

CMUN 241 | Games Studies | Spring 2011

Tuesdays @ 4:15-6:45, SOC #15

Instructors	Dr. Adrienne Massanari and Dean Don Heider
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Course Web site	http://cmun241sp11.wordpress.com and Blackboard
Office hours	Dr. Massanari (SOC #204): Mondays 11:30-12:30, Tuesdays 3:00-4:00, and by appointment; Dr. Heider: By appointment

Course description and learning objectives

This course examines games and highlights their importance and complex role within contemporary culture. We will approach games as “texts” that can be “read” using a variety of theoretical lenses. Using these theories, we will explore what games say about the nature of identity, community, presence, learning, and communication. You will also reflect on your own experience playing games in a blog you keep for this class.

By the end of this semester, you will be able to:

- (1) Define and critique several theoretical lenses/approaches (ludic, ethnographic, textual, social-scientific, critical-cultural) we use to understand and explore gameplay;
- (2) Provide concrete examples as to how games are impacting our sense of identity, our communities, and our global society;
- (3) Describe and analyze the ways the press, and popular culture tell stories about games, the games industry, and fans;
- (4) Understand some of the tensions inherent in the game development process;
- (5) Explore the ways in which we learn through/in games;
- (6) Conduct research into your own area of gaming culture.

All of the technical skills you will need to complete assignments in this course will be covered during class time. I don't expect you to be a “super-gamer,” just curious and interested in the topic. I do expect you to ask me questions and seek out information needed to fulfill the course requirements on your own.

Required texts

Course readings are available as PDFs on BlackBoard (BB) or on their authors' web sites (indicated below). While there is no physical textbook to purchase, I do ask that you bring printed copies of the articles to class to facilitate our discussions.

You will need to purchase a copy of World of Warcraft (WoW) for our gaming sessions (<http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/games/wow/>). WoW costs \$29.99 for a digital copy of the game and includes one month of free gameplay. After the first month, there is a recurring subscription charge of \$14.99 a month. We will be playing on the *Suramar* server, so you need to create at least one Horde character there to participate in the class gaming sessions.

You should plan on spending 4-5 hours a week playing WoW outside of our in-class gaming sessions. The lab in which the game is installed serves as a classroom most days, but is available before 10 AM Monday-Thursday, after 12:45 PM on Fridays, and until the SOC building closes (about 1 PM) on Saturdays.

If you wish to install the software on your own machine, the minimum requirements are:

Windows® System XP/XP64/Vista/Vista64/7** OS (with the latest Service Packs or updates)

- Intel Pentium 4 1.3 GHz or AMD Athlon XP 1500+
- 1 GB or more of RAM
- NVIDIA® GeForce® FX or ATI Radeon™ 9500 video card or better
- 25.0 GB available HD space
- 4X DVD-ROM drive (Downloadable Installer also available)
- Broadband Internet connection
- Keyboard/mouse

Mac® OS X 10.5.8, 10.6.4, or newer

- Intel processor
- 2 GB RAM or higher
- 25.0 GB available HD space
- 4X DVD-ROM Drive
- Broadband Internet connection

Assignments

You need to spend at least 4-5 hours a week engaging in some sort of gameplay outside of class. For the first few weeks, you can choose the kinds of games you play – board, word, computer, or physical games count. Alternatively, you can spend your time in *Second Life* or another virtual world. After week 4, you'll need to spend your time in WoW, as this will serve as the class “game space” where we all play. Depending on the lab schedule and class availability, we will agree to a gameplay session each week so that you can fulfill this requirement.

While there are no exams in this class, you will be reading and writing a fair amount. Four major assignments comprise the required course work. These include blog postings, a take-home midterm, a group playtest, and a final research paper.

All written work for this class should be properly sourced and cited using APA 5th/6th edition guidelines.

Gaming journal (10)	25%
Take-home midterm	25%
Participation (in-class exercises, blog comments, group discussion, pop quizzes)	10%
Group playtest	10%
Final paper + presentation	30%

Gaming journal (25%)

Each of you will have your own personal blog, which will serve as a journal in which you can reflect on the readings in light of your own gaming experiences in WoW. Each posting should be about 3-5 paragraphs – around 300-400 words – and are due at 8AM on the day listed on the schedule. These postings should be tagged/categorized as “readings” on your blog.

To receive full credit for your postings, they should:

- (1) Reflect on your gameplay that week in light of the topics brought up in the readings;
- (2) Respond to and analyze, rather than just summarize, that week's readings;

- (3) Include at least one link to an outside source related to the issues that the readings cover;
- (4) Be proofed for grammar and spelling errors.

