Communication 390/590:
Introduction to Game Theory, History, and Design

Spring 2019
Tuesdays 2-4:50pm in CAC 113
Course website: D2L
Instructor: Alex Ingersoll - alex.ingersoll@uwsp.edu
Office Hours: (CAC 309) Mon & Thur 2-3:00pm

Course Objectives[i]

"Play is a structuring activity, the activity out of which understanding comes. Play is at one and the same time the location where we question our structures of understanding and the location where we develop them."
        -James S. Hans

This seminar offers students an introduction to the academic study and design of games (from board and card to digital). We will examine their cultural, educational, and social functions by analyzing, playing, and reading/writing about games in a variety of socially situated contexts (from ancient to contemporary). By considering the links between theory and practice, the seminar will enable students to develop critical frameworks to initiate basic game design. By the end of the semester, students will integrate and communicate their critical perspectives through the creation of a physical game design prototype as a final research project. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze the field of game studies from a media studies perspective
- Experiment with contemporary game theory and draw from the conceptual history and analysis of interactivity and play
- Examine debates surrounding how games influence and reflect society and interpret how theories of game design and play are applied to games
- Engage in collaborative research and presentations throughout the semester, which will provide students with opportunities to explore and design a wide array of rule systems, genres, and play styles

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Required Texts and Materials
- Elias, George Skaff, Richard Garfield, and K. Robert Gutschera. 2012. *Characteristics of Games*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. *(Available at bookstore or as a FREE e-book, either will work).*
- One physical version of a board/card game. Details to be provided in class.
- Other course readings available on D2L.

Communication
Due to the collaborative nature of seminars in general and this class in particular, effective communication among all classmates and the instructor is CRITICAL. I will often send emails to the class through your UWSP account or D2L. You will need to have and regularly check an active UWSP email account. Much of the work in the course is geared toward group coordination and therefore necessitates a willingness to cooperate. This course requires each student to commit to the success of every other student's project at every step.

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[i] This syllabus is subject to change as my opinions change and evolve, especially with your help and guidance.

Evaluation

Your final grade in this course is a composite of the different projects listed below. Detailed explanations of each assignment will be given in class at the appropriate times. Late work will not be accepted past the assigned due date. All work will be collected at the beginning of class unless stated otherwise.

Category	Total
Game Modification	5%
Abstract Game	10%
Social Game	10%
Intervention Game	10%
Story Game	10%
Final Game	35%
Participation/Discussion/Game Responses	20%

Grade Breakdown

A (100-93.5%)   A- (93.4-89.5%) B+ (89.4-86.5%) B (86.4-83.5%)   B- (83.4-79.5%) C+ (79.4-76.5%)
C (76.4-73.5%)   C- (73.4-69.5%) D+ (69.4-66.5%) D (66.4-59.5%)   F (<59.4%)

Evaluation Cont.

Since the success of this class depends upon your presence in class, it is expected that you will come to every class on time and ready to engage in the day's materials. Students who attend every single meeting will see their diligence reflected both in their participation grade, and most likely, in the quality of their work. For an absence to be considered excused, you must present University-approved documentation. Your second and third unexcused absences will result in 1 full letter grade deduction from your participation grade. Your fourth will result in 1 full letter grade deducted from your overall grade. Lateness of more than ten minutes will count as 1/2 of an absence. (Repeated lateness of less than ten minutes will also add up to an absence, at my discretion). **If you have four unexcused absences, you will fail the course**. If you do miss a class, please be sure to check with me and/or your classmates for what you missed and make sure you receive any assignments, handouts, etc.

When working outside of class *be sure to make arrangements that includes full participation by your group members*. You will be responsible for extra work that must occur outside of class, whether in CAC or the library. When working on group projects, you will be expected to pull your weight and participate in each aspect of the group work. When assignments are due, we will hold a brief in-class "critique" in which groups will share and respond constructively to each other's work.

