ENG279H5

History of Video Games

Dr. Chris Young　　　　　Fall 2024　　　　　v. 1.1 2024-09-13

Contents

Syllabus version 1.1

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ENG279H5 – History of Video Games

1. Course Information

Time and Location

Fall, 2024

Lecture Time: Wednesday, 9.10-11.00am

Lecture Location: MN 2170

PRA 0101 Time: Friday, 9.10-10.00am   PRA 0102 Time: Friday, 10.10-11.00am

PRA 0101 Location: IB 390   PRA 0102 Location: MN 1190

Instructor Information

Instructor: Chris Young, Ph.D.

Email: christopher.young@utoronto.ca

Office Location: HM 372 (3rd Floor of UTM Library)

Office Hours: Wednesday, 11.10-12.00pm

Teaching Assistant Information

Teaching Assistant: Alexander O'Connor   Teaching Assistant: Anna Sokolova

Email: alexander.oconnor@mail.utoronto.ca Email: anna.sokolova@mail.utoronto.ca

Office Location: MN 5209   Office Location: MN 5209

Office Hours: Friday, 11.10-12.00pm   Office Hours: 10.10-11.00am

Calendar Course Description

This course introduces students to the history of video games from early arcade cabinets and personal computers to home video game consoles and mobile devices in everyday life. It considers the role of culture, technology, and marketing in the formation of interactive texts, genres, and play experiences. Students will be exposed to unique primary sources in the Syd Bolton Collection of video games and the Electric Playground Media Archive of historical game industry footage through course content, lectures, and assignments.

Course Format

Weekly classes follow the format of a 2-hour lecture on Wednesdays followed by a 1-hour practical laboratory session on Fridays. The lecture classes will examine the weekly genre in video game history. The practical laboratory will be dedicated to learning the required knowledge and skills to be successful in the assignments. Students are expected to attend and participate in lecture and practical laboratory activities.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the history of video games from early arcade cabinets and personal computers to home video game consoles and mobile devices in everyday life (demonstrated through in-class activities and all assignments).
2. Hone analytical skills for reading, watching, and playing primary resources like textual, audiovisual, and software documents and records from video game history (demonstrated through in-class activities and assignments 1, 2, and 3).
3. Select and integrate information from various sources, including electronic and print scholarly resources, primary sources, and community resources to research video game history (demonstrated through in-class activities and all assignments).
4. Describe, evaluate, and communicate the emergence of video game genres and identify specific game elements associated with those genres (demonstrated through in-class activities and assignment 4).

Required Texts

All required texts will be made available on Quercus via the Library Reading List tab as hyperlinks with institutional access to journal articles, chapters of books, online essays, and primary source documents, videos, and games.

2. Evaluation

Assignment Overview

This course has a hybrid structure that mixes lectures and practical laboratory activities to study the history of video games. Final grades will be assessed based on the performance of each assignment according to the weighting below.

Practical Laboratory Participation (10%)

Students will actively participate in the activity and discussion portions of the weekly practical laboratory sessions. The aim of participation in the practical laboratory sessions is to get students to think critically about the course material and to work through the knowledge and skills required to be successful in completing the assignments.

Students will be evaluated individually on their participation in the practical laboratory sessions based on their frequency of participation, the quality of their comments, and their listening skills:

- Frequency – Students initiate contributions more than once in each practical laboratory session either through the group activities or wider class discussion.
- Quality – Students make insightful and constructive comments, using appropriate terminology and language. Comments are expected to balance between general impressions, opinions, and specific thoughtful criticisms.
- Listening – Students listen attentively when other students are sharing their comments and presenting perspectives, as indicated by comments that build on other students' remarks to create an insightful and constructive dialogue in group activities and discussion.

Practical Laboratory Participation is worth 10% of your final grade. The grade for participation will be assessed following each practical laboratory session and then given a cumulative grade following the final class on November 29, 2024.

Assignment 1: Close Reading Analysis (20% Due September 27, 2024 at 11.59pm)

For this individual assignment submitted to Quercus, students will perform a close reading of a text section from a document in video game history and write a 500 to 750-word close reading analysis. A close reading is a very in-depth, careful analysis of a text. The analysis looks closely at what is happening in the text and considers references to material outside of the text. For example, a close reading of a textual document can refer to the larger document more broadly (e.g., a video game magazine) but also focuses its analysis and thesis on just a small section (e.g., a video game review

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within the magazine). The thesis of a close reading analysis must argue why and how this reading is important in a context beyond the text itself.