The final blog posting should be a longer reflection (around 800-1000 words) that ties together the various perspectives we've encountered this semester.

You will also need to read and comment on your classmates' blogs regularly throughout the semester, which will count as part of your participation grade.

Take-home midterm (25%)

Over spring break, you will complete a take-home midterm. You will receive a question related to the course readings from the first half of the class, and write a 5-6 page essay referencing the articles we've read thus far.

While the midterm is open-note/open-internet, you may not discuss your answers with others before turning it in to me. More information about the midterm will be distributed in class.

Group playtest (10%)

During the first two weeks of class, you will sign up to playtest a game with others on one of the days indicated in the course schedule (below). Your group will design a new game or modify an existing one to help the class reflect on that day's topic. For example, if you chose the "economics and gaming" day, you might create a game in which players attempt to amass the most amount of counters or fake money, or must buy/sell/trade items to win. Or, if you signed up to playtest on the gender and gaming day, you might create a game where males and females have different ways to win. The game can involve the whole class or individual groups.

You can structure your game however you wish, but you will need to provide rules/directions (simple ones that can be explained in a few minutes) and whatever additional items you might need to play (counters, dice, cards, etc.). You could also create a game to play in WoW or *Second Life*. Whatever you choose, you will need to structure the game so that it can be played easily in a half-hour. The class will discuss what worked and what could be improved. After the gaming session, you will provide me with a set of instructions for your game, making note of any changes you might make after having now playtested it.

Your group should make an appointment to meet with me at least a week prior to your presentation date so that we can brainstorm together as to how to structure your playtest.

Final research paper and presentation (30%)

The course readings and topics we discuss in class will lay the foundation for your own, 8-10 page research paper in which you examine some aspect of gaming culture in-depth. For example, you might explore the history of alternative reality games (ARGs), first-person MODDing communities, or the mobile game industry in Korea. Alternatively, you could focus your work specifically on some aspect of *World of Warcraft* – perhaps sociality inside guilds, WoW fandom, who is playing (and why), or how WoW web communities support gameplay. This paper should draw upon scholarly outside sources in addition to the course readings. I will distribute more information about this assignment in class.

Methods of evaluation

For all written assignments in this class, I (Dr. Massanari) will use a rubric to ensure clear and consistent grading. A version of the rubric I typically use is listed below.

A range Excellent analysis that critically examines a text through interpretive frameworks discussed in class. Digs deep beneath the surface. Creative and innovative approach

to the problem/question being considered. Outstanding content, clarity of writing, and organization of research material. Sophisticated, appropriate use of language. Thorough research and documentation of ideas, arguments, and comments. Free of mistakes: no typos; no misspellings; no punctuation or grammatical glitches; no errors of fact. All the necessary details, documentation, quotes, citations, and specifics are there.

- B range** Very good attempt to link analysis to class themes, but more connections could be made. Very good to excellent; above average work and research. Some improvement needed in content, clarity, organization, or documentation. Occasional typos or other glitches say more about the lack of close proofreading than failure to master the mechanics of spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage. More details, quotes, citations, or examples needed. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, source, or date, etc.) show inattention to detail and accuracy although content of the paper is above average.
- C range** Average analysis that lacks clear connections to class themes. Average, acceptable writing and research that meets basic expectations. Needs work on content, clarity, organization, and documentation. Although basic facts most likely are there, lacks elaborating and supporting documentation or quotes. Errors indicate need for improvement in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage: material was not proofread carefully. Errors of fact (incorrect spelling of a title, reference name, wrong source, date, or page number, etc.) show inattention to detail and accuracy.
- D range** Weak, unfocused work. Organization is below average, with numerous grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Documentation and details are scanty or superfluous, with errors of fact. Paper may reflect a lack of understanding of the assignment or a lack of research effort.

Grading scale

A	94-100%
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	Below 59%

Participation/Attendance

One of the goals of this course is for you to be able to engage with the material in a supportive environment that is conducive to your learning. To do this, you need to come to class having carefully read the readings (making note of and asking any questions you might have during class) and ready to fully participate in discussions and activities. Behavior that disrupts the learning environment (including talking during lectures, texting in class, sleeping, etc.) will adversely affect your participation grade.

It is important for you attend class, both for you to master the course material and to contribute positively to the classroom learning environment. We take attendance every session at the beginning of class. **Only one unexcused absence during the semester is allowed without penalty. After that, each absence will reduce your final grade by one-third of a letter (e.g. a B will become a B- if you miss or are late to two classes and so on).** Arriving more 15 minutes late or longer, or leaving more than 15 minutes early without notifying me beforehand, also counts as one absence. Arriving late after a break mid-class may count as “late” if that privilege is abused.