Again, this course focuses on media production as a collaborative process. Creating an environment of mutual respect is *paramount* to successful work. While difference of opinions and vigorous debate are highly encouraged, you will be expected to refrain from using disparaging remarks (e.g., sexist, racist, homophobic language) in class, lab, or written work. **Finally, classes often include challenging texts and gaming examples. This material may challenge you (or potentially offend) and I expect you to approach these materials in the spirit of the wider educational environment. The selection of these materials are intended to spark a healthy discussion and I expect mature and respectful interactions.**

Communicating with Me

The best way to talk to me is during my office hours. I am available over email but it may take me a day to respond. This means that you will need to ask questions about assignments more than 24 hours before they are due. If you are having problems completing the assignments, you need to communicate the issues with me at least 24 hours before the assignment is due so we may lay out alternative courses of action.

Computers, Procrastination & Murphy's Law[ii]

Late assignments will <u>not be accepted</u>. Please don't come to class without homework due to technical difficulties. (My computer crashed, printer ran out of ink, not enough batteries, etc.) Don't wait until the last minute to carry out your work. If you do, you will be rushed, your work will suffer and you won't have time to deal with the inevitable computer issues. Expect equipment to malfunction, batteries to run down, and hard drives to crash.

Plagiarism and Copyright

If you plagiarize the work of others, you will fail the course. Please be aware of what plagiarism entails (http://www.plagiarism.org). Proper citation is REQUIRED for ALL sources, including information you use from Internet publications and sites. Also, remember that you CANNOT legally use someone else's music or art work UNLESS you get written permission from the copyright holder, or unless you purchase a license allowing you to use specific music or images. The only exception is if the work in question is in the public domain or explicitly states that you may use it free of charge. Everything and everyone MUST be cited. Any student caught plagiarizing will receive a grade of "F" for the class.

Community Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

UW-Stevens Point values a safe, honest, respectful, and inviting learning environment. In order to ensure that each student has the opportunity to success, we have developed a set of expectations for all students and instructors. This set of expectations is known as the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, and it is intended to help establish a positive living and learning environment at UWSP. Read more here: https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Documents/CommunityRights.pdf

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education in general and UWSP in particular. Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is taken very seriously. Don't do it! The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. For more information, see the UWSP "Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures" section of the *Rights and Responsibilities* document, Chapter 14, which can be accessed here: https://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Student-Conduct.aspx

Assistive Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here: https://www.uwsp.edu/hr/Pages/ADA-Resources.aspx
If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way that I can. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here: https://www.uwsp.edu/datc/Pages/default.aspx

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ii The 4th law of thermodynamics: "Anything that can go wrong will go wrong."

Course Schedule

Week 1 - Introduction, Play, Design

1/22	Optional: Humble, "Game Rules as Art" (D2L) Optional: Duffy, "Board Games' Golden Age" (D2L) Optional: Strauss, "That Time When People Thought Playing Chess Would Make You Violent" (D2L) Optional: Newitz, "The Most Popular Sport in North America 900 Years Ago" (D2L)
	◯ Assign: Game Modification

Week 2 - Basics

1/29	Read: Elias, Garfield, & Gutschera (EGG), Ch. 1: Basics; Ch. 2 Multiplayer Optional: "Schools of Design and Their Core Priorities" HERE
	✶ DUE: Game Modification

Week 3 - Formal Systems and Rules

2/5	Read: EGG, Ch. 3: Infrastructure; Ch. 4 Systems Optional: Yucel, "Rules for Writing Rules" (D2L) Optional: Casey, "Making Better Use of Dice in Games" (D2L) Final Boss: Isaksen, et. al., "Characterising Score Distributions in Dice Games" (D2L)
	◯ Assign: Abstract Game

Week 4 - Game Play 01

2/12	Read: Rules for *Sushi Go* and *Patchwork*
	◯ PLAY: *Sushi Go* and *Patchwork*

Week 5 - Indeterminacy, Chance, Feedback

2/19	Read: EGG, Ch. 5: Indeterminacy Read: Salen & Zimmerman (SZ), Games as Cybernetic Systems (D2L) Optional: Strogatz, "One Giant Step for a Chess-Playing Machine" https://nyti.ms/2Rjetd3 Optional: Torner, "Uncertainty in Analog Role-Playing Games" (D2L)
	✶ DUE: Prototype & Rules for Abstract

Week 6 - Player(s) Experience(s)

2/26	Read: SZ, The Magic Circle; Games as Social Play (D2L) Optional: "The Minecraft Generation" https://nyti.ms/1Wtm4RB
	◯ Assign: Social Game
	✶ DUE: Abstract Game

Week 7 - Game Play 02

3/5	Read: Rules for *Catan* Optional: Faidutti, "Postcolonial Catan" & Loring-Albright "The First Nations of Catan: Practices in Critical Modification" (both articles as one pdf on D2L)
	◯ PLAY: *Catan*
	✶ DUE: Prototype & Rules for Social Game

Week 8 - Effort and Superstructure

3/12	Read: Read: EGG, Ch. 6: Player Effort; Ch. 7 Superstructure
	Optional: Auerbach, "Dark Souls II: The Rise of 'Masocore' Gaming" HERE
	✳ **DUE: Social Game**

Week 9 - SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS

| 3/19 | GO PLAY! |

Week 10 - Game Play 03

| 3/26 | Read: Rules for *Pandemic* |
| | ◯ PLAY: *Pandemic*
 ◯ Assign: Final Concept |

Week 11 - Narrative Design

4/2	Read: SZ, Games as Narrative Play; Games as the Play of Meaning (D2L)
	Optional: Dessem, "Achievement Unlocked" (D2L) Optional: Casey, "What Deduction Games Like Werewolf Tell Us About Ourselves" (D2L) Final Boss: Juul, "Games Telling Stories?" gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/
	◯ Assign: Story Game ✳ **DUE: Final Concept**

Week 12 - Games as Cultural Intervention

4/9	Read: SZ, Games as Cultural Rhetoric; Games as Cultural Resistance (D2L) Read: Campbell, "Low-income, minority students tell their life stories through games" https://www.polygon.com/2018/11/14/18071372/low-income-minority-students-game-design-education-oakland-gameheads?
	Optional: Pobuda, "Assessing Gender and Racial Representation in the Board Game Industry" HERE Optional: Abstruse, "Abstruse Reviews the New Dungeons & Dragons System!" (D2L) Optional: Stenros & Sihvonen, "Out of the Dungeons: Representations of Queer Sexuality in RPG Source Books" (D2L) Optional: Hudson, "Nintendo's New Key to Creativity: More Women" (D2L) Optional: "The Struggle to Bring More Women into Game Development" HERE
	◯ Assign: Intervention Game

Week 13 - Cultural Politics with/in Games

4/16	Read: Wagner, "The Future of the Culture Wars is Here, and it's Gamergate" (D2L) Read: Totilo, "The Diversity Question" (D2L)
	Optional: Watch "Anita Sarkeesian Was Just On *The Colbert Report*" HERE Final Boss: Bogost, "The Rhetoric of Video Games" (D2L)
	Assign: Final Game ✳ **DUE: Intervention Game**

Week 14 - Game Lab

4/23	Read: Fullerton, Prototyping; Playtesting (D2L)
	✴ **DUE: Story Game**

Week 15 - Game Lab

4/30	Read: Fullerton, Selling Yourself and Your Ideas to the Game Industry (D2L) Read: Solis, "What If Someone Steals Your Idea?" (D2L) Play: Work on Final Games
	◯ Assign: Playtesting Reports

Week 16 - Final Prototype and Playtesting

5/7	Play: Work on Final Games
	✴ **DUE: Prototype & Rules for Final Game**

Final: Playing and Celebrating Final Games

5/14 - 12:30pm	✴ **Game Time**