

CS98/198: The Gamer Condition

The Mind of the Modern Gamer

Facilitators:

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Course Overview:

The video game industry has finally reached a state where video games can be welcomed into mainstream art and culture. The demographic of the gaming community has widened proportionately so, and now video games are a legitimate topic of conversation. Now that our culture has progressed to a point where we can have mature conversations about the symbolism, artistic style, and overall quality of video games, we may begin to ask questions about the nature of the gaming human being – questions like “Why do we game?”

This DeCal, **The Gamer Condition (CS 98/198)**, seeks to facilitate discussion about the people behind the controllers, developers and players alike. It will investigate a myriad of topics in the modern world of gaming, such as:

- *What makes games so fun?*
- *Who plays video games?*
- *Why video games, as opposed to board games or card games?*
- *How do players influence the development of games?*
- *What do the developers assume about the players?*
- *What is our relationship between ourselves and our avatar (virtual self)?*
- *Why do games make us angry (rage)?*
- *Why do players cheat? Grief? Hack?*
- *What determines respect in a game/gaming community? Fame? Infamy?*
- *What makes a tactic or practice “cheap?” What defines an “exploit?”*
- *Who –or what– makes the rules? Whose rules do we follow?*

Over the next fifteen weeks, we will slowly unravel the nature of those who create, modify, and interact with the video gaming sphere. This is relatively uncharted territory, so in the spirit of the DeCal, we will all be learning and contributing equally in this course. Students will be expected to think deeply about different aspects of their gaming habits (and those of others) to develop a fuller understanding of what issues are current and relevant in the modern world of gaming.

Format/Homework

The format of this DeCal is designed to parallel the Video Games as Interpretable Media (or Video Games as Art) DeCal. We will hold **weekly two-hour discussions**, with a break in the middle. Most administrative work, including homework submission, will be through bSpace.

There will be short **weekly assignments**, generally writing up a short (half-to-full page, double spaced) reflection on the week's topic. Students may be asked to play a particular game as a "reading" equivalent. In addition, there will be a **final project**, which in its current inception will be a series of team debates over a particular issue of interest.

Grading

As with all DeCals, The Gamer Condition will be graded on a Pass/No-Pass basis. To pass the course, students must fulfill the following criteria. (Naturally, there will be some leeway allowed. If you have trouble meeting any of these, just discuss it with a facilitator):

- **Participate at least once in every weekly discussion.** If a student misses a weekly discussion, she/he may be asked to speak up a little more often in the subsequent sessions. Attendance will be implicitly taken through tracking participation.
- **Turn in weekly homework assignments.** Up to **three** homework assignments may be missed without penalty; if you miss more than three, talk to one of us facilitators and we will work out some way for you to make up the work. **Generally, no late homework will be accepted.**
- **Complete the final project.**

Resources

Assignments will likely be supplied each week, impromptu and on a weekly basis. There is no reader or textbook for this course. If we assign a reading for a week, it will be either posted to or linked on bSpace. Students may be asked to get a hold of a certain video game for a week and play a little bit; students are encouraged to operate in groups to help this along. In most cases, **the demo will suffice** in case the student cannot afford to purchase the full version of the game.

Again, if you do not own a computer or a console, you are *highly encouraged* to work in groups.

Final Notes

This class is open to *anyone*, and we welcome regular gamers and casual folks alike. You don't even have to have played before, if you are willing to learn about our world. Bring your friends!

Finally, while there may be gray lines about cheating in games, **cheating on an assignment or the final project is unacceptable.** Standard academic policies apply. Do your own work. If anything is unclear, talk to the facilitators. **The last thing you want to do is fail a video game decal. Don't cheat.**