

Video Game Industry



Course Number: 331P • Unique Number: 09689

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Office hours: Tuesday 4-5pm in person – please send e-mail; Online by appointment.

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Course Description

This course addresses the video game industry as a whole. It analyses issues related to several aspects of game development: from working conditions in game development companies to localization, influencers, and players. Learning how to navigate the video game industry is key for understanding the nature and changes of this global media industry. Therefore, we analyze crucial game development steps: the engines, level design, narratives, art and aesthetic, game localization, and quality assurance. These topics are crucial to understand how the industry works. From it, we explore the working conditions on the video game industry, discussing the most current attempts for unionization. After that, we discuss the role of players, eSports, livestreams, and influencers to the video game industry.

Required Readings

Readings are listed below and assigned chapters and articles are to be read *during* each week. The weekly readings are available on the course's Canvas site, under "Files". You are allowed to download and print out the documents, at your convenience.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

1. Understand a game as a cultural product, tied to the time and place it was developed
2. Understand how the video game industry works
3. Think critically about the video game industry
4. Be able to communicate thoughts and ideas in several forms (written, spoken, visual)

Grading breakdown

Assignments	Point Value
Reading Reports	28
Historical Profile	16
Play experience (language)	13
Play experience (player)	13
Final Paper (Fourth Module)	30

Grading Scale:

A = 100-94 A- = 90-93 B+ = 87-89 B = 84-86 B- = 80-83
C+ = 77-79 C = 74-76 C- = 70-73 D = 60-69 F = 0-59

Assignments

Reading Reports: each assigned week, the student must deliver a report on the week's readings, which includes 1 paragraph summarizing at least one of the week's texts, along impressions and questions. If you report more than one text, you get extra credits and one more paragraph. Maximum: 1 page, double spaced.

Historical Profile: pick a franchise, system, engine, or studio that interests you. Research its history (through their own website and any scholarly texts you may find) and develop a profile that connects it to what you have learned in the classes on history of games and game development. 2-3 pages (double spaced).

Play Experience (Language): Play any video game you have never played before in a language you are not familiar with for 1 hour (preferably one narrative-based – e.g. Role Playing Games, point-and-click adventure games, and AAA games such as Tomb Raider, GTA, or Nier Automata). After that, replay the same part of the game in a language you are comfortable with. Write about the experience, relating it with the discussions presented in the texts about game localization. 2-3 pages (double spaced).

Play Experience (Player): Play any game you like for at least an hour. Write about the experience in relation to the texts on game development and on players. 2-3 pages (double spaced).

Final Paper: Choose a topic and a social issue related to the video game industry that you care about. Research the topic and write a 4-5 pages paper (double spaced) about it. Cite at least 2 scholar sources for the topic besides the ones referenced in this syllabus.

Late work

All assignments and due dates are described in this syllabus. If you feel that you will not be able to deliver the assignment on time, please contact Dr. Fontolan in advance so we can work a new delivery schedule. Late assignments that are not excused will be deducted 1 letter grade per day.

Course Policies

Attendance policy

Considering the nature of this course, attendance is not mandatory. We will have weekly, 1hr meetings on Thursdays at 3pm to discuss the readings and address questions. These meetings will be recorded, so everyone can have access to the discussions.

Diversity

During classes, you will be encouraged to share your own experiences, opinions and understandings of different perspectives. Sometimes, talking about a subject may not be easy to someone, so patience, empathy and respect are required. Do not to hesitate to talk to Dr. Fontolan (in whatever format you find fit) if you are suffering any kind of discrimination and/or unsettledness during the discussions proposed.

Pronouns and Social Name

I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc.). Please, let me know of either your name and pronouns are different than the ones appearing at the official records.

Accessible, Inclusive, and Compliant Statement

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability and Access (D&A). Please refer to D&A's website for contact and more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with D&A, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

Sharing Course Materials

No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without explicit, written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. The University is aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in initiation of the student conduct process and include charge(s) for academic misconduct, potentially resulting in sanctions, including a grade impact.

The University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Academic Integrity

If a student is caught plagiarizing or using AI tools (such as ChatGPT) to complete assignments, he/she/they will be graded zero and the case will be sent to the dean. If the same student is caught a second time caught plagiarizing, he/she/they will fail the course automatically. For more information, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>

Writing Support

Even the best writers sometimes struggle when learning the unique language of communication professionals. Whether you're writing your first news story or advertising copy or you're polishing a screenplay, the Moody Writing Support Program can help boost your skill while providing encouragement to succeed. You can schedule a one-on-one session with a qualified writing coach from your department to brainstorm ideas, polish skills or work on problems.

Mental Health

The college experience is stressful, and managing your mental health is central to your success. Please alert Dr. Fontolan immediately to work out a plan if any personal issues impede you to keep track. Also seek professional support at <https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/>.

Safety

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn't feel right – it probably isn't. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

Title IX Reporting

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Education Code, Section 51.252 (formerly known as [Senate Bill 212](#)) requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, report any information to the [Title IX Office](#) regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, written forms, applications, one-on-one conversations, class assignments, class discussions, or third-party reports) must report it to the [Title IX Coordinator](#). Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, please remember that I will be required to report this information.

If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <https://titleix.utexas.edu/> or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what now is called North America. Moreover, we would like to acknowledge the Alabama-Coushatta, Caddo, Carrizo/Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Comanche, Kickapoo, Lipan Apache, Tonkawa and Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas.

Course Calendar and readings

Week 1 – The Video Game Industry in a Nutshell

August, 21st – August, 25th

- Read:
 - GONZÁLEZ-PIÑERO, M. (2017). “The value chain of the video games industry”. *In: Redefining the value chain of the video games industry*. Knowledge Works National Centre for Cultural Industries. Pp. 20-29.
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Introduction to this course
Recorded Lecture - Introducing the Video Game Industry
- Meet: Thursday, August 24th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: 1min Video Presenting Yourself – August, 28th 11:59pm CST

Week 2 – A Crash Course on Video Game History

August, 28th – September, 1st

- Read:
 - BANFI, R. (2023). Gaming I, II, and III: Arcades, Video Game Systems, and Modern Game Streaming Services. *Games and Culture*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231186634>
 - DYER-WITHEFORD, N.; PEUTER, G. (2009). “Immaterial Labor: A Workers’ History of Videogaming”. *Games of empire: global capitalism and video games*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Game History beyond Games and Consoles
- Meet: Thursday, August 31st 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – September, 4th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 3 – Game Development 1

September, 4th – September, 8th

- Read:

- BULUT, E. (2020). "The Unequal Ludopolitical Regime of Game Production: Who Can Play, Who Has to Work?". *A Precarious Game: The Illusion of Dream Jobs in the Video Game Industry*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp. 30-53. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501746543-004>
- CONSALVO, M., & STAINES, D. (2021). Reading Ren'Py: Game Engine Affordances and Design Possibilities. *Games and Culture*, 16(6), 762–778. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412020973823>
- Watch: Game Design: Crash Course Games #19 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOQTZ6N_eVg
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Game Engines
- Meet: Thursday, September 7th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – September 11th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 4 – Game Development 2

September, 11th – September, 15th

- Read:
 - BULUT, E. (2021). White Masculinity, Creative Desires, and Production Ideology in Video Game Development. *Games and Culture*, 16(3), 329–341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412020939873>
 - SAMPLE, M. (2013) “Criminal Code: Procedural Logic and Rhetorical Excess in Videogames”. *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 7 (1). <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/7/1/000153/000153.html>
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Game Development
- Meet: Thursday, September 14th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: Historical Profile – September, 18th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 5 – Level Design

September, 18th – September, 22nd

- Read:
 - STONE, K. (2023). “Reparative Game Creation: Designing For and With Psychosocial Disability”. *Design Issues*, 39 (1), 14–26. https://doi.org/10.1162/desi_a_00703
 - KARLSSON, T., BRUSK, J., & ENGSTRÖM, H. (2022). “Level Design Processes and Challenges: A Cross Section of Game Development”. *Games and Culture*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120221139229>
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Discussing about Level Design
- Meet: September 21st 3pm CST via Zoom

- DUE: reading report – September, 25th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 6 – Art and Aesthetic

September, 25th – September, 29th

- Read:
 - NIEDENTHAL, S. (2009). “What we talk about when we talk about game aesthetics”. *DiGRA '09 - Proceedings of the 2009 DiGRA International Conference: Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*. <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-game-aesthetics/>
 - HEPLER, J. B. (2007). ““You Must Be an Artist” Stereotypes and Realities about Female Game Artists”. *In: Women in Game Development*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Art and Aesthetic in Games
- Meet: September, 28th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – October, 2nd 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 7 – Narratives

October, 2nd – October, 6th

- Read:
 - SIMONS, J. (2007) “Narrative, Games, and Theory”. *Game Studies: the international journal of computer game research*, 7 (1). [https://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/simons#:~:text=Game%20Theory%20and%20Narrative,respectively%20\(Osborne%2C%202004\).](https://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/simons#:~:text=Game%20Theory%20and%20Narrative,respectively%20(Osborne%2C%202004).)
 - EGENFELDT-NIELSEN, S.; SMITH, J. H.; TOSCA, S. P. (2019) “Narrative”. *In: Understanding Video Games The Essential Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Watch: Extra Credits Using Narrative as Context - Balancing Gameplay and Story Elements <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Izk-e0WrjP0>
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Game Narratives
- Meet: October, 5th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – October 9th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 8 – Game Localization

October, 9th – October, 13th

- Read:

- MANGIRON, C.; O'HAGAN, M. (2013). "Game localization: A practical dimension". *In: Game Localization: Translating for the global digital entertainment industry*. John Benjamins Publishing. Pp. 111-148.
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Game Localization
- Meet: October, 12th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: Play Experience – October, 16th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 9 – Quality Assurance

October, 16th – October, 20th

- Read:
 - BULUT, E. (2020). "Game Testers as Precarious Second-Class Citizens". *In: A Precarious Game The Illusion of Dream Jobs in the Video Game Industry*. London: Pelergo.
 - HEPLER, J. B. (2007). "The 'Average Players': How Game Testing Departments Can Be Biased". *In: Women in Game Development*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Q.A. Workers
- Meet: October, 19th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – October, 23rd 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 10 – Work in the Video Game Industry: from harassments to unionizations

October 23rd – October 27th

- Read:
 - CARPENTER, N. (2022) "The Rise of the Video Game Union: Literally everything you need to know about video game unions". *Polygon*, published December 5th, 2022. <https://www.polygon.com/23485977/video-game-unions-guide-explainer>
- Watch: Taliesin & Evtel's Blizzard's Ultimate Shame... The Lawsuit, And Why Our Faves Are Problematic - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqd1uAtqtTQ>
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Work Conditions and Unionization
- Meet: October, 27th 8am CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – October, 30th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 11 – Players

October, 30th – November, 3rd

- Read:

- JENSON, J., & DE CASTELL, S. (2018). “The Entrepreneurial Gamer”: Regendering the Order of Play. *Games and Culture*, 13(7), 728–746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412018755913>
- PHILLIPS, A. (2020). “Of Dickwolves and Killjoys: Feminism and Interpretive Violence in Gaming Communities”. *Gamer Trouble: Feminist Confrontations in Digital Culture*. New York: NYU Press
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Players
- Meet: November, 2nd 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: reading report – November, 6th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 12 – Game, Gamers and Identities

November 6th – November 10th

- Read:
 - SHAW, A. (2015). “From Custer’s Revenge and Mario to Fable and Fallout: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Digital Games”. In: *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816693153.003.0002>
 - GRACE, L. D. (2021). “An Introduction to Black Games, Blackness in Games, and Otherness”. *Black Game Studies: an introduction to the games, game makers, and scholarship of the African Diaspora*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, ETC Press.
- Watch: Psychgeist’s Why do we create digital versions of ourselves? - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcGxw9Xwa50>
- Watch: Recorded Lecture - Players and Identities
- Meet: November, 10th 8am CST via Zoom
- DUE: Play experience (player) – November, 13th 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Week 13 – eSports and Livestreams

November 13th – November 17th

- Read:
 - BIHARI, I., & PATTANAIK, D. (2023). “Professional Gaming and Pro-Gamers: What Do We Know So Far? A Systematic Review”. *Games and Culture*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231154058>
 - ORLAND, K. (2015). “Twitch plays everything: How livestreaming is changing game design” *ARSTechnica*, published October, 26th 2015. <https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2015/10/twitch-plays-everything-how-livestreaming-is-changing-game-design/>

- Watch: Recorded Lecture – Esports and Livestreams
- Meet: November, 16th 3pm CST via Zoom

Week 14 – Fall Break – No activities

Week 15 – Game Influencers

November, 27th – December, 1st

- Read:
 - YODOVICH, N., & KIM, J. (2022). “Exploring the Feminization of Backseat Gaming Through Girlfriend Reviews YouTube Channel”. *Games and Culture*, 17(5), 795–815. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211056124>
 - FLEUR, A. S.; DEWINTER, J. (2021) ““Unfiltered and True to Itself” How Content Creators Represent the Black Community in The Sims 4”. *American Journal of Play*, 13 (2 and 3). <https://www.museumofplay.org/app/uploads/2022/01/13-2-Article-10-True-to-itself.pdf>
- Watch: An episode of Girlfriend Reviews - <https://www.youtube.com/@GirlfriendReviews>
- Meet: November, 30th 3pm CST via Zoom
- DUE: Final Paper – December, 1st 11:59pm CST on Canvas

Suggested Readings:

- CARPENTER, N. (2020) “These game writers made history by going on strike — and winning: The 21-day strike ended with an agreement”. *Polygon*, published August 11th, 2020. <https://www.polygon.com/2020/8/11/21363817/lovestruck-voltage-entertainment-writers-strike-video-game-industry-unionization>
- EDWARDS, K. (2014) “Beyond Localization: An Overview of Game Culturalization”. In: MANGIRON, C.; ORERO, P.; O’HAGAN, M. *Fun for All Translation and Accessibility Practices in Video Games*. Bern: Peter Lang. Pp. 287-304.
- KARLSEN, F. (2022). “Balancing Ethics, Art and Economics: A Qualitative Analysis of Game Designer Perspectives on Monetisation”. *Games and Culture*, 17(4), 639–656. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211049579>
- Reitman, J. G., Anderson-Coto, M. J., Wu, M., Lee, J. S., & Steinkuehler, C. (2020). Esports Research: A Literature Review. *Games and Culture*, 15(1), 32–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019840892>
- YEE, N. (2006). “The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play”. *Games and Culture*, 1(1), 68–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412005281819>

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