: - playlist from Writing on Games - playlist from Errant Signal - My Trip To Liberty City - Jim Monroe also check out: - Critical Distance Feb-Mar 2018 Roundup: History - Lincoln, Kevin. (2018). I Want My Chess TV. *Topic.*	1. Flood, J. (2012). Playing *Assassin's Creed 3* on the Pine Ridge Rez. *Killscreen* (Nov. 28, 2012). **Team 01:** 2. Walker, Austin. (Jun 10, 2015). Editorial: Why We Write: On Game Critique, Influence, and Reach. *Giant Bomb.***Team 02:** Also, watch Language of Editing: Basic Cuts - Folding Ideas.
04 **Jan 26**	**Textual Analysis and Ludonarrative Dissonance** also check out: Zimmerman, Eric. (Jan 11, 2017). Every game is a language [video].	1. Yin-Poole, Wesley. (2018). The horror of Vault 11. *Eurogamer.* **Team 03:** 2. Folding Ideas. Ludonarrative Dissonance. YouTube. **Team 04:**
05 **Feb**	**History, Cultural Analysis, and Professionalism** also check out:	1. Smith, Matt. (Dec 24, 2021). You died of dysentery: 50 years of traveling *The Oregon Trail*. *Kotaku.* **Team 05:**

2	• Gough, Cody. (Mar 24, 2018). Chutes and Ladders Began as a Game to Teach Morality 2,000 Years Ago. *Curiosity.* • Donlan, Christian. (2017). Why did ancient Egypt spend 3000 years playing a game nobody else liked? *Eurogamer.*	2. Vossen, Emma. (2021). Tom Nook, capitalist or comrade? *Loading 13*(22), 109-134. **Team 06:** 3. Chen, Mark. (2012). *Leet noobs.* Chapters 2 **Mark** Also, read Chapter 3 and watch Why It's Rude to Suck at Warcraft - Folding Ideas
06 Feb 9	**Addiction, Violence, and Mental Health** also check out: • Avery-Weir, Gregory. (Aug 15, 2011). Why so few violent games? *Ludus Novus.* • Psychgeist. State of the Research: Gaming Disorder. YouTube.	1. Cover, Rob. (2006). Gaming (ad)diction: Discourse, identity, time, and play in the production of the gamer addiction myth. *Game Studies.* **Team 07:** 2. Errant Signal. Violence in Games. YouTube. **Team 08:** 3. Price, Renata. (Aug 30, 2021). A year later, I still can't stop thinking about *Disco Elysium. Kotaku.* **Team 09:**
07 Feb 16	**Toxicity, Harassment, and eSports** also check out: • Takahashi, Dean. (Aug 23, 2019). Riot Games closes a chapter with sexual harassment lawsuit settlement. *VentureBeat.* • D'Anastasio, Cecilia. (Sep 7, 2018). Two Riot employees leave under complicated circumstances after PAX session excluding men. *Kotaku.* • People Make Games. Investigating Three Indie Superstars Accused of Emotional Abuse. YouTube.	1. Gironi, Fabio. (Jan 9, 2019). Gaming's hidden toxicity. *First Person Scholar.* **Team 10:** 2. D'Anastasio, Cecilia. (July 10, 2020). *The Super Smash Bros.* community reckons with sexual misconduct allegations. *Wired.* **Team 11:** 3. Innuendo Studios. Things of Beauty: Super Smash Bros. as Spectator Sport. YouTube. **and** Stern, Jacob. (Dec 1, 2022). The World Cup of Microsoft Excel. *The Atlantic.* **Team 12:**
08 Feb 23	**Representation and Industry-Fan Relations** also check out: • PBS Game/Show. Representation in Games series. • LGBTQ Video Game Archive	1. Yang, George. (Dec 8, 2020). Orientalism, *Cyberpunk 2077*, and Yellow Peril in Science Fiction. *Wired.* **and** Yussef Cole And Tanya DePass. (Mar 1, 2017). Black Skin Is Still A Radical Concept in Video Games. *Vice.* **Team 13:**