For this assignment students will select one of the following video game magazine issues:

- *Edge*. Future Publishing. August, 1994.
- *Game Players Sega-Nintendo*. Fair Lawn Future Publishing. December, 1994.
- *Nintendo Power*. Nintendo of America Inc. January/February, 1989.
- *PC Gamer*. Imagine Media. July, 2002.
- *Play*. Future Publishing. December, 1997.

Video game magazines contain lots of important historical information on how artifacts (e.g., games and consoles), people (e.g., creators and players), and cultural practices (e.g., cheating and speed running) were received by the media and audiences at specific moments in video game history. As such, its crucial students learn how to read and analyze these textual documents by performing a close reading analysis.

Students are expected to scan through the magazine issue and read the articles, reviews, advertisements, and other content. Once familiar with the magazine's form and content, students will select a specific section in the magazine for their close reading analysis. A section can include, but is not limited to a feature article, a review, a hints section, a playthrough, or even an advertisement. Students should select a section that is no more than two to three pages of content for their close reading analysis.

The close reading analysis should include a thesis with an overview of the textual document, followed by a source, discourse, and context analysis:

- Overview – What are the artifacts, people, and cultural practices discussed? An overview should cover the who, what, where, when, and why of the section for your close reading analysis. For example, some sections of magazines focus on reviewing video games. In those reviews specific technologies, developers, and player practices may be discussed.
- Source – Does the source provide credible information that is clear for readers to understand? A source analysis should discuss whether you find the information provided to be authentic, credible, reliable, and meaningful for audiences. For example, some journalists interview game developers and provide select quotes to tell a specific story. In those interviews the journalist may focus on certain elements creating bias in how the story is presented to readers.
- Discourse – What are some of the themes, genres, and terms discussed? A discourse analysis explores the underlying themes in the text, definitions of genres, and any terminology used. For example, feature articles may define a game within certain genres

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and apply specific terms in describing gameplay and narrative. Its crucial to explain the meaning behind the terminology to understand the underlying discourse of the text.

- Context – Why does this section exist within the magazine? A contextual analysis situates the section within the wider textual document and period of video game history. For example, many magazines provide hint sections for players to navigate difficult gameplay within a video game. Consider why the content was created for specific audiences and what might that tell us about video game history more broadly.

The Close Reading Analysis Assignment is worth 20% of your final grade. It should be approximately 500 to 750-words in length, include a thesis statement, and follow the MLA citation style (9th Edition). Students are expected to use scholarly sources in support of their thesis and close reading analysis. Your Close Reading Analysis Assignment is due by 11.59pm on September 27, 2024 via Assignment Submission on Quercus as a PDF document.

Assignment 2: Close Watching Analysis (20% Due October 18, 2024 at 11.59pm)

For this individual assignment submitted to Quercus, students will perform a close watching of a segment from a video record in video game history and write a 500 to 750-word close watching analysis. A close watching is a very in-depth, careful analysis of a video segment. The analysis looks closely at what is happening in the segment and considers references to material outside of the video record. For example, a close watching of a video segment can refer to the larger video record more broadly (e.g., a broadcast television episode) but also focuses its analysis and thesis on just a small section (e.g., an interview with a game developer). The thesis of a close watching analysis must argue why and how this watching is important in a context beyond the video record itself.

For this assignment students will select one of the following episodes from the broadcast television series the *Electric Playground*, which aired from 1997 to 2016 on cable networks in Canada and around the world:

- *Electric Playground*. Greed Productions Inc. Season 1, Episode 1. 1997.
- *Electric Playground*. Greedy Productions Inc. Season 1, Episode 7. 1997.
- *Electric Playground*. Greedy Productions Inc. Season 1, Episode 12. 1997.
- *Electric Playground*. Greedy Productions Inc. Season 2, Episode 2. 1998.
- *Electric Playground*. Greedy Productions Inc. Season 2, Episode 11. 1998.

