

CMGT 537: The Industry, Science and Culture of Video Games (4 Units)



Spring 2020
Mondays – 5-7:50pm
Section: 21732D
Location: ANN 309

Instructor: Dmitri Williams
Office: ANN 414k
Office Hours: 3:30-5 or after class,
Mondays. By appointment.
Contact Info: dcwillia@usc.edu

I. Course Description

From the Catalog: History, social dynamics, and cultural impact of video games; developments in technology and design; issues confronting the video game industry and organizations.

Video games have become the largest sector of the entertainment industry, with a cultural impact far beyond their role as an economic commodity. In this class, we will explore the history of video games, the present industry landscape, their communities, and developments in technology, design, and industry organization. There is a strong emphasis on the industry itself—business models, competition, changes in technology, etc. The class emphasizes student participation and involvement.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

Students taking the course gain a working knowledge of the industry, its challenges and opportunities, leading to becoming a savvy consumer or citizen, or prepared to find a job within it.

Prerequisite(s), Co-Requisite(s), Concurrent Enrollment, Recommended Preparation:

None. Many students have no prior interest or background in gaming as a personal interest.

III. Course Notes

Students will be expected to attend one or more trips out into Los Angeles to visit game studios.

All students are required to sign up for two email services: Daily email feeds from www.gamesindustry.biz and www.gamasutra.com.

Optional other services you might want to add:

- 1) USC listserv for games classes and events, here <https://games.usc.edu/>.
- 2) The [Kliuless weekly report](#).
- 3) [SperData monthly report](#).

- 4) Mobile Dev Memo for those focused on mobile gaming
- 5) Elite Game Devs for those considering running a studio some day
- 6) The International Game Developers Association is a hub of info and community for those interested in the industry. They run a [periodic email blast](#) with news and events.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

- In-class group projects
There are two group-based projects during the term:
 - 1) Group presentations on gender in gaming (5%)
 - 2) Mock debate on game effects and regulation (5%)
- Credit/NC short assignments: 10%
You'll be asked to play games and show evidence that you reached a certain point, as well as complete a self-assessment scale. These are credit/no credit tasks. Your friends and family will not take these assignments seriously, but be assured your instructor does.
- Midterm, consisting of short, medium and essay questions: 25%
- 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.
- Term project: 30%
Your term project will consist of a paper with 10-12 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 must be based on some kind of empirical data—whether statistical or qualitative. The term paper is due May 7 by 5 pm to my email inbox (paper by May 3 at 5pm get +3%). If you want feedback, you need to send the email copy, plus also tell me that you're submitting a paper copy under my office door, accompanied by a self addressed envelope with stamps.
- In-class participation: 15%
Please note that informed participation in class will matter more than in a typical course. Look, I even italicized it. At some point in the term you'll remember this or return here and realize, hey, he really meant this.

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Gender presentation (group project)	5	5

Debate performance	5	5
Credit/No-credit assignments	10	10
Industry interview	10	10
Midterm	25	25
Final Paper	30	30
Participation	15	15
TOTAL	100	100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

c. Grading Standards

Only the highest-quality work earns an A. Average work can expect Bs and Cs, with significant underperforming resulting in Ds and Fs. High quality includes critical thinking rather than basic description and always includes professional writing.

d. Grading Timeline

Assignments are typically graded and returned within 1-2 weeks.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, usually with some kind of documentation, grades are reduced by 10% per day late, starting immediately at the time and date due.

B. Assignments are generally submitted via paper at the start of class.

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Readings and slides are posted on Blackboard. Also required is “Replay” by Tristan Donovan (available on Amazon new, used or Kindle and through the regular USC course book process).

IX. Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the **Annenberg Digital Lunge** for more information. To connect to USC’s Secure Wireless network, please visit USC’s **Information Technology Services** website.

X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/13/20 – 5/1/20)

Friday, January 31: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, January 31: Last day to drop a class without a mark of “W,” except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 4: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of “W” and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, February 28: Last day to drop a course without a mark of “W” on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

Friday, February 28: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 3: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W” for Session 001

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and probably will change - based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/Due Dates
Week 1 1/13	Introduction: Overview, taxonomy, early history, genres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Spacewar!” in Levy, S. (1994). <i>Hackers: Heroes of the computer revolution</i>. New York: Penguin Books 	
Week 2 1/20	No class, MLK Day		
Week 3 1/27	Industry Economics: I/O model, vertical integration, state of the industry, creative destruction, convergence, distribution models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Shokrizade (2015). The Top F2P Monetization Tricks (blog post) EP trend article on Battle Pass (quasi-subscription model) ptional article on store portals. 	Play <i>Minecraft</i> . Send me a screenshot of your character, with a sword, underground.
Week 4 2/3	Analytics, data and user research, performance marketing, social networks and their impact/virality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mapping the UA stack and Modeling video ad effectiveness on mobile, Seufert, E. (2016) (Mobiledevmemo post) Optional, for marketing people: 	Play <i>World of Tanks</i> through boot camp and at least 5 battles after. Send me a screenshot

	Guest: Dennis Wixon	Sufert presentation on mobile marketing phases.	of your Player Record screen.
Week 5 2/10	Offsite at a startup: 1RIC Office for AR Dinner after, TBD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • App Annie Mobile report • Koster, R. (2016) AR is an MMO • Ball, M. (2019). The Mirage of Cloud Gaming • VRX XR Industry Report 2019 from WG (in Readings folder, needs to be uploaded) • Optional: My Op-Ed in the LA Times. • Optional: SuperData 2019 AR report 	
Week 6 2/17	No class, President's Day		
Week 7 2/24	In-game advertising, Guest: Dominique MacAree (EA) Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donovan, Ch. 21 (Girl Gaming, but skip the Playstation material) • Beyond Barbie chapters (2) • Lynch et al (2016). Sexy, Strong, and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years <p><i>Optional:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Williams, Martins, Consalvo and Ivory, "The virtual census." • TNI Syllabus: Gaming and Feminism 	Group presentations on gender
Week 8 3/2	Online gaming and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dibbell, J., A Rape in CyberSpace. • "Murder Incorporated" handout • Chiarella, T. (2004). The lost boys. <i>Esquire</i>. • Escape to Another World. Avent, R. (2017). <i>1843 Magazine</i>. <p><i>Optional:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trepte et al (2012). The social side of gaming: How playing online computer games creates online and offline social support. • Feverbee/Vanilla webinar on good forum management 	Play <i>World of Warcraft</i> and send me a screenshot of your character at level 5 or higher, with a classmate also in the picture.
Week 9 3/9	First half of class, Midterm Second half of class, term paper workshop and ideation	No readings	Come with a one-paragraph term paper ideas and a rough hypotheses ready for discussion.

Spring Break Dates: 3/16-3/20	No Class		
Week 10 3/23	Indie studios, Guest Erin Reynolds, Flying Mollusk Studios Media constructions and social history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Glassner, B. (1999). <i>The culture of fear: Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things</i>. New York: Basic Books. p. 58-74. ● Herz, J. C. (1997). <i>Joystick nation</i>. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Ch. 4, p. 43-59. ● Williams, D. (2006). A (brief) social history of gaming. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Video Games: Motivations and Consequences of Use</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum. 	
Week 11 3/30	Social science of games: motivations, player types, presence, effects Policy, ratings, regulation Maybe some term paper discussion/workshopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sherry, J., Greenberg, B., Lucas, S., & Lachlan, K. (2006). Video game uses and gratifications as predictors of use and game preference. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), <i>Playing computer games: Motives, responses and consequences</i>. Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum. ● Prescott et al (2018). Meta-analysis of the relationship between violent video game play and physical aggression over time. <i>PNAS</i>. ● Ferguson, C. blog post, 2018 in Psychology Today <p>Optional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● imits for minors in Asian countries (NYTimes). 	Player profile at http://survey.ihobo.com/BrainHex/ (email me a screenshot)
Week 12 4/6	Policy Debate Term paper workshopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Donovan Ch. 18 (Moral Combat) ● Policy packet on Blackboard: Amicus brief, links to Illinois & US Senate materials, Yee's statement. Note: you don't need to read all of this, but you should know pieces that relate to your role. ● Of possible interest, some new related stories, e.g. this <p>Consider looking at the loot box issue through this lens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freedom of Speech and loot boxes 	Debate prep: Know your role

Week 13 4/13	Tentative off-site visit to Riot Entertainment's eSports arena 5:15 park 5:30pm: Riot leaders speak 6:15pm: Tour 7pm: Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NewZoo eSports Report • Also watch the 20-minute eSports episode of the Netflix show "Explained". • Bady Numbers and Bad Business: Inside the eSports bubble 	Play an hour of LoL and watch one full LoL eSports match.
Week 14 4/20	Game design, Tentative guest speaker, Mike Sellers Overflow topics		Industry interview due
Week 15 4/27	[Course evals] International distribution Overflow topics Final boss battle		
USC STUDY DAYS Dates: 5/2-5/5			
May 7	The term paper is due May 7 by 5 pm to my email inbox. Submit by May 3 at 5pm get +3% to your paper's grade.		

XII. Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies

Attendance is a key part of your participation grade. If you're going to miss a class, a courtesy notice is helpful, but not required. If you aren't there, you aren't participating, and your grade will naturally go lower as a result. If you need to miss a timed class session, you need documentation explaining (doctor's note, etc.). No documentation means a zero on anything that is part of that day.

Communication

I generally reply to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

osp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

sca.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

ds.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

ds.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Breaking Bread Program [undergraduate students only]

<https://undergrad.usc.edu/faculty/bread/>

The Breaking Bread Program is designed to provide individual undergraduate students with an opportunity to meet and have scholarly discussions with faculty members outside of the normal classroom setting. Through this program, students and faculty enjoy good company and great conversation by literally “breaking bread” over a meal together and USC will pick up the tab! Your meal event can take place anywhere outside of the normal classroom setting. Your venue can be a restaurant or eatery on or off-campus.

XIII. About Your Instructor

You can learn more about me from a handy Google search, though you'll have to learn to spell my first name. Alternatively, visit my personal website at the creatively titled

www.dmitriwilliams.com or www.keepcalmandcarryons.net