	- PBS Game/Show. (2014). How are games biased against the disabled? - Gwaltney, Javy. (2015). Day in the life: Disability and representation in videogames. *Paste*. - Pobuda, Tanya A. (Mar 27, 2022). Why is board gaming so white and male? I'm trying to figure that out. *The Conversation*.	2. Alexander, Julia, and Kuchera, Ben. (Jul 10, 2018). ArenaNet's firings reinforced gaming culture's worst impulses. *Polygon*. **Team 14:**
09 **Mar 2**	**Women in Games and Capitalist Exploitation** also check out: - Plunkett, Luke. (Feb 27, 2018). There was a 1908 board game about women fighting cops in the streets. *Kotaku*. - Bezio, Kristin. (2018). Ctrl-Alt-Del: GamerGate as a precursor to the rise of the alt-right. *Leadership, 14*(5), 556–566.	1. Feminist Frequency. Tropes vs Women in Video Games series. and Do Gamers Need Anita Sarkeesian's Feminism? **Team 15:** 2. People Make Games. How Valve is Profiting from Steam's Back-Door Casinos. YouTube. **and** People Make Games. Roblox Pressured Us to Delete Our Video. So We Dug Deeper. YouTube. **Team 16:**
10 **Mar 9**	**Games for Good** also check out: - Not Your Mama's Gamer on games and mental health! http://www.nymgamer.com/?s=mental+health - Thurm, Eric. (2018). Do not pass go, do not engage in class warfare. *Topic*. - Fox, Jr., Kevin. (Dec 16, 2021). *Cyberpunk 2077, The Outer Worlds*, and mainstream sci-fi games' lack of imagination. *Paste*. - Greening the Games Industry *Games for Health*'s special issue on games for mental health!	- Shaffer, David William, Squire, Kurt D., Halverson, Rich, and Gee, James Paul. (2004). Video games and the future of learning. University of Wisconsin-Madison and Academic Advanced Distributed Learning Co-Laboratory. - Sullivan, Mark. (Mar 18, 2022). This game crowdsources cyberattacks against Russian websites. *Fast Company*. - Plunkett, Luke. (Nov 22, 2022). Report: Big game companies like Square Enix and Roblox are ignoring climate change. *Kotaku*.

11 Mar 16	**We might meet this week, depending on whether projects need more time or if we skip a week during the quarter some time**

—COURSE RESOURCES AND MATERIALS—

Further readings/resources:
- **A curated list of good YouTube channels on games criticism**
- *Games and Culture* first issue.
- *Gamestudies.org*
- *Queer Game Studies*
- *How to Talk about Videogames*
- *Gaming at the Edge*
- PBS Game/Show
- Critical Gaming Project blog.
- This Week in Videogame Blogging. ← One of the most important sites about critical gaming.
- *Tabletop: Analog game design* (esp. The greatest gift, p. 111).
- Connected Learning / Digital Media and Learning
- Network Society
- Moral panics
- History of the desktop http://bestreviews.com/#reviews
- Making Games in a F****d Up World https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MfIkwKt7tl4 and http://www.molleindustria.org/blog/making-games-in-a-fucked-up-world-games-for-change-2014/
- Also, scroll up and see the further resources for each week in the weekly schedule. Week 2 has a list of LPs to watch.

—IMPORTANT POLICIES AND INFO—

[IAS Common Syllabus Resources and Policies](#) ← **Go read this. It pertains to all of your IAS courses!**

General Teaching Statement:
First, I believe I have a responsibility to support you for lifelong success and happiness. The way I've designed this course is in line with this guiding principle, from the technologies we use to how I accept revisions for almost all assignments. Furthermore, **the course is initially destabilizing by design because I want you to practice finding answers, asking when you need help, and learning through trying something, receiving feedback, and trying again until you excel**. I have a tiny blip of a chance to affect you positively in the long scheme of things so I've designed this course to encourage agility, independence, curiosity, and perseverance so that hopefully I've helped you be successful long after this course is over.

Second, I am a scholar and designer who believes in equity, justice, and **maximizing agency for everyone**. But I don't have all the answers, and I am on a lifelong journey to learn as well. Additionally, I try my hardest to decentralize power and to treat you as equals, but there are inherent dynamics that will always exist. I will endeavor to never exercise that power unless it is ethical to do so.

Third, **learning is social.** This is the foundational principle of my Ph.D. research in education and informal learning. I encourage you to communicate with each other, with the peer facilitators, and with me as much as possible, even if all you have to say is just a small status update. You want to develop "[swift trust](#)" and to learn by asking and reasoning aloud and by watching others.

Late and Revision Policies:
Most of the activities for my courses are done in teams or have certain milestones requiring you to give and receive feedback from peers. As such, it's quite difficult to get the same experience if you turn in late assignments. **Late work becomes meaningless if they arrive after someone was available to provide you with feedback. Meaningless work gets a zero grade. Late, but still meaningful, work gets at least partial credit, and you must let us know that you are still planning on doing it.** If it's extremely insightful or proves that you've been thinking about the course topics deeply, full points are still possible.

For work in **Perusall, the system is set up to accept late work, but I reserve the right to deduct points for egregiously late work,** especially if you don't let me know beforehand that it will be late. If your notes are late, it helps a lot if the notes are

particularly insightful and of high quality to make up for the fact that they're late. Also, **if you post something after the initial deadline, you should let me know** since I don't receive notifications for additions to previous readings.

For Slack or Discord, generally, you should let me know what's going on if you're going to miss a week or be late. Most likely, it'll be okay so long as you're communicative. Then follow up and let me know when you've posted something, and I'll regrade.

If you receive only one point in Perusall or Slack / Discord, it generally means you didn't meet the criteria for two points. **In most cases, you can revise or post more** (Perusall requires at least 3 high-quality notes, but more help make sure you get full points) and then just let me know to regrade.

For anyone who is chronically late with either Perusall notes or Slack / Discord, it is even more important to communicate any issues with me and/or peer facilitators and work with us to figure out a schedule for making up the late work. In most cases, you'll receive at least partial credit, but, again, you must negotiate your case in advance.

I try to email students who are chronically late with work to check in and then escalate by filing a Navigate Student Success Management report if I feel the need. Extreme circumstances sometimes do occur, however, so if that happens, please let me know and we can figure something out. If you know something will come up during the quarter, let us know earlier rather than later so we can figure out how you can still participate.

That said, **revisions are usually encouraged and actually expected if you receive comments or suggestions for edits**. In other words, your best stab by the due date is waaay better than not turning something in on time. **Most of the time, you'll just get comments and can submit revisions to be regraded.** You must, however, let us know what's going on and what your expectations are! So let us know what you're thinking!

Attendance and Zoom:
You are expected to be there during class times, but we will not be taking attendance to allow for anyone who needs to be absent for any given week (due to COVID or other reasons). That said, if you miss an in-class activity, that's on you. *If you cannot make it to a class session, you are still expected to let us and your team know!* That's common decency and being responsible and communicative. Not doing so results in fewer community engagement points.

Any Zoom class sessions might be recorded. The recording will capture the presenter's audio, video, and computer screen. Student audio and video will be recorded if they share their computer audio and video during the recorded session. The recordings will be accessible to students enrolled in the course to review materials. Normally, these recordings will not be shared with or accessible to the public.

The University and Zoom have FERPA-compliant agreements in place to protect the security and privacy of UW Zoom accounts. Students who do not wish to be recorded should:

- Change their Zoom screen name to hide any personal identifying information such as their name or UW Net ID, and
- Not share their computer audio or video during their Zoom sessions.

All that said, you are still highly encouraged to share your video during our Zoom sessions where appropriate. A lot of online community and *presence* research shows that it is harder to "be social" through online forms of communication since people miss out on gestures, body language, facial expressions, tonal changes, etc., but one way to mitigate this at least a little is to share video and audio. But it is entirely up to you whether you do. If not, there are alternatives such as using a filter (e.g., Snap Camera) or **putting up a photo as your profile image**. If you are simply self-conscious about how you look, one solution would be to **turn off your self-view in Zoom**, which has been shown to alleviate the feeling like everyone is watching. Also, if you don't share your video without some good reason and you complain about not being social when remote, that's sort of on you.

Online Communication:
Allow for mistakes. Despite the best intentions, sometimes you might be hurt by something that someone in the course says. Please talk to me about this, as I can help resolve the conflicts. Remember that most students, and humans in general, are clueless and that we don't usually intend to be hurtful. Never ascribe spite when it's more likely incompetence or cluelessness!

Write well. Be clear and concise, and use good spelling and grammar. Stay on topic. To check clarity, read your message aloud to yourself before sending it.

As a general rule, I will not message or respond to students on Slack / Discord or through other means after 9 pm, so if you want to reach me and want a reply that day, please be sure to message me well in advance of that evening. Please write to me on my university email account markchen@uw.edu for any messages that are super important and/or that you do not wish to place on Slack / Discord so that we can keep a good record of the messages (and to ensure I receive them because DMs on Slack / Discord can sometimes get lost!). You may also want to send a group DM to the PFs and me instead of just me if you need time-sensitive help.

In addition, advising staff in the UW Bothell's Schools of IAS and STEM will have access to Canvas, Slack / Discord, and other communication tools used in courses as a means to support and mitigate issues if any arise.

I take on different roles in my relations with students. I am generally your friend and care about you, but I am also your professor, so keep that in mind in your communications with me.

A Note on Stress:

Thinking about the amount of work you have to complete within the next few weeks like

My life is a mess

Success in this course depends heavily on your personal health and well-being. Recognize that stress is an expected part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected setbacks or life changes outside the classroom. And let's be realistic. Life absolutely sucks for most people right now. Stress is a perfectly natural response to world-altering events. If you somehow have made it through the past year completely unaffected, realize that most of your classmates were not so lucky. Some of them may have lost friends or family, have lost their jobs, have been hospitalized, have extra responsibilities such as caring for parents or grandparents or are otherwise dealing with things that make them perform less than optimally.

That said, your other instructors and I strongly encourage you to reframe challenges as an unavoidable pathway to success. Reflect on your role in taking care of yourself throughout the term, before the demands of exams and projects reach their peak.

You do not owe me or your teammates personal information about your situation. It is up to you what you choose to share with your team that is personal in nature; however, do let your team know anything that will affect projects (for example, if you'll be late on a deliverable, you should let your team know that you're running late, but you're not obligated to tell them why). From the other end of things, if others on your team give you bad news about their own status, don't ask for personal information; let your teammates choose whether to volunteer anything additional, don't pressure them to divulge, and respect their decision.

Please DO feel free to reach out to me about any difficulty you may be having that may impact your performance in this course as soon as it occurs and before it becomes unmanageable. And you are always welcome to talk to me about whatever you like, whether it's personal, professional, or a combination. Additionally, your academic advisor and many other support services on campus stand ready to assist you if you need/want.

Again, thanks for reading this syllabus. I know it's a lot, but it's important. If you email me with your name, this course number, and an image of a cat, you'll get 2 extra credit points. If you email me later in the quarter asking for help and the answer is in the syllabus, I'll respond with an image of a cat.

Classroom and Online Etiquette:
Understanding and respecting the fact that people have diverse backgrounds, embodiments, and experiences is at the heart of higher education. In IAS and at UWB, students are expected to: 1) respect differences expressed in readings, by students or instructors which may include: age, cultural/ethnic/racial background, linguistic, disability, gender & gender presentation, religion, sexual orientation, immigration status, veteran status, and we can go on (use your good judgment); 2) engage respectfully in discussions of diverse viewpoints and ideologies embedded in course readings, films, and presentations.

Basically, be respectful of other views and experiences, even when they are in conflict with your own. Try not to be defensive. No one wants to brainwash you. Learn everything you can. If you agree, good for you. If you disagree, the knowledge that you gain can provide you with intelligent reasons for why you disagree. Either way, you'll know more and will be smarter on a variety of topics. That is the point of education.

Treating your interactions online as you would in a face-to-face class is imperative for successfully completing this course. Inappropriate interactions will have consequences.

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 e-mail account and Canvas regularly, so that I can communicate with each of you electronically between classes. If you wish to use another e-mail address as your primary account, set up your UW account to forward to your other address.

Syllabus Academic Freedom Statement:
Academic freedom is the principle that scholars have the right - without repression - to teach, conduct research, and/or disseminate ideas, even those that are not widely accepted or convenient, with the primary goal of truth-seeking. This is central to the mission, goals, and values of the academy and is a core principle of academia. As the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) states, "institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good…The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition." This course is based on the most recent and relevant research and scholarship in this discipline and in related fields. Although some of the ideas expressed within this course may not be convenient or fit within your worldview, they are grounded in rigorous and informed study.

Our goal is to have deep, informed, and lively classroom debate and discussion. Students MUST provide logical, rational, and evidence-based argumentation. To be entitled to have your views treated as serious candidates for the truth, you must present evidence for your statements. All "opinions" should be backed up with logical argumentation and evidence with the purpose of seeking truth toward the common good.