

**DRAFT: Dates will change as events and guests are scheduled**

**CMGT 537, Spring 2018**  
**The industry, science and culture of video games**  
**USC Annenberg School for Communication**

Professor Dmitri Williams

[dcwillia@usc.edu](mailto:dcwillia@usc.edu)

ANN 406

Class hours: 6:30-9:20 Thursdays

Office hours by appointment. Preceding class is easiest, but other times are possible.

Office: ANN 414K

**Course Description**

Video games are now one of the major sectors of the entertainment industry, having surpassed the film industry in receipts. However, video games are having a cultural impact far beyond their role as an economic commodity. In this class, we will explore all of these dynamics, studying the history of videogames, the present industry landscape, their social and cultural impact, and developments in technology, design, and industry organization. There is a strong emphasis on the industry itself—business models, competition, changes in technology, etc. In-class sessions (and evaluations) stress student participation and involvement.

**Texts and Supplies:**

Readings are posted on Blackboard. Also required is “Replay” by Tristan Donovan (available on Amazon new, used or Kindle).

All students are required to subscribe to the daily email feed from [www.gamesindustry.biz](http://www.gamesindustry.biz) and [www.gamasutra.com](http://www.gamasutra.com).

**Components of the Course Grade:**

- In-class participation: 10%  
Please note that informed participation in class will matter more than in a typical course.
- In-class group projects: 20%  
There are two group-based projects during the term:
  - 1) Group presentations on gender in gaming (10%)
  - 2) Mock debate on game effects and regulation (10%)
- Industry Interview: 10%

Find a full-time industry person who will give you 30-60 minutes of their time. Interview them about a topic of your interest, then write up a summary of the interview in a two-page paper. Be prepared to talk about what you learned in class the next week, and use presentation materials if needed. You may not interview one of our guest speakers.

- **Game company profile: 10%**  
Write a two-page profile of a game company. Include its origins, its market, and its prospects. Explain where it lives in the overall industry structure, and where it lies on the vertical chain. What are its strengths and weaknesses? How would you advise the company? Would you invest? You'll be graded based on how well you use course concepts in the profile.
- **Game analysis: 10%**  
Play a game in depth. In two pages, explain its genre, its pros and cons and suggest what its ESRB rating or metacritic rating should be, then note whether your assessment matches the actual rating. Then, review the game as if you were a designer, using concepts from the readings, class, speakers or field visits. Get beyond description. If the game does something well or poorly, explain or hypothesize why that is. Pick one you haven't played.
- **Term project: 40% (30% paper, 10% presentation)**  
Your term project will consist of a paper with 13-15 pages of text, not including a cover page, bibliography or appendices. You will analyze some aspect of games. This can be corporate, cultural, social scientific, or another area proposed by the student. Tailor it to your own interests, and to a practical real-world project if you like. Papers based on some kind of empirical data—whether statistical or qualitative—always fare better. The term paper is due Dec. 10 by 5 pm to my email inbox. If you want feedback, you need to give me a hard copy in addition to the emailed copy, plus a return addressed and stamped envelope.

### **Academic Integrity Policy**

The School of Communication is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical support. It endorses and acts on the school policies and procedures detailed in the SCampus section titled: "University Student Conduct Code." See especially Appendix A: "Academic Dishonesty Sanction Guidelines." The policies, procedures, and guidelines will be assiduously upheld. They protect your rights, as well as those of the faculty. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, fabricating data for a project, submitting the same paper to more than one professor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone but yourself. If you have questions about any of these matters, confer with the instructor.

### **Academic Accommodation based on Disability**

Any student requesting academic accommodation based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP's phone number is (213) 740-0776.

### Stress Management

Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

### Sexual Assault Resource Center

The Center for Women & Men and the Sexual Assault Resource Center are one and the same. Student Counseling Services is a separate place that also offers confidential counseling and support groups on a variety of other topics. To schedule an appointment with Student Counseling Services, call (213) 740-7711 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or visit the Engemann Student Health Center on the University Park Campus.