Excused absences are those that result from documented personal or medical emergencies. Additionally, if you anticipate participating in athletic meets or other university-sanctioned activities, we need to be notified of these well in advance (preferably at the beginning of the semester).

Late assignments

Unless you have a documented medical or personal emergency, late assignments will not be accepted. If an emergency happens, please contact one of the instructors as soon as possible so we can make other arrangements. The only other cases in which late assignments will be accepted are if you are participating in an athletic meet or other university-sponsored event. Please let us know of any potential conflicts at the beginning of the semester.

You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course.

Academic integrity/Plagiarism

Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. **Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment or failure of the course (at the instructor’s discretion).** The case may carry further sanctions from the School of Communication or the university, the most serious being permanent expulsion. Avoid turning in work that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academically dishonest (e.g. failing to properly credit a source or using someone else’s ideas without clarifying that they are not yours).

It is dishonest to:

- Turn in the same work for two classes;
- Turn in a paper you have not written yourself;
- Copy from another student or use a “cheat sheet” during an exam;
- Fail to attribute others’ ideas in all assignments handed in for this course.

If you have questions about what proper source referencing looks like, see someone at the Tutoring Center in the Sullivan Center, Suite 260, extension (773) 508-7714 or come talk to one of us early in the semester. You might also consider investing in an APA (American Psychological Association) style guide. Online resources are also available through the Loyola libraries Web site. Be especially careful citing online sources. This is an academic community; being uninformed or naive is not an acceptable excuse for not properly referencing your sources.

Special needs

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructors. We will accommodate your needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student’s responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Other policies

- It is important that you check your LUC e-mail account regularly, as we send important updates about the class and often return assignments over e-mail.
- Please set your phone to vibrate when you enter class and refrain from texting or checking voicemail/e-mail while class is in session. You may be asked to leave the class (and lose credit for any assignments handed in that day) if you do not comply with this request.
- Please turn off your monitor during lectures in the computer lab. When we're completing in-class exercises using the computers, please don't IM, chat, e-mail, browse the web, or complete coursework for other classes. You may be asked to leave the class (and lose credit for any assignments handed in that day) if you do not comply with this request.
- If you come in late to class, please enter quietly. (See attendance policy for more information about tardiness).
- If you need to leave early, please let me know ahead of time and make an effort to sit by the door. (See attendance policy for more information about leaving early).
- If you are not in class and miss announcements, assignments or lecture materials, it is your responsibility to get them from a classmate. If you have a legitimate reason for missing class (e.g. official university travel for sports or documented illness), we will be glad to meet with you to catch you up, but we will generally follow the course schedule you have received with only minor adjustments from time to time.
- Your syllabus, the reading schedule, and assignment descriptions serve as our "contract" with you. All evaluation of your work is based on the criteria outlined within these documents. Please take the time to familiarize yourself with the expectations (and relative weight) for each assignment.
- Please treat everyone in the class with civility and respect.

Course schedule and readings*

Week 1	January 18 (Tues)	Introduction Topics: Introduce ourselves and the course Homework: Send blog URL to amassanari@luc.edu by 1/21
Week 2	January 25 (Tues)	What are games? What is play? Topics: Defining play, taxonomy of games Read: "The Definition of Play" and "The Classification of Games" in Roger Caillois' <i>Man, Play and Games</i> (BB); Greg Costikyan's "I Have No Words and Must Design: Toward a Critical Vocabulary for Games" from <i>Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings, June, 2002</i> (BB) Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #1
Week 3	February 1 (Tues)	Where did games come from? Topics: Board games, RPGs, Tolkien, D&D, fantasy worlds

* We reserve the right to modify the reading schedule if necessary. Readings are due on the day they are listed.

