

PHIL 3410: Philosophy of Gaming
Fall 2024 | MW 9:30-10:45
Langdale Hall Rm 618

Instructor: Professor Daniel Weiskopf
 Email: dweiskopf@gsu.edu
 Office hours: Tue 2:00-4:00 (via WebEx)

DESCRIPTION

Gaming and play are inherent parts of human life. They are sources of challenge and pleasure, chances to explore simulated worlds, ways to socialize and connect with others, and forums to explore our identities. Games also dominate popular culture around the globe; videogames in particular are a many-billion-dollar industry. But games can also have more negative effects. They may encourage undesirable ways of thinking and acting or reinforce oppressive worldviews. Games communities can also be sites of toxic behavior.

In this course we will explore some basic questions about the nature of games, focusing on how the experience of gaming is crafted by designers, players, and communities, and how games in turn can make us in particular ways. We will focus on how games convey meaning, shape our agency, evoke emotions, foster role-playing, and create communities. We will do this through reading what scholars and critics have written about games, and by playing and discussing games together. Our aim is to develop ways of critically analyzing games that are attentive to their full complexity.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course you should:

- Be able to explain foundational concepts related to play and gaming
- Be able to show how specific examples of game design and game play exemplify those concepts
- Be able to explain and theorize key relations among games, players, communities, and contexts of play
- Be able to apply this knowledge in critiquing particular games

GRADING

Grades will be determined using the following formulas (no extra credit):

Reflection notes	30%	A+ 100-97%	A 97-93%	A- 92-90%
Midterm paper	30%	B+ 89-87%	B 87-83%	B- 82-80%
Final project	40%	C+ 79-77%	C 77-73%	C- 72-70%
Total	100%	D 69-60%	F 59-0%	

Reflection notes are one paragraph discussions that either give a considered analytical response to one of the course readings or critically discuss some aspect of your gameplay sessions. There will be seven of these due throughout the term.

The **midterm paper** is a short essay in which you will apply some of the theoretical concepts and frameworks we have discussed to a particular game.

For the **final project**, you have two options. You may write a traditional **argumentative essay** in which you lay out and defend a position on one of the themes and topics we have covered. Alternatively, you may make a **critical let's play video** in which you walk through a particularly interesting portion of a game, accompanied by theoretical commentary and analysis that draws on our texts and discussions. Topics, guidelines and examples for both assignments will be distributed in advance.

MATERIALS

The readings will all be PDFs posted to iCollege. We will play the following games, which you will need to buy or otherwise gain access to:

[*Myst: Masterpiece Edition*](#) (cost: \$5.99 on Steam)

[*Papers, Please*](#) (cost: \$9.99 on Steam)

Instructions on signing up for a Steam account will be posted to iCollege. These games and the others assigned should be playable on standard laptop or desktop computers. No console or gaming-quality PC is required.

EXPECTATIONS

A few suggestions on how to prepare for success in the class:

1. Successful students are **active learners**. This means being present and attentive in class, reading critically and taking notes, checking in on how well you are understanding the material, and asking questions when things aren't clear.
2. Successful students **make connections**. This means thinking about how what we are learning in this class connects with what you're learning in other classes, and how it fits in with your own experiences and beliefs and those of your peers.
3. Successful students **manage their time wisely**. This means keeping on top of the readings and assignments. If you fall behind, it will be much harder to catch up as the semester goes on.

I expect you to do your best to follow these guidelines. You, meanwhile, can expect the following from me:

1. I will be **responsive and timely** in how I grade assignments and respond to messages. Assignments will be returned within two weeks, and I will answer

emails and other communications within 48 hours.

2. I will be **clear** in all of my course communications. This includes setting deadlines, presenting material in lectures and discussion, explaining the purpose of assignments, and establishing grading standards.
3. I will be **fair**. This means that assignments will be graded according to set criteria, that discussions will be moderated in a way that gives everyone's views a respectful hearing, and that course guidelines will be applied equally to all participants.

Email (dweiskopf@gsu.edu) is the best way to contact me. Put the course name or number in the subject line of your message. I answer emails Mon to Fri. I will send course updates to your GSU email throughout the semester, so check it often.