### Schedule

Date	Session	Readings
1/11	Introduction: Overview, taxonomy, early history, genres	"Spacewar" in Levy, S. (1994). <i>Hackers: Heroes of the computer revolution</i> . New York: Penguin Books
1/18	Industry History of Video Games Video: 1) Commodore Wars <a href="https://8bitgeneration.vhx.tv/products/growing-the-8-bit-generation">https://8bitgeneration.vhx.tv/products/growing-the-8-bit-generation</a> 2) Once Upon Atari <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE:</b> <b>Play <i>Minecraft</i>. Send me a screenshot of your character, with a sword, underground.</b>	Donovan, Ch. 1-8

1/25	<p>Industry Economics: I/O model, vertical integration, state of the industry, creative destruction, convergence, distribution models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Williams, D. (2002). Structure and competition in the U.S. home video game industry. <i>The International Journal on Media Management</i>, 4(1), 41-54.</li> <li>● Shokrizade (2015). The Top F2P Monetization Tricks (blog post)</li> <li>● Nielsen 360 2017 Report. Also available as webinar at <a href="https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/7108511282025716995">https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/7108511282025716995</a></li> </ul>
2/1	<p>Media Constructions/Social history of gaming, Left vs. Right  <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Game company analysis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Glassner, B. (1999). <i>The culture of fear: Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things</i>. New York: Basic Books. p. 58-74.</li> <li>● Herz, J. C. (1997). <i>Joystick nation</i>. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Ch. 4, p. 43-59.</li> <li>● Williams, D. (2006). A (brief) social history of gaming. In P. Vorderer &amp; J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.</li> </ul>
2/8	<p>Tentative Class is at 7pm off-site in Manhattan Beach tonight: Field Trip to <a href="#">Heavy Iron Studios</a> (map in the link). We will have an optional dinner nearby at <a href="#">Cafe Rio</a> at 6.  <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Play World of Warcraft and send me a screenshot of your character at level 5 or higher.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Donovan, Ch. 26 (Mainstream gaming)</li> </ul>
2/15	<p>Modern Games, AR &amp; VR Video:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <a href="#">State of the Industry (SuperData)</a>. <i>Do not share.</i></li> <li>2) Mobile review (AppAnnie)</li> </ol> <p><b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Game review</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Nielsen VR report</li> <li>● Weinberger, M. Mark Zuckerberg just signed the death warrant for the smartphone</li> <li>● Koster, R. (2016) AR is an MMO</li> <li>● “The Untold Story of Magic Leap, the World’s Most Secretive Startup” Kevin Kelly, WIRED</li> <li>● Optional: <a href="#">Apple shows off new ARKit</a>.</li> <li>● Optional: My <a href="#">Op-Ed in the LA Times</a>.</li> </ul>

2/22	<p>Analytics, data and user research, performance marketing, social networks and their impact/virality</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Play World of Tanks through boot camp and at least 5 battles after. Send me a screenshot of your Player Record screen</p> <p>TENTATIVE GUEST: Dennis Wixon, 6-7:30</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mapping the UA stack and Modeling video ad effectiveness on mobile, Seufert, E. (2016) (Mobiledevmemo post)</li> <li>● Optional, for marketing people: <a href="#">Seufert presentation</a> on mobile marketing phases.</li> </ul>
3/1	<p>Life in the industry</p> <p>TENTATIVE GUEST: Chris Ko. (moving dates)</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Game industry interviews due. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.</p>	<p>No readings.</p> <p>Take the time to do a good interview and start thinking about your term paper topic.</p>
3/8 VR/AR M2E week	<p>Game design, spillover material</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT DUE: 1 paragraph term paper proposals</p> <p>TENTATIVE guest, Clinton Foy, Crosscut Ventures 7:30-8:50</p> <p>TENTATIVE GUEST: Joe Unger and Trish Williams 6-7:20 to guest..</p> <p>TENTATIVE GUEST (Second half of class) Mark Van Lommel (PMK•BNC)</p> <p>Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* How the demographics of "gamers" impacts game design, PR and marketing</li> <li>* The role of PR in each of these situations (EA, Nintendo, Ubisoft)</li> <li>* What responsibility, if any, do publishers have in crafting game content?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Account of an industry milestone: <a href="http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-kiss-that-changed-video-games">http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-kiss-that-changed-video-games</a></li> <li>● News report on a hot topic from E3 this year: <a href="https://games.yahoo.com/blogs/plugged-in/ubisoft-facing-backlash-over-lack-of-female-assassins-in-assassins-creed--unity-202301284.html">https://games.yahoo.com/blogs/plugged-in/ubisoft-facing-backlash-over-lack-of-female-assassins-in-assassins-creed--unity-202301284.html</a></li> <li>● Editorial on the responsibility of game developers in light of current events: <a href="http://www.polygon.com/2014/8/19/6029085/battlefield-hardline-police">http://www.polygon.com/2014/8/19/6029085/battlefield-hardline-police</a></li> </ul>
3/15	<i>Spring Break, no class</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>