		<p>Read: “Board Games” in Mary Flanagan’s <i>Critical Play: Radical Game Design</i> (BB); “I was a Teenage Magic User”, “I’ll Only Go to Level 10,” and “An Outlet for Souls Who Cannot Rest” from Ethan Gilsdorf’s <i>Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #2</p>
Week 4	February 8 (Tues)	<p>Why do we play games? Who plays games?</p> <p>Topics: Motivations for playing computer games, stereotypes and myths about “gamers”</p> <p>Read: Nick Yee’s “Motivations for Play in Online Games” in <i>CyberPsychology & Behavior</i> (BB); Maria Frostling-Henningsson’s “First-Person Shooter Games as a Way of Connecting to People: ‘Brothers in Blood’” in <i>CyberPsychology & Behavior</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #3; WoW account created/paid for by class time</p>
Week 5	February 15 (Tues)	<p>What happens when we play games?</p> <p>Topics: Flow state, learning and literacy through games</p> <p>Read: “Enjoyment and the Quality of Life” in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s <i>Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience</i> (BB); “Semiotic Domains: Is Playing Video Games a ‘Waste of Time?’” in James Paul Gee’s <i>What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #4</p>
Week 6	February 22 (Tues)	<p>Case study: Mobile, console and casual games</p> <p>Read: “What is Casual?” in Jesper Juul’s <i>A Casual Revolution</i> (BB); Elizabeth Losh’s “In Polite Company: Rules of Play in Five Facebook Games” in <i>Proceedings of the 2008 International Conference on Advances in Entertainment Technology</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #5</p>
Week 7	March 1 (Tues)	<p>Case study: Virtual worlds and their players</p> <p>Topics: History of virtual worlds/MMOs, player types</p> <p>Read: Richard Bartle’s “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs” (online: http://www.mud.co.uk/richard/hclds.htm); Don Heider & Adrienne Massanari, “Friendship, closeness, and disclosure in Second Life” in <i>International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations</i> (BB).</p>

		<p>Take-home midterm distributed</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #6</p>
Week 8	March 8 (Tues)	NO CLASS – Spring Break
Week 9	March 15 (Tues)	<p>Identity and community</p> <p>Topics: Socialization online, avatars, guilds, identity</p> <p>Read: Williams, et al’s “From Tree House to Barracks: The Social Life of Guilds in <i>World of Warcraft</i>” in <i>Games & Culture</i> (BB); Betsy Book’s “Moving Beyond the Game: Social Virtual Worlds” from <i>State of Play Conference 2004</i> (BB)</p> <p>Group 1 playtest</p> <p>Due in class: Take-home midterm</p>
Week 10	March 22 (Tues)	<p>Gaming workers and game players (fans/modders)</p> <p>Topics: Content creation, MODs, fandom, narrative, gaming industry</p> <p>Read: Hector Postigo’s “Of Mods and Modders” in <i>New Media & Society</i> (BB); Mia Consalvo’s “Zelda 64 and Video Game Fans: A Walkthrough of Games, Intertextuality, and Narrative” from <i>Television & New Media</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #7</p>
Week 11	March 29 (Tues)	<p>Games and gender</p> <p>Topics: Women and gaming, girl games</p> <p>Read: “Where the Women Are” in T.L. Taylor’s <i>Play between Worlds</i> (BB); Elisabeth Hayes’ “Women, Video Games & Learning: Beyond Stereotypes” in <i>Tech Trends</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #8</p> <p>Group 2 playtest</p>
Week 12	April 5 (Tues)	<p>Gaming economics</p> <p>Topics: Virtual economies and their real-world implications, selling/buying/farming virtual goods</p> <p>Read: “The Economics of Fun: Behavior and Design” in Edward Castronova’s <i>Synthetic Worlds</i> (BB); Julian Dibbell’s “The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer” in <i>The New York Times Magazine</i> (online: http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/goldfarmers.html)</p>

		<p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #9</p> <p>Group 3 playtest</p>
Week 13	April 12 (Tues)	<p>Making (and breaking) the rules</p> <p>Topics: Cheats, walkthroughs, MODS, rules, etc.</p> <p>Read: Stephen Sniderman’s “Unwritten Rules” in <i>The Game Design Reader</i> (BB); Mia Consalvo’s “Rule Sets, Cheating, and Magic Circles: Studying Games and Ethics” in <i>International Review of Information Ethics</i> (BB); Julian Dibbell’s “Mutilated Furies, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Grieferers, the Sociopaths of the Virtual World” in <i>Wired</i> (online: http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons)</p> <p>Group 4 playtest</p>
Week 14	April 19 (Tues)	<p>(Re)presentation in games</p> <p>Topics: Race/gender/class/(dis)ability/sexuality in games</p> <p>Read: David J. Leonard’s “Not a Hater, Just Keepin’ It Real: The Importance of Race- and Gender-Based Game Studies” in <i>Games and Culture</i> (BB); Lisa Nakamura’s “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in <i>World of Warcraft</i>” in <i>Critical Studies in Media Communication</i> (BB)</p>
Week 15	April 26 (Tues)	<p>Serious and pervasive games</p> <p>Topics: Alternate-reality games (ARGs), educational/political/social games, pervasive/persuasive gaming</p> <p>Read: Jane McGonigal’s (2003) “A Real Little Game: The Performance of Belief in Pervasive Play” in <i>Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) “Level Up” Conference Proceedings</i> (BB)</p> <p>Due by 8 AM: Blog posting #10 (final reflections)</p>
Week 16	May 3 (Tues)	<p>Presentations of final projects (Final exam period)</p> <p>Due in class: Final project</p>