I hold **virtual office hours** on WebEx, Tue 2:00-4:00. Reserve a slot at least one day in advance if you want to chat. Let me know if there are specific issues you'd like to discuss. If you are unavailable then, email me to schedule another time.

SCHEDULE

The readings are available on [iCollege](#). Our lectures and discussions will clarify and supplement the texts, but they presuppose that you have read them at least once. After we've discussed the readings, go back over them to see how your understanding has improved.

Disclaimer: The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary.

PLAY AND GAMES

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|--------|-----------------------------------|
| M 8/26 | Session Zero: Introduce ourselves |
| W 8/28 | Miguel Sicart, "Play Is" |
| M 9/2 | ** Labor Day ** |
| W 9/4 | Bernard Suits, "What Is a Game?" |

RULES AND RHETORIC

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|--------|---|
| M 9/9 | Rolf Nohr, "Tetris: Rules" (Play: <i>Pongs</i>) |
| W 9/11 | Ian Bogost, "The Rhetoric of Video Games" (Play: <i>Loved; Hair Nah; Dys4ia</i>) |

FICTION AND NARRATIVE

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|--------|--|
| M 9/16 | Grant Tavinor, "Videogames and Fiction" |
| W 9/18 | Jon Robson and Aaron Meskin, "Video Games as Self-Involving Interactive Fictions" (Start playing: <i>Myst: Masterpiece Edition</i>) |

- M 9/23 Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (Continue playing: *Myst: Masterpiece Edition*)
- W 9/25 Discuss *Myst: Masterpiece Edition*

ROLE-PLAYING

- M 9/30 Gary Alan Fine, "Role-Playing and Person-Playing" (Watch/listen to an actual play)
- W 10/2 Sarah Stang and Aaron Trammell, "The Ludic Bestiary: Misogynistic Tropes of Female Monstrosity in *Dungeons & Dragons*"

IDENTITY

- M 10/7 Shira Chess, "Contextualizing Player Two" (Play: *Diner Dash*)
- W 10/9 Adrienne Shaw, "Does Anyone Really Identify with Lara Croft?"
- M 10/14 Kishonna Gray, "The 'Problem' of Intersectionality in Digital Gaming Culture" and "Queering Intersectional Narratives"

IDEOLOGY

- W 10/16 Alexander Galloway, "Allegories of Control" (Start playing: *Papers, Please*)
- M 10/21 Miguel Sicart, "Moral Dilemmas in Computer Games" (Continue playing: *Papers, Please*)
- W 10/23 Discuss *Papers, Please*

GAMIFICATION

- M 10/28 Adrian Hon, "The Rise of Gamification" (Play: *Universal Paperclips*)
- W 10/30 Natasha Dow Schüll, "Digital Gambling: The Coincidence of Desire and Design" (Play: *Banana; Candy Crush Saga*)

VIOLENCE

- M 11/4 Robert Sparrow, Rebecca Harrison, Justin Oakley, and Brendan Keogh, "Playing for Fun, Training for War: Can Popular Claims about Recreational Video Gaming and Military Simulations be Reconciled?"
- W 11/6 Amanda Phillips, "Shooting to Kill: Headshots, Twitch Reflexes, and the Mechropolitics of Video Games"

FAIRNESS

- M 11/11 Mia Consalvo, "Gaining Advantage: How Videogame Players Define and Negotiate Cheating"
- W 1/13 C. Thi Nguyen and José Zagal, "Good Violence, Bad Violence: The Ethics of Competition in Multiplayer Games"

FEELINGS

- M 11/18 Aaron Smuts, "The Paradox of Painful Art" (Play: *my father's long, long legs; howling dogs*)
- W 11/20 Bonnie Ruberg, "Playing to Lose: The Queer Art of Failing at Video Games" (Play: *QWOP; Level Devil*)
- M 11/25 **** Thanksgiving Break ****
- W 11/27 **** Thanksgiving Break ****

LET'S PLAY

- M 12/2 In-class play, TBD
- W 12/4 More play and course wrap-up
- M 12/9 *Game Over*: Final assignment due by midnight

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Conduct

Attendance at all meetings is expected. We meet for the entire scheduled time unless otherwise noted. You may not distribute recordings or transcripts of lectures and discussions. You must request permission to make recordings for personal use. Adhere to normal standards of good classroom behavior: cell phones silent and put away, no loud personal conversations, snoring, etc.

