DRAFT, CURRENTLY BASED ON LAST YEAR
Note: This class will be piloting Brightspace, the system that will replace Blackboard

COMM 350
  Video Games: Business,
  Science and Culture
  (4 Units)

**Spring 2024, Mondays and
  Wednesdays – 3:30-4:50**
Section: 20551
Location: ANN 406

Instructor: Dmitri Williams
Office: ANN 414k
Office Hours: By appointment,
  usually before or after class.
  Contact Info:
  dcwillia@usc.edu

Intro questionnaire.

Course Description
From the Catalog: Introduction to the medium; history of video games; video games as aesthetic products, cultural products, economic outputs; policy issues, effects, and sites of community.

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 cultures, representation, 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.

Student Learning Outcomes
Students taking the course gain a working knowledge of the industry, its challenges and opportunities, leading to becoming a savvier consumer or citizen, or prepared to find a job within it. Specifically, students will be able to:

- Understand structural issues in the history of gaming that lead to inevitable results
- Be able to explain all side of the violence in gaming issue
- Network in the industry, and identify potential career paths
- Analyze issues of identity and the presence or absence of various groups in gaming content
- Conduct original empirical research on an aspect of interest
- Understand the industry like a boss

Prerequisite(s), Co-Requisite(s), Concurrent Enrollment, Recommended Preparation:
- Many students have no prior interest or background in gaming as a personal interest.
- Having training in research methods and/or writing a research paper is recommended but not required.

Course Notes
Students will be expected to attend one or more trips out into Los Angeles to visit game studios. We will be interacting with real people out there in the world, sometimes in class and sometimes outside. Real people are professional, but dealing with them is messy. Be prepared and be flexible.

Laptop Policy and Hardware/Software Required
Students will be required to play a number of games. All of these are free-to-play and are available online. Any student adhering to the Annenberg laptop policy should have what's needed. If you don't have access to a Mac or PC, make sure you can get/borrow/use, etc.

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 Lounge** for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's Information Technology Services website.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
All reading materials are on Blackboard. It's all free, so if you have to eat an Uber charge at some point in the term, remember that.

You are required to sign up for two email services: Daily email feeds from www.gamesindustry.biz and Game Developer. Expect us to talk about these newsfeeds regularly, in class and on Discord. You don't need to memorize them. Get these in your daily inbox and make a habit out of at least skimming them so you are "in the know" using real industry sources rather than the popular press. This is something you should expect to do in any field–there is always a layer of specialized knowledge that goes past anything you will find in mainstream reporting.

Purely optional, here are some other services you might want to add or explore for your own interests, or as resources during the class:

1) USC listserv for games classes and events, here https://games.usc.edu/.
2) The Deconstructor of Fun Industry report digest.
3) SuperJoost, the best overview of industry trends, imo.
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.
7) IGDA has a Game Research Division.
8) For those into esports, there is an email newsletter and an archive of related research here https://arc.york.ac.uk/
9) NCA Games Division Discord
10) TakeThis Discord, Discord focused on games and mental health
11) Able Gamers Website
12) Games For Change Website

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% (screenshots)
  You'll be asked to play games and show evidence that you reached a certain point. These are credit/no credit tasks. Your friends and family will not take these assignments seriously, but be assured your instructor does. Every term someone does not hand these in and expects a B+ but gets a C+, etc. Don't be that someone.

- Discord participation: 5%
  Be there and use that space for discussions, during and after class. Use it to help each other in the class, to play and socialize. These are easy points, but you need to have some quantity and quality to get them. Once again, if you never or rarely do this, you'll be the student who gets a lower grade than expected. Discord works on any computer or mobile device and is free. Install it and get