<p>3/22</p>	<p>1) In-game advertising, product placement and deals.</p> <p>2) Social science of games: motivations, player types, presence, effects  <b>TENTATIVE GUEST: Dom McAree</b> (Global Media Solutions group). Topic: Native Brand Advertising in EA titles.  <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Player profile at</b> <a href="http://survey.ihobo.com/BrainHQA">http://survey.ihobo.com/BrainHQA</a></p> <p>3) Roles assigned for next week, reminder to prep for workshop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sherry, J., Greenberg, B., Lucas, S., &amp; Lachlan, K. (2006). Video game uses and gratifications as predictors of use and game preference. In P. Vorderer &amp; J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Playing computer games: Motives, responses and consequences</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.</li> <li>● Barlett, C., Anderson, C., Swing, E. (2008). Video game effects: Confirmed, Suspected, and Speculative. <i>Simulation &amp; Gaming</i>, 20.</li> <li>● Ferguson, C. (2007) The good, the bad and the ugly: A meta-analytic review of positive and negative effects of violent video games. <i>Psychiatric Quarterly</i>. 78, 309-316.</li> </ul>
<p>3/29</p>	<p>Policy, ratings, regulation.</p> <p>Also, term paper discussion  <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Class debate</b>  <b>TENTATIVE GUEST: Sean Bender</b>, founder Phoenix Labs (formerly Riot, venture capital), 7:40-8:50.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Donovan Ch. 18 (Mortal Kombat)</li> <li>● Policy packet on Blackboard: Amicus brief, links to Illinois &amp; US Senate materials, Yee's statement</li> </ul>
<p>4/5</p>	<p>Identity, gender, race and community  <b>ASSIGNMENT DUE: Group presentations</b></p> <p>Term paper workshop.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Donovan, Ch. 21 (Girl Gaming, but skip the Playstation material)</li> <li>● Beyond Barbie chapters (2)</li> <li>● Dibbell, J. (2003, January). The 79th richest nation on Earth doesn't exist. <i>WIRED</i>, 12, 106-113.</li> </ul> <p><i>Optional:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Williams, Martins, Consalvo and Ivory, "The virtual census."</li> <li>● TNI Syllabus: Gaming and Feminism</li> <li>● Lynch et al (2016). Sexy, Strong, and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years</li> <li>●</li> </ul>

4/12	Online gaming. Active players. Order of Light (MTV True Life segment), Avatars Offline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dibbell, J., A Rape in CyberSpace.</li> <li>• “Murder Incorporated” handout</li> <li>• Chiarella, T. (2004). The lost boys. <i>Esquire</i>.</li> <li>• Escape to Another World. Avent, R. (2017). <i>1843 Magazine</i>.</li> </ul> <p><i>Optional:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trepte et al (2012). The social side of gaming: How playing online computer games creates online and offline social support.</li> <li>• NewZoo eSports Report</li> <li>• Feverbee/Vanilla webinar on good forum management</li> </ul>
4/19	Spillover material	
4/26	Last class: Final Presentations	No reading. Prep your presentation and work on your term paper.
5/3	Final Exam time slot, 7-9 pm	
5/10	Papers due by email, 5pm	

Leftover topics

GDC VAULT: Can use to fill, find topics, and for an assignment

A) User-created content, modding, cheats, machinima

B) ARGs

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jesse\\_schell\\_when\\_games\\_invade\\_real\\_life](http://www.ted.com/talks/jesse_schell_when_games_invade_real_life)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_gaming\\_can\\_make\\_a\\_better\\_world](http://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world)

C) Older and female players

D) Location-based games

E) Games for Education and “Serious Games,” Term Project Workshop

F) Building games in the academic and military contexts: Funding, creativity

G) Game making in the industry context

- Optional: Sellers, M. (2006). Designing the experience of interactive play. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum.