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EN 200: Writing and Analyzing Games (Writing Seminar)
Spring 2014
T/R 3:30-4:45

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Instructor: Dr. Jeff Kirchoff
Office: Schilling Hall 434D
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 9:30-12:30, Wednesday TBD, and by appointment.
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Course Description
Why do people love Pong? What qualities does Dungeons and Dragons possess that have captivated people for close to forty years? How do you craft an engaging game that will stand the proverbial test of time? This course will help students form tentative answers to these questions and others like it. Specifically, students will learn a variety of gaming theories to analyze existing games—ranging from board to video games and just about everything in between—as written texts and cultural artifacts. These analyses will be both formal (through short, written responses) and informal (class discussion). These analyses will help students work on the "major" project of the semester: the development of a game from idea to product. As such, students will be expected to pitch, promote, and actually create/design/produce a game (complete with a full set of rules) during the duration of the semester. To aide in this quest, students will become familiar with the "best practices" of game design.

Goals of the Course
By the end of the semester, students will have
  * Identified key tenets of gaming theory
  * Characterized the varied purposes of games
  * Used ideas from gaming theory to analyze a wide range of games
  * Developed a video game using free software
  * Pitched, promoted, and published a board, card, or role-playing game that was played in class

Required Texts
Rules of Play by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (ISBN 978026224051)
How to Do Things With Videogames by Ian Bogost (ISBN 9780816676477)

Course Policies
Attendance: Because so much of the learning process takes place in the classroom, attendance is an integral part of this class. This semester, we'll be playing, analyzing, and discussing a lot of games in class, so any class missed will put students at a disadvantage. Additionally, as a general rule I value all voices in the classroom and enjoy the dynamic a full class offers. That said, I understand emergencies do occur and that individuals have a life beyond the university. Thus, students are afforded four "free" absences (the equivalent of two weeks of class); please note I do not need to know about the nature of your absence—just let me know ahead of time if you will miss class (a 24 hour notice is appreciated). For each absence after the fourth, the offending student's "Attendance and Participation" grade will go down a full letter grade (e.g., five absences will mean the best possible "Attendance and Participation" grade will be a "B"). Note

that if a student has an extended and/or serious illness the result is usually an incomplete or medical withdrawal from the course.

Tardiness: Try to be on time. I'm a punctual sort of fellow, and I tend to get class started at the scheduled time. When people come in late, it disrupts the flow of class and more importantly, the late individual will miss key information from the beginning of class. If tardiness becomes a problem for a particular student, I will talk with that person individually.

Late Assignments: I do not accept late work unless prior arrangements have been made. This is a non-negotiable policy; however, if you have questions or are worried about completing an assignment on time, talk to me well before the due date and we can come up with a plan of action. Note: "well before the due date" does not mean 24 hours before the assignment is due. I generally like to hold these sorts of conferences a week ahead of the due date. If someone contacts me 24 hours before a project is due, my response may not be very favorable. This policy extends to daily work as well.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs when one person presents another person's words or ideas as her/his own. It is a serious offense that can result in an F for the course. Please see me if you have any questions concerning plagiarism.

Respect: My goal is for everyone to feel welcome and comfortable in the classroom, so please treat everyone in this class with respect. This should be a friendly, positive environment open to discussion and feedback. To that end, there is no tolerance for individuals who intentionally disrupt class or contribute to a hostile learning environment. Examples of disruptive behavior include (but are not limited to) talking or texting on a cell phone, speaking out of turn, facebooking, emailing, checking fantasy sport teams, swearing excessively, sleeping, attacking individuals verbally or physically, talking to friends while others are talking/working, or staunchly refusing to participate. If I see this kind of behavior occurring, you will be asked to leave the classroom and you will be counted absent for that day. If you have any questions or concerns regarding these policies, let me know and I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Food is permissible, as long as it does not become a distraction. Please note that many of your peers may have laptops out; please be careful not to spill anything on these valuable tools.

Speaking of *laptops*, since we'll be looking at a variety of games available online, it will behoove students to bring a fully charged laptop to each and every class. I tend to do assign a lot of in-class writing as well, and I think laptops facilitate this kind of work nicely.

Participation is expected of all of us. Please come to class ready to ask questions, share ideas, and provide feedback to others. Please note that your participation will be a part of your overall assessment (see below).

Email is a great tool for communication. However, I ask that when you send me an email to use a proper salutation (e.g. Hi Dr. Kirchoff), complete sentences, and identifying information. This is a matter of common courtesy. As I mention above, I will make a good faith effort in responding to email queries within 24 hours.
Sending documents as *attachments* to an email is a perfectly valid way to get feedback on a project. To ensure readability, please save your documents as a .rtf, .docx, or .pdf.

Lastly, I prefer to be addressed as "Dr. Kirchoff," "Professor Kirchoff," or "Jeff"—whichever you are most comfortable with. I will not respond to nicknames, Mr. Kirchoff, or other variations of my name.

Inclement Weather
Part of the joys of living in the Midwest is the possibility of facing severe snow and ice storms during the winter months. As a commuter—as I'm sure many of you are—I may be unable to make class on extreme bad-weather days that Millikin stays open for. If this unfortunate possibility becomes reality, I will email you (through Moodle's News Forum) at least 12 hours before class to let you know that we will not be meeting in person that day, but will instead be having a virtual class. Instructions will be posted to Moodle; students will still be expected to participate virtually on these rare days.

Disability Accommodation Policy
Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. If you are seeking classroom accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, you should submit your documentation to the Office of Student Success at Millikin University, currently located in Staley Library 014.

Academic Honesty
All students are expected to uphold professional standards for academic honesty and integrity in their research, writing, and related performances. Academic honesty is the standard we expect from all students. Read the Student Handbook for further details about offenses involving academic integrity at: http://www.millikin.edu/handbook/.

Staley Library also hosts a web site on Preventing Plagiarism, which includes the complete university policy. It is located at: http://www.millikin.edu/staley/services/instruction/Pages/plagiarism-faculty.aspx. Visit and carefully read the Preventing Plagiarism web site.

The Faculty has the right and the responsibility to hold students to high ethical standards in conduct and in works performed, as befits a scholar at the university. Faculty members have the responsibility to investigate all suspected breaches of academic integrity that arise in their courses. They will make the determination as to whether the student violated the Academic Integrity Policy. Should the faculty member determine that the violation was intentional and egregious, he or she will decide the consequences, taking into account the severity and circumstances surrounding the violation, and will inform the student in writing, forwarding a copy of the letter to the Registrar and to the Dean of Student Development.

This letter will be destroyed when the student graduates from the University unless a second breach of integrity occurs, or unless the first instance is of sufficient magnitude to result in failure of the course, with an attendant XF grade recorded in the transcript. If an XF is assigned for the course, the faculty letter of explanation becomes a permanent part of the student's record. If a second violation occurs subsequent to the first breach of integrity, the Dean of Student Development will begin disciplinary and judicial processes of the University, as outlined in the Student Handbook.

If a student receives an XF for a course due to academic dishonesty, this remains as a permanent grade and cannot be removed from the transcript. However, students may repeat the course for credit toward graduation. Some programs and majors have more explicit ethical standards, which supersede this Policy, and violation of which may result in dismissal from some programs or majors within the University. If you have difficulty with any assignment in this course, please see me rather than consider academic dishonesty.

Please note that I do not tolerate plagiarism in any form.

Course Assignments/Grade Distribution
Informal writing (blog): 20%
→ Once a week, you will be expected to post one to two paragraphs (roughly 500 or more words) to our class blog. These posts should in some way respond to our weekly topic(s); as such, they can be responses to class discussion, course readings, or games analyzed. In some instances, you could even provide a practice analysis of a game you are familiar with. I invite you to close your paragraphs with an intriguing question or observation that can kick-start conversation in our class. Quite frankly, these posts will often guide some of our in-class discussion, or at least get us started in a particular class session. Students will be expected to post to the blog at least ten times during the semester; thus, each student is afforded five "free" weeks. Use them wisely. In order to receive full credit, blog posts need to be well-written (e.g. complete sentences, organized, mechanically sound), insightful, and posted on time (no later than Mondays at noon).

Formal game analysis: 15%
→ Not only will we be learning how to write games this semester, but we will also be analyzing games throughout the semester. Using any of the gaming theories we discuss in class, students will be asked to write a three to four page analysis of a game (video game, card game, board game, or role-playing game). A short proposal will be needed for this assignment. A formal assignment sheet will detail the particulars.

Videogame Creation and Reflection: 15%
→ Though we are not exclusively focusing on videogames this semester, we will be spending a bit of time discussing the importance of this massive industry. To that end, students will be asked to experiment with creating a short video game using Stencyl, a free game-making software that we'll learn how to use in class. The kinds of games you can make with this software are wide-ranging (e.g. anything from Mario to Angry Birds). We will play your videogames in class. Additionally, students will be asked to write a one to two page reflection that articulates the process/experience/frustrations/successes of making a videogame. A formal assignment sheet will detail the particulars.

Pitch, Promote, Publish: 35%
→ The major project we will be working on this semester is pitching, promoting, and designing a game of your choice. A detailed assignment sheet will be made available to you early on in the semester. Please note that this will be a group project.

Attendance and Participation (includes in-class writing exercises): 15%

→ As indicated above, attendance and participation will be assessed in this class. Plan on coming to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings; bringing relevant, academic questions to class is always welcomed as well.

Key Due Dates
Pitches for Major Project: 2/6
Draft of Rules for Major Project: 3/4
Draft of Games (1): 4/3
Draft of Games (2): 4/15
Promotional Materials: 4/15
Formal Analysis: 4/24
Videogame and Reflection: 5/8
Final Major Project: Finals Week

Tentative Weekly Schedule
(Key: *Rules of Play = RP* and *How to Do Things With Videogames =* Bogost)
Level (Unit) One: The Core Concepts (A Foundation for the Class)
1/21 (Tuesday)
- Introductions
- Go over class syllabus
- Two Truths and a Lie

→ Read "The Design and Testing of the Board Game—Lord of the Rings" (*RP* 22-27)

1/23 (Thursday)
- Introduce "Pitch, Promote, Publish" Project
- Games as text

→ Read "Meaningful Play" (*RP* 29-37) and "Design" (*RP* 39-47)

1/28 (Tuesday)
- Writing and Giving a Pitch
- Discernable and Integrated Meaningful Play
- Semiotics Primer

1/30 (Thursday)
- Practice Identifying Meaningful Play and Design Principles in Games

→ Read "Systems" (*RP* 49-55) and "The Magic Circle" (*RP* 93-99)

2/4 (Tuesday)
- Brief discussion and application of Systems and the Magic Circle
- Individual work time on pitches

2/6 (Thursday)
- Pitches for Games
- Anonymous Voting for Games
- Group Meeting

→ Read "Interactivity" (*RP* 57-69)

2/11 (Tuesday)
- Anatomy of Interaction

→ Read "Defining Games" (*RP* 71-83)

2/13 (Thursday)
- Game Definitions—Some Parameters and Qualifiers

Level (Unit) Two: The Rules of Games
2/18 (Tuesday)
- Playing and Analyzing Sibling Rivalry

→ Read "Defining Rules" (*RP* 119-126) and "Rules on Three Levels" (*RP* 127-139)

2/20 (Thursday)
- Operational, Constituative, and Implicit Rules
- Analyzing Written Rules

→ Read "Games as Emergent Systems" (*RP* 151-171)
2/25 (Tuesday)
- Complexity Theory
- Group Work

→ Read "Games as Systems of Uncertainty" (*RP* 173-189)

2/27 (Thursday)
- Looking at Games of Chance
- Practice Writing Rules

→ Read "Games as Systems of Information" (*RP* 203-211) and "Games as Systems of Conflict" (*RP* 249-265)

3/4 (Tuesday)
- Information Economy
- Competition vs Cooperation
- A Brief Note on Zero Sum Games

3/6 (Thursday)
- Playing and Analyzing Ironclad

→ Read "Defining Play" (*RP* 301-311) and "Games as Narrative Play" (*RP* 377-419) over Spring Break

3/11 (Tuesday) and 3/13 (Thursday) Spring Break

Level (Unit) Three: Designing "Play"
3/18 (Tuesday)
- Games as Narrative
- Group work on writing narrative

→ Read "Games as Social Play" (*RP* 461-487) for 3/25

3/20 (Thursday) No Class (Kirchoff at Conference)

3/25 (Tuesday)
- Social Games
- Group work on games

3/27 (Thursday)
- Play and Analyze Sneak
→ Read "Games as Cultural Rhetoric" (*RP* 515-533)

Level (Unit) Four: Ways to Talk About Games
4/1 (Tuesday)
- Introduce Formal Written Analysis Project
- Games as Cultural Artifacts
→ Read "Introduction" and "Art" (Bogost 1-17)

4/3 (Thursday)
- Games as "Art"
- Playtest—Day One
→ Read "Empathy and "Reverence" (Bogost 18-29)

4/8 (Tuesday)
- Discussion of Bogost
- Promotion Materials for your Game
→ Read "Promotion" and "Kitsch" (Bogost 64-69 and 83-88)

4/10 (Thursday)
- Discussion of Bogost
- Promotion Materials for your Game
→ Read "Relaxation" and "Habituation" (Bogost 89-95 and 125-133)

4/15 (Tuesday)
- Discussion of Bogost
- Playtest—Day Two
→ Read "Disinterest" and "Conclusion" (Bogost 134-140 and 147-154)

4/17 (Thursday)
- Discussion of Bogost
- In-class Writing/Peer Review
- Introduce Digital Game Assignment

Level (Unit) Five: Playing Around with Digital Games
4/22 (Tuesday)
- Introduction to Stencyl

4/24 (Thursday)
- Advanced work with Stencyl

4/29 (Tuesday)

- In-class work with Stencyl

5/1 (Thursday)
- In-class work with Stencyl

5/6 (Tuesday)
- Play-test
- Peer Review

5/8 (Thursday)
- Playing Games
- Course Evaluations

Finals week 5/12→ Public Playing of Your Games

EN 200: Writing and Analyzing Games
Pitch, Promote, Publish
Due Finals Week
35% of your final grade

In groups, you will pitch, promote, and "publish" a board, card, or role-playing game.

The Pitch
After you've selected your groups, each group member will be expected to come up with a written game pitch (you'll need enough copies for the whole class) and a short, five-minute presentation of your proposed game. Game pitches are short documents/short speeches but are incredibly layered and complex. Consider: you need to convince several people that your game is worth investing in (or, in our case, designing) in a short amount of time. Thus, you need to make your game seem exciting while also looking at the bottom line—who is going to buy/play this game and how is it going to be promoted and released?

Your pitches will need the following elements:
- Title of game
- Genre of game (e.g. trivia, strategy, fantasy)
- Category of game (e.g. board game, card game, role-playing game)
- The big idea (What is your game about? What's the general story?)
- Key features (What is unique about your game? What sets it apart? How can we sell/promote your game?)
- Target Audience (Is your game designed for kids? Adults? Teenagers? Boys? Girls? Families?)

Your written pitch can/should be a bit more detailed; your five-minute speech should be designed to get us all excited about your game and understand why your proposed game is different and more interesting than not only the other pitches, but also other games on the market.

→ Note: Do NOT bash/critique/diminish anyone else's proposed pitches. Treat everyone's pitch with respect.

On 2/6, students will present their pitch. Group A will start. Each member of the group will share their ideas. After Group A has finished pitching, the rest of the class—instructor included, Group A members excluded—will anonymously vote on which pitch the group will ultimately design and promote. This is meant to mirror the actual experience of pitching a game—those who pitch the game do not have much of a say in which game gets developed/green-lighted. Group B and Group C will follow. By the end of 2/6, each group will know which games they are designing and promoting. Note that whichever pitch gets selected will not negatively or positively affect anyone's grade for this project.

Promoting Your Game
During finals week, we will open our class up to the Millikin community and invite them into our classroom to play your games. However, we need to come up with a way to inform and

persuade Millikin students, instructors, and administrators to take a break from Finals week madness and play your creations. That is where the promotional materials come in.

As a group, you need to craft promotional materials—in the form of university-approved print posters—that will encourage/persuade Millikin students to attend our "game premier." Please note: you cannot *hire* someone to make your promotional materials. The posters—which should blend image and the written word—need to be created and produced by the group.

These posters should have the following information:
- *Where* the event is held
- *When* the event is taking place
- *What* participants can expect
- *Why* people should attend
- A brief synopsis of your game. Like your pitches, you need to make your game seem appealing to a wide range of individuals.

Designing the Game
Using the tenets of game design found in *Rules of Play*, you will actually design and create a playable game. Specifically, you will
- Create a board, card, or role-playing game. If you create a board or card game, you are responsible for crafting the board and the cards. Likewise, you are responsible for supplying all the necessary equipment (dice, markers, cards, etc.).
- Design a user-friendly rule-book to accompany your game.
- *Optional:* Package your game so that it can easily be transported (bonus points will be given for those that choose to do this).

Our entire semester will be spent talking about how to design (and analyze) games. Thus, your game should very clearly/obviously make use of the ideas we discuss. You need to consider what kind of rule-system you want to instill. You'll want to brainstorm how the game-play should unfold. Think about the wider implications of your game—what kind of cultural commentary/critique should it implicitly or explicitly possess?

We will have lots of workshop time for groups to kick around ideas. Additionally, we'll be continually play-testing groups' games with an eye towards making the games a more meaningful, fluid play-experience.

EN 200: Writing and Analyzing Games
Formal Game Analysis
Due 4/24/2014
15% of your final grade

This is a class not only on designing and writing games, but also analyzing games. That is, part of our work in this class requires us to ask how games work, what games are saying, and what place games has in our society. To that end, this formal game analysis asks you to conduct an analysis of a board, card, video, or role-playing game.

Here are some options for this particular assignment.
1. You could craft an analysis in a vein similar to any of Ian Bogost's chapters in *How to Do Things With Videogames*. That is, your analysis could complement any of his chapters. For instance, you could choose to talk about how a certain game—perhaps *Magic the Gathering*—is not only a game, but also a work of art. You could also blend a couple of topics that Bogost talks about; thus, I might choose to talk about how promotional games are also inherently kitschy.
2. Given our extensive work with the text *Rules of Play*, you could certainly provide an analysis of a game using any number of frameworks provided in our primary textbook. Consider:
   a. You could write about a particular game as cultural rhetoric. For instance, I might discuss *Risk* and its cultural implications.
   b. You could write about how a particular game works within a specific rule framework that we discussed. For instance, you could analyze the game *Memory* or *Guess Who* as a system of information.
   c. You could discuss the narrative or social play of a game. Particularly interesting might be analyzing what is gained and what is lost in video games that can either be done socially or individually (for instance, any *Madden* football game)

Regardless of which option you choose, your essay should be between three and four pages minimum. I will always be willing to read work longer, but any work that fails to reach a full three pages will not pass. The elements of academic writing apply here, so be sure to have a strong introduction, an analytical thesis statement, transitions, fully developed paragraphs, a conclusion, and (when applicable) MLA citations.

One final note: please email me your topic. Tell me what game you are analyzing and what analytical framework you plan on using. Additionally, let me know what you think your main points will be. Please do this within 72 hours.

EN 200: Writing and Analyzing Games
Videogame Creation and Reflection
Due 5/8/2014
15% of your final grade

The major project we are working on this semester is the design of a board, card, or role-playing game. However, I do not want to ignore the production of videogames. While not the focal point of our semester, this project invites students to design and create a *short* video game using Stencyl (a free, downloadable videogame creator).

A couple of notes about this project:
- We will spend a couple of days learning the basics of Stencyl. Stencyl is an interesting software. It is free, fairly intuitive and you can create games as complicated as Mario or as simple as Pong. Additionally, there are several support forums and support materials that are made available to you.
- This does not have to be a complicated game, though it needs to fit the parameters of a game, as defined by *Rules of Play*. This is *introduction* to crafting videogames—not an advanced course. It is meant to get your "feet wet" (if you pardon the cliché).
  - To that end, keep in mind that Stencyl—though a terrific program—is still rather limited. This is not the venue to create the next World of Warcraft. This, however, the time to see if you can make a game that would fit well on minigames.com. Remember—*Rules of Play* clearly indicates that a meaningful game does not have to always be intricate.
- I'm very interested in your reflection. This reflection can be relatively informal. It should talk about your experiences creating a videogame. What did you like? What did you hate? How does it compare to designing a board/card/role-playing game? What are some interesting things you learned about Stencyl? What are some things you might do differently if you had more time? Your reflection should be a couple of pages. Though informal, be sure that it is mechanically and grammatically sound.

We are devoting two weeks completely to this project. We'll spend two days (one week) going over the basics of Stencyl. The following two days will be in-class work time for you to workshop and fiddle around with games. Despite having two weeks of in-class work, don't hesitate to work outside of class on this project. I acknowledge that you have two other projects in the works—the formal analysis and the major project—but a little outside work on this project can go a long ways.