The broadcast television episodes of the *Electric Playground* contain lots of important historical information on how artifacts (e.g., games and consoles), people (e.g., creators and players), and cultural practices (e.g., cheating and speed running) were received by the media and audiences at

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specific moments in video game history. As such, its crucial students learn how to watch and analyze these video records by performing a close watching analysis.

Students are expected to watch the full 30-minute episode and view the interviews, reviews, advertisements, and other video segments. Once familiar with the episode's form and content, students will select a specific video segment in the episode for their close watching analysis. A video segment can include, but is not limited to a feature interview, a review, behind the scenes footage, or even a commercial. Students should select a video segment that is no more than three to four minutes of content for their close watching analysis.

The close watching analysis should include a thesis and overview of the video segment, followed by a source, discourse, and context analysis:

- Overview – What are the artifacts, people, and cultural practices discussed? An overview should cover the who, what, where, when, and why of the video segment for your close watching analysis. For example, some segments of *Electric Playground* episodes focus on reviewing video games. In those reviews specific technologies, developers, and player practices may be discussed.

- Source – Does the source provide credible information that is clear for viewers to understand? A source analysis should discuss whether you find the information provided to be authentic, credible, reliable, and meaningful for audiences. For example, some journalists interview game developers and provide select video footage to tell a specific story. In those interviews the journalist may focus on certain elements creating bias in how the story is presented to viewers.

- Discourse – What are some of the themes, genres, and terms discussed? A discourse analysis explores the underlying themes in the video segment, definitions of genres, and any terminology used. For example, feature interviews may define a game within certain genres and apply specific terms in describing gameplay and narrative. Its crucial to explain the meaning behind the terminology to understand the underlying discourse of the video segment.

- Context – Why does this video segment exist within the broadcast televised episode? A contextual analysis situates the video segment within the wider video record and period of video game history. For example, many episodes of the *Electric Playground* include video segments that take viewers "behind the scenes" where video games are made at studios and publishers. Consider why the content was created for specific audiences and what might that tell us about video game history more broadly.

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The Close Watching Analysis Assignment is worth 20% of your final grade. It should be approximately 500 to 750-words in length, include a thesis statement, and follow the MLA citation style (9th Edition). Students are expected to use scholarly sources in support of their thesis and close reading analysis. Your Close Watching Analysis Assignment is due by 11.59pm on October 18, 2024 via Assignment Submission on Quercus as a PDF document.

Assignment 3: Close Playing Analysis (20% Due November 8, 2024 at 11.59pm)

For this individual assignment submitted to Quercus, students will perform a close playing of an encounter from a video game in video game history and write a 500 to 750-word close playing analysis. A close playing is a very in-depth, careful analysis of an encounter in a video game. The analysis looks closely at what is happening in the game and considers references to material outside of the game. For example, a close playing of an encounter from a game can refer to the game more broadly (e.g., gameplay and narrative) but also focuses its analysis and thesis on just a small encounter (e.g., a level, chapter, or an activity). The thesis of a close playing analysis must argue why and how this playing is important in a context beyond the game itself.

For this assignment students will select one of the following video games from the Internet Archive's Software Library: MS-DOS Games, which have been emulated in the EM-DOSBOX in-browser emulator:

- *Doom*. idSoftware. 1993.
- *Prince of Persia*. Broderbund. 1990.
- *The Oregon Trail*. MECC. 1990.
- *Sid Meier's Civilization*. MicroProse Software Inc. 1991.
- *Zork I: The Great Underground Empire*. Infocom Inc. 1984.

Video games contain lots of important historical information on how design (e.g., player interface), publishing (e.g., marketing material), genre (e.g., adventure games), and culture (e.g., masculinity) were disseminated by creators and interpreted by players at specific moments in video game history. As such, its crucial students learn how to play and analyze these video games by performing a close playing analysis.

Students are expected to play through the video game as far as they can within two to three hours. Once familiar with the video game's form and content, students will select a specific encounter in the video game for their close playing analysis. An encounter can include, but is not limited to a gameplay activity, a level or chapter, a particular space or environment, an interface, player input, or a gameplay mechanic. Students should select an encounter that is short enough to be described succinctly in their close playing analysis.