Special accommodations

All efforts will be made to accommodate students with special needs. Students who wish to request accommodations may do so by connecting with the Access and Accommodations Center (AACE). Students will be accommodated upon instructor receipt of an accommodation notice from AACE (see [How to Connect](#)).

Involuntary withdrawal

If by the midpoint of the semester you have not submitted a preponderance of required work, have been absent for two or more weeks without communicating with me, or fail to respond to email messages about nonattendance or a failing grade, I may withdraw you from the class.

Laptops and other electronic devices

Use of laptops and related electronic devices is permitted for course related use only. Disruptive or distracting use of personal electronics will first result in a warning, then in your being asked to leave the class.

Technical support

Online platforms like iCollege can be hard to use, and often break in weird ways. If you are having trouble getting iCollege to do what you want, documentation can be found [here](#). If the platform is broken or inaccessible, contact GSU's [IT department](#) via [email](#).

Lateness policy

Late work is penalized by half a letter grade or the equivalent. It is due at most 72 hours after the original deadline and will not be accepted after that point. Exceptions will be considered in rare circumstances (e.g., serious illness or family medical emergency).

COVID-19 and other illness

Should you test positive for COVID, any accommodations will be informed by evolving guidance on quarantine duration. There will be no change to mode of course delivery, so you will be responsible for collecting notes for missed in-person classes.

Academic honesty

Acceptable academic conduct is laid out in the GSU [Code of Conduct](#). You are expected to abide by this code. The most important aspect of the code is that work you submit should be your own (i.e., not plagiarized). **The penalty for violations is an "F" in the course, which cannot be replaced by repeating the course or with a withdrawal.**

AI tools such as ChatGPT, LLaMA, Claude, Bard, etc. are banned. Work produced using these systems does not count for our purposes as your own intellectual labor, and it will be handled as if plagiarized. Similarly, the use of group chat platforms (Slack, GroupMe, etc.) to complete assignments is also banned unless the assignment is an explicitly collaborative one. Collaborating and using assistive technology is important, but so is learning to think, research, write independently and take authorship of your work.

Department of Philosophy: General Syllabus Statement: Fall 2024

Diversity and Inclusion: GSU is home to a highly diverse student body. In our classrooms, this diversity is a source of strength and a resource for teaching and learning. The Department of Philosophy welcomes voices and viewpoints that have been historically marginalized or underrepresented within the discipline. Faculty and students in Philosophy courses commit to creating an intellectual environment that is inclusive of students' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, regardless of their race, religion, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identification, ability status, socioeconomic status, national identity, or any other identity markers.

Respect & Civility: All students in this course should be treated with respect and dignity and provided with an equitable opportunity to participate, contribute, and succeed. Disagreement is part of philosophical discussion. But students should avoid language that is demeaning or stigmatizing, particularly when addressing other members of the class and responding to their views. Students who wish to use a name or pronoun other than what is available on the class roll or iCollege may introduce themselves to the class using it or inform the instructor via email. Students should use the names and pronouns preferred by students and faculty.

- **This syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.**
- The **withdrawal period** for a course with the possibility of receiving a "W" for **Fall 2024, Sep 3rd – Oct 15th**. A student may be awarded a **W** no more than 6 times in their career at Georgia State. After 6 W's, a withdrawal is recorded as a WF, which counts as an F in a GPA.
- **The customary penalty for any violation of academic honesty is an "F" in the course, which cannot be replaced by repeating the course or with a withdrawal.** See selections from the University Policy on Academic Honesty below. **Copying or using any material from the internet in any way without proper citation is a violation of the policy.**
- Students who wish to request an accommodation for a disability may do so by registering with the [Access and Accommodation Center \(AACE\)](#). Students may only be accommodated upon issuance by AACE of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought.
- Students are responsible for confirming that they are attending the course section for which they are registered. Failure to do so may result in an F for the course.
- By University policy and to respect the confidentiality of all students, **final grades** may not be posted, emailed, or given out over the phone. To see your grades, use PAWS.
- Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State University. Upon completing the course, **please take the time to fill out the online course evaluation on PAWS.**

Please subscribe to one of our department listservs for current information and events:

<https://philosophy.gsu.edu/listserve-form/>

For more information on the philosophy program and the value of philosophy courses visit:

<http://philosophy.gsu.edu>

For more information on GSU Code of Conduct visit:

<https://codeofconduct.gsu.edu/>

For more information on student accommodations visit the AACE website:

<https://access.gsu.edu/>

For more information on assistance for students visit the Dean of Students website:

<https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/student-conduct/>

Policy on Academic Honesty, from the GSU Student Code of Conduct

As members of the academic community, students are expected to recognize and uphold standards of intellectual and academic integrity. The university assumes as a basic and minimum standard of conduct in academic matters that students be honest and that they submit for credit only the products of their own efforts. Both the ideals of scholarship and the need for fairness require that all dishonest work be rejected as a basis for academic credit. They also require that students refrain from any and all forms of dishonorable or unethical conduct related to their academic work.

The university's policy on academic honesty is published in the *Faculty Handbook* and *On Campus: The Student Handbook* and is available to all members of the university community. The policy represents a core value of the university, and all members of the university community are responsible for abiding by its tenets. Lack of knowledge of this policy is not an acceptable defense to any charge of academic dishonesty. All members of the academic community—students, faculty, and staff—are expected to report violations of these standards of academic conduct to the appropriate authorities. The procedures for such reporting are on file in the offices of the deans of each college, the office of the dean of students, and the office of the provost.

Definitions and Examples

The examples and definitions given below are intended to clarify the standards by which academic honesty and academically honorable conduct are to be judged. The list is merely illustrative of the kinds of infractions that may occur, and it is not intended to be exhaustive. Moreover, the definitions and examples suggest conditions under which unacceptable behavior of the indicated types normally occurs; however, there may be unusual cases that fall outside these conditions that also will be judged unacceptable by the academic community.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is presenting another person's work as one's own. Plagiarism includes any para-phrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work as one's own. Plagiarism frequently involves a failure to acknowledge in the text, notes, or footnotes the quotation of the paragraphs, sentences, or even a few phrases written or spoken by someone else. The submission of research or completed papers or projects by someone else is plagiarism, as is the unacknowledged use of research sources gathered by someone else when that use is specifically forbidden by the faculty member. Failure to indicate the extent and nature of one's reliance on other sources is also a form of plagiarism. Any work, in whole or in part, taken from the Internet or other computer-based resource without properly referencing the source (for example, the URL) is considered plagiarism. A complete reference is required in order that all parties may locate and view the original source. Finally, there may be forms of plagiarism that are unique to an individual discipline or course, examples of which should be provided in advance by the faculty member. The student is responsible for understanding the legitimate use of sources, the appropriate ways of acknowledging academic, scholarly or creative indebtedness, and the consequences of violating this responsibility.

Multiple Submissions: It is a violation of academic honesty to submit substantial portions of the same work for credit more than once without the explicit consent of the faculty member(s) to whom the material is submitted for additional credit. In cases in which there is a natural development of research or

knowledge in a sequence of courses, use of prior work may be desirable, even required; however the student is responsible for indicating in writing, as a part of such use, that the current work submitted for credit is cumulative in nature.

Cheating on Examinations: Cheating on examinations involves giving or receiving unauthorized help before, during, or after an examination. Examples of unauthorized help include the use of notes, computer-based resources, texts, or "crib sheets" during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member), or sharing information with another student during an examination (unless specifically approved by the faculty member). Other examples include intentionally allowing another student to view one's own examination and collaboration before or after an examination if such collaboration is specifically forbidden by the faculty member.

Unauthorized Collaboration: Submission for academic credit of a work product, or a part thereof, represented as its being one's own effort, which has been developed in substantial collaboration with another person or source or with a computer-based resource is a violation of academic honesty. It is also a violation of academic honesty knowingly to provide such assistance. Collaborative work specifically authorized by a faculty member is allowed.

Falsification: It is a violation of academic honesty to misrepresent material or fabricate information in an academic exercise, assignment or proceeding (e.g., false or misleading citation of sources, falsification of the results of experiments or computer data, false or misleading information in an academic context in order to gain an unfair advantage).