The close playing analysis should include a thesis and an overview of the video game encounter, followed by a source, discourse, and context analysis:

- Overview – What are the key narrative and/or gameplay elements of the video game encounter? An overview should cover the who, what, where, when, and why of the encounter for your close playing analysis. For example, a video game encounter could focus on the controls and player input required to create the interactive experience for a specific activity, like movement in a virtual space. Framing the technical and embodied requirements for the encounter can provide detail of the game's intended interactive gameplay experience.

- Source – Does the source provide credible information that is clear for players to understand? A source analysis should discuss whether you find the information provided to be authentic, credible, reliable, and meaningful for players. For example, some games provide player instructions through menu systems, heads-up displays (HUDs), in-game lore, or cutscenes. How this source information is presented to the player can have an impact on gameplay and interpreting the player's experience.

- Discourse – What are some of the themes, genres, and terms of the gameplay encounter? A discourse analysis explores the underlying themes in the game, its genre, and any terminology used. For example, the narrative and/or gameplay mechanics can heavily impact the genre of a game, like a computer terminal interface for text-adventure games. Its crucial to explain how narrative and/or gameplay mechanics are used to understand why specific interactive experiences are typically associated with certain genres and themes in video game history.

- Context – Why does this encounter exist within the game? A contextual analysis situates the encounter within the wider game and period of video game history. For example, many video games released before the early 1990s were text-heavy with pixelated graphics due to the limited technical capabilities of personal computers and associated media storage, like floppy discs. Consider why the encounter was designed a specific way and what might that tell us about video game history more broadly.

The Close Playing Analysis Assignment is worth 20% of your final grade. It should be approximately 500 to 750-words in length, include a thesis statement, and follow the MLA citation style (9th Edition). Students are expected to use scholarly sources in support of their thesis and close playing analysis. Your Close Playing Analysis Assignment is due by 11.59pm on November 8, 2024 via Assignment Submission on Quercus as a PDF document.

Assignment 4: Video Game Genre Playlist (30% Due November 29, 2024 at 11.59pm)

For this individual assignment submitted to Quercus, students will write a 1,000 to 1,500-word playlist of five to six video games defining a genre. Students are expected to define the genre and explain why their chosen games are representative of this genre by articulating the narrative and/or gameplay mechanics that thread them together. The produced playlist ideally combines a strong theoretical foundation and positioning within the wider domain of game history with a rigorous argument and innovative genre creation. Students are encouraged to put together a genre playlist that includes games from different gaming technologies, historical periods, companies, and geographic regions, where possible. A premium is put on any playlist that innovates a genre within video game history.

The playlist should include a thesis that provides a definition of the genre, an overview of the playlist, and descriptions of the video games:

- Genre Definition – Provide a clear thesis statement articulating your genre and what narrative and/or gameplay mechanics are representative of your genre. This statement can be included in your overview but will need to connect directly to each video game in your playlist as well.
- Overview – Outline the narrative and/or gameplay mechanics that thread your playlist together. While you have only selected five to six video games, there may be other video games that did not make your playlist, which can provide additional evidence and context for your selection.
- Video Game Descriptions – Focus specifically on the narrative and/or gameplay mechanics that are representative of the genre in each video game. A high-level description of each game is important, but it is also crucial that these descriptions focus directly on the narrative and/or gameplay mechanics that warrant a video game's inclusion in your playlist. For example, a specific video game may be known as an exemplar of storytelling in scholarly literature and popular press, but your genre definition may focus on the gameplay mechanics that are less well known and discussed.

The Playlist Assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. It should be approximately 1,000 to 1,500-words in length, include a thesis statement that provides a definition of the genre, an overview and playlist of five to six games in that genre, and follow the MLA citation style (9th Edition). Students are expected to use scholarly sources in support of their thesis, genre, and playlist. Your Playlist Assignment is due by 11.59pm on November 29, 2024 via Assignment Submission on Quercus as a PDF document.

Citation Style

All assignments must make consistent use of the MLA citation style (9th Edition). The use of reference managers (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley, or EndNote) is highly recommended.

Drop Date

The last day to drop this course from your academic record and GPA is November 6, 2024. If you submit assignments on time, Assignments 1 and 2 should be graded, which represent 40% of your final grade.

Grading

Please consult the UTM's Grades and Academic Record resources that will form the basis for grading in this course. Evaluation will be carried out in accordance with the University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy. Please refer to the grading policy on the governing council website.

Lateness Penalties

All work is due on the dates and times indicated in the course schedule. Late assignments will incur a 2% late penalty per day. All assignments are also to be handed in via Quercus. Deadline extensions will be granted only with authorized documentation or at the instructor's discretion. No assignments will be accepted for grading more than one week following the original due date except where accommodations have been provided. Please refer to the Accommodations and Absences sections of the syllabus for more information on how to receive accommodations for missed term work.

Request an Assignment to be Regraded

Students may request for their assignment to be regraded. Students are required to submit in writing by email their request to the course instructor which demonstrates how their assignment addressed the assignment requirements and conditions for a higher grade in the grading rubric (provided on Quercus assignment description). Once received the course instructor will review the request and provide written feedback by email to the student which outlines why their assignment will or will not be regraded. If the assignment is regraded, the course instructor will provide the new grade in their written email response.

Rounding Grades

No assignment grades are rounded. For example, if a student receives 79% on an assignment it will not be rounded up to 80%. Likewise, if a student receives 81% on an assignment it will not be rounded down to 80%. However, at the end of the course when all the assignment grades are tabulated some final grades may be rounded up or down to the nearest percentage point. For

example, if a student ends the course with 78.4% their final grade will be rounded down to 78%. If a student ends the course with 78.5% their final grade will be rounded up to 79%. In circumstances where a student's final grade is rounded up to within a percentage point of a letter grade, such as 79%, their final grade will be rounded up to that higher letter grade, such as 80% (A-).

3. Rules and Regulations

Statement on Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the U of T operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land. Read about U of T's Statement of Land Acknowledgement.

Statement on Commitment to Equity, Human Rights, and Respect for Diversity

The U of T is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities.

Student Code of Conduct

All students registered at the U of T are required to conduct themselves in a respectful manner. The Code of Student Conduct applies and will be enforced regardless of the physical location where students are undertaking their studies. For more information, see Code of Student Conduct (December 13, 2019) from The Office of the Governing Council, Secretariat.

Student Email Policy

Students are expected to email the instructor and teaching assistants using their UTORmail accounts (e.g., email accounts ending with @utoronto.ca or @mail.utoronto.ca). When contacting the instructor or teaching assistants, please include the course code in the subject line (e.g., ENG279 History of Video Games). Email responses can take up to 48 weekday hours by the instructor and teaching assistants (e.g., if you email on Friday evening you may not get a response until the following Tuesday).

Statement on Academic Integrity

UTM wishes to remind students that they are expected to adhere to the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters regardless of the course delivery method. UTM expects that students will

maintain the same academic honesty and integrity both in a classroom setting and online. Potential academic offences related to digital contexts include, but are not limited to:

- Accessing unauthorized resources (search engines, chat rooms, Reddit, etc.) for assessments.
- Using technological aids (e.g., software) beyond what is listed as permitted in an assessment.
- Posting test, essay, or exam questions to message boards or social media.
- Creating, accessing, and sharing assessment questions and answers in virtual "course groups."
- Working collaboratively, in-person or online, with others on assessments that are expected to be completed individually.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from your instructor or from other institutional resources.

Statement on Copyright

Please be advised that the intellectual property rights in the material referred to on this syllabus, and posted on the course site, may belong to the course instructor or other persons. You are not authorized to reproduce or distribute such material, in any form or medium, without the prior consent of the intellectual property owner. Violation of intellectual property rights may be a violation of the law and U of T policies and may entail significant repercussions for the person found to have engaged in such act. If you have any questions regarding your right to use the material in a manner other than as set forth in the syllabus, please speak to your instructor.

Statement on Use of Generative AI

Students may not use artificial intelligence tools for writing as part of their course assignments. However, these tools may be useful when gathering information from across sources and assimilating it for understanding in the research process. It is imperative students are critical in the use of these technologies during the research process as they are known to fabricate information. Always verify your sources are authentic.

4. Accommodations and Absences

Accessibility Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

Accessibility staff (located in room 2240, Student Services Hub, Davis Building) are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. Please call 905-569-4699 or email access.utm@utoronto.ca. The sooner you let us know your needs the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Missed Term Work Policy and ACORN Absence Declaration Tool

Students who miss a practical laboratory session or assignment deadline may wish to seek academic consideration and declare an absence using the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool. Students who declare an absence in ACORN should expect to receive reasonable academic consideration from their instructor without the need to present additional supporting documentation. Students have a responsibility to alert the instructor using the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool in a timely fashion for any requested accommodations for missed practical laboratory sessions of assignments (e.g., before the scheduled practical laboratory session or the assignment deadline).

Students can only use the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool once per academic term (e.g., the fall term) for a maximum period of 7 consecutive calendar days. Students who have already used one absence declaration in a term will be restricted from declaring any further absences using the ACORN Absence Declaration Tool. Students are required to arrange any further academic consideration directly with their instructor and / or student services advisor. Students may be asked to provide supporting documentation as evidence of their absences such as the U of T approved verification of illness form (VOI).

Religious Accommodations

It is the policy of the U of T to arrange reasonable accommodation of the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated by ordinary scheduling and statutory holidays.

Students have a responsibility to alert the instructor by email in a timely fashion to upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences (e.g., before the scheduled practical laboratory session or the assignment deadline). It is most important that no student be seriously

disadvantaged because of her or his religious observances. The sooner you let the instructor know your needs the quicker the instructor can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

5. Student Support Resources

Academic Dates

The UTM's Sessional Dates and Academic and Financial Deadlines.

Health & Counselling Centre

The Health & Counselling Centre (HCC) is located in Room DV 1152 on the first floor of the William G. Davis Building. The HCC supports the UTM Community in receiving medical and clinical support. Visit the HCC Website to explore their online resources and to find out more information on how to access to medical care and counselling.

Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre

The Robert Gillespie Academic Skills Centre (RGASC) is located in Room 3251 on the third floor of the Maanjiwe nendamowinan Building. The RGASC offers individual consultations, workshops (many CCR-accredited), and a wide range of programs to help students identify and develop the academic skills they need for success in their studies. Programming will include both in-person and online options. Visit the RGASC website to explore their online resources, book an in-person or online appointment, or learn about other programming such as Writing Retreats, the Program for Accessing Research Training (PART), Mathematics and Numeracy Support, and dedicated resources for English Language Learners.

UTM Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Office

The UTM Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Office (EDIO) is located in Room DV 3094G on the third floor of the William G. Davis Building. The EDIO supports the UTM community in resolving issues that involve equity, discrimination, or harassment; as well as provides guidance and resources on equity-related initiatives. Visit the EDIO website to explore their online resources, book a consultation, or learn about other programming such as EDIO Initiatives, Work-Study Opportunities, and Solidarity with Black Communities.

UTM Indigenous Centre

The UTM Indigenous Centre (IC) provides service delivery, programming, and support to Indigenous faculty, students, staff, and librarians. The IC works to build lasting and meaningful relationships with surrounding Indigenous communities. The IC also hosts gatherings and cultural programming for UTM's Indigenous members and provides a welcoming and inclusive space for future Indigenous

students. Visit the IC website to learn more about their online resources, indigenous spaces, and cultural programming.

UTM Library

The U of T Libraries connect students with the world-class collections needed to successfully conduct research and complete assignments. At the UTM Library, located within the Hazel McCallion Academic Learning Centre, students will find dedicated support for their courses:

- Rare and unique materials like the Syd Bolton Collection of video games and the Electric Playground Media Archive in the Archives & Special Collections via appointments in the Reading Room.
- Reference and Research Help via in-person drop-in and the Ask a Librarian virtual chat service.
- Research guides developed by subject expert liaison librarians, plus individual consultations on request.
- Workshops on navigating databases, finding relevant articles, using software, citing correctly, and more.

6. Course Schedule

Students are required to complete readings that provide context to that week's video game genre. Some of the readings provide overviews of a genre or sub-genre, while other readings provide a case study analysis of specific video game titles. Students are expected to complete the readings each week to supplement lecture content, practical laboratory activities, and their assignments. While there is evaluation on students' retention of the readings, these readings have been selected to support the learning outcomes of the course for student success.

Week 1 – Press Start (Wednesday September 4, 2024)

In the first week of class, we will go through the syllabus, assignments, and the overall structure of the course content. There will also be an overview of the key genres in video game history that we will explore each week.

Required Reading

- Lowood, Henry. "Pong (1972)." *Fifty Key Video Games*, edited by Bernard Perron, Kelly Boudreau, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Dominic Arsenault, Routledge, 2022, pp. 202-209.
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, and Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. "History." *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2020, pp. 61-109.

Week 2 – Competition (Wednesday September 11, 2024)

Competition between players and computers is a defining characteristic of games. This week we will explore some of the competitive sub-genres of games like ball-and-paddle games, sports games, fighting games, and dance and music games. We will also take some time to look at the professionalization of players with streaming and e-Sports.

Required Reading

- Newman, Michael Z. "Ball-and-Paddle Games: Domesticity." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, pp. 208-215.
- Witkowski, Emma. "Counter-Strike: Spectatorship." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, pp. 293-300).

Week 3 – Adventure (Wednesday September 18, 2024)

Some of the earliest video games used the element of exploration to create vast open worlds via the genre of Adventure. This week we will explore some of the adventure sub-genres like text-adventures, point-and-click games, and adventure-action games.

Required Reading

- Fernández-Vara, Clara. "Adventure." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, and Bernard Perron, Routledge, 2014, pp. 232-240.
- Reed, Aaron A., John Murray, and Anastasia Salter. "Defining Adventure Games from the Ground Up." *Adventure Games: Playing the Outsider*. Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 33–60.

Week 4 – Simulation (Wednesday September 25, 2024)

Assignment 1 due Friday September 27 by 11.59pm on Quercus

Before video games emerged as a viable commercial product for the public computing technologies were used to create realistic simulations of war and strategy. This week we will explore some of the simulation sub-genres like real-time strategy games, war gaming, and walking simulators.

Required Reading

- Giddings, Seth. "Simulation." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, and Bernard Perron, Routledge, 2014, pp. 259-266.

- Krapp, Peter. "Sid Meier's Civilization: Realism." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, pp. 44-51.

Week 5 – Serious (Wednesday October 2, 2024)

Though games are widely viewed as a form of entertainment, many creators used games for serious purposes. This week we will look at the wider genre of serious games through sub-genres like education and learning games, advertising games, and health games.

Required Reading

- Murphy, Sheila C. "The Oregon Trail (1971)." *Fifty Key Video Games*, edited by Bernard Perron, Kelly Boudreau, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Dominic Arsenault, Routledge, 2022, pp. 184-190.
- Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, and Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. "Serious Games and Gamification—When Entertainment Is Not Enough." *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2020, pp. 241-282.

Week 6 – Social (Wednesday October 9, 2024)

Games have always been social. This week we look at some of the social aspects of games through sub-genres like Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs), Massively Online Games (MMOs),and location-based games. We will also take some time to look at the social activities of player cultures like speed-running and cheating.

Required Reading

- Bergstrom, Kelly. "Eve Online: Cheating." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, pp. 301-308.
- Nichols, Randy. "Pokémon Go: Globalization." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, (pp. 250-257.

Week 7 – Platformer (Wednesday October 16, 2024)

Assignment 2 due Friday October 18 by 11.59pm on Quercus

Run n' Jump games, or platformers as they are widely known, are one of the most unique and defining genres of video games. This week we will look at the 2D and 3D platformer genre and explore some of the sub-genres that have developed over the last 40 years. We will also have a guest appearance from Peter Liepa, the creator of *Boulder Dash* (1984), an action puzzle game.

Required Reading

- Young, Bryan-Mitchell. "Super Mario Bros. (1985)." *Fifty Key Video Games*, edited by Bernard Perron, Kelly Boudreau, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Dominic Arsenault, Routledge, 2022, pp. 262-267.
- *McDonald, Peter. "Introduction: A Curious Perspective." Run And Jump: The Meaning Of The 2D Platformer. MIT Press, 2024, pp. 1-20.*

Week 8 – Horror (Wednesday October 23, 2024)

Though horror is typically associated as a film genre it has also developed into a defining genre of video games using audiovisual, haptic, and other immersive technologies to frighten and shock players. In the lead up to Halloween we will explore sub-genres of horror like action horror, survival horror, and jump scare horror.

Required Reading

- Perron, Bernard. "Resident Evil." *Fifty Key Video Games*, edited by Bernard Perron, Kelly Boudreau, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Dominic Arsenault, Routledge, 2022, pp. 216-222.
- Therrien, Carl. "Games Of Fear: A Multi-faceted Historical account of the horror genre in video games." *Horror Video Games: Essays On The Fusion Of Fear And Play*, edited by Bernard Perron, McFarland, 2009, pp. 26-45.

Reading Week (Wednesday October 30, 2024)

There is no class, practical laboratory activities, or readings during Reading Week. Get some rest and play some games.

Week 9 – First Person Shooter (Wednesday November 6, 2024)

Assignment 3 due Friday November 8 by 11.59pm on Quercus

Since its emergence in the mid-1990s, the First Person Shooter genre has dominated the charts of video games, raking in the highest active player counts, sales, and revenue annually. We will explore some of the military, action, and science fiction First Person Shooters that have defined and shaped the genre over the past 30 years.

Required Reading

- Voorhees, Gerald. "Shooting." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, and Bernard Perron, Routledge, 2014, pp. 251-258.
- Wolf, Mark J. P. "*BattleZone* and the Origins of First-Person Shooting Games." Guns, Grenades, and Grunts: First Person Shooter Games, edited by Gerald A. Voorhees, Josh Call, and Katie Whitlock, Bloomsbury, 2012, pp. 25-40.

Week 10 – Role Playing (Wednesday November 13, 2024)

Role Playing Games (RPGs) are some of the most expansive and imaginative video games, tying in complex narrative and game play mechanics to create numerous paths for players to explore. We will explore some of the early RPGs and then examine the more recent MMORPGs that have taken advantage of networking thousands of players into the same virtual world.

Required Reading

- Burn, Andrew. "Role-Playing." *The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*, edited by Mark J. P. Wolf, and Bernard Perron, Routledge, 2014, pp. 249-250.
- Call, Josh, Katie Whitlock, and Gerald Voorhees. "From Dungeons to Digital Denizens." *Dungeons, Dragons, and Digital Denizens: The Digital Role-Playing Game*, edited by Gerald Voorhees, Josh Call, and Katie Whitlock, Continuum, 2012, pp. 11–24.

Week 11 – Sandbox (Wednesday November 20, 2024)

Players have always been keen to build and create their own worlds. The genre of sandbox games captures this playing at making approach. This week we will explore some of the sub-genres of sandbox games that are inextricably tied to player cultures like user-generated content, modding, and home brew games.

Required Reading

- Joly-Lavoie, Alexandre. "SimCity (1989)." *Fifty Key Video Games*, edited by Bernard Perron, Kelly Boudreau, Mark J. P. Wolf, and Dominic Arsenault, Routledge, 2022, pp. 233-238.
- Newman, James. "Minecraft: User Generated Content." *How to Play Video Games*, edited by Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann, New York University Press, 2019, pp. 277-284.

Week 12 – Game Over (Wednesday November 27, 2024)

Assignment 4 due Friday November 29 by 11.59pm on Quercus

In our last week of class, we will have a guest lecture by film maker and artist, Peter Mishara. Peter will give a lecture on their background as a video game history storyteller through the lens of creating the television show *The Artists* for CBC. Students are expected to watch the feature documentary release of *The Artists* television show before class. We will end the class with a course recap of what we have covered and speculate on where video games might go in the future.

Required Viewing

- *The Artists – Feature Documentary*. Directed by Peter Mishara, First Generation Media, 2018.

7. Credits and Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

This syllabus was put together by the instructor Chris Young in 2024 following encouragement from and support by Larry Switzky and Jacob Gallagher-Ross. Special thanks go to the faculty, librarians, and staff in the Department of English & Drama and the UTM Library for supporting the creation of this course, its administration, and providing some of the language around Rules and Regulations, Accommodations and Absences, and Student Support Services.

Image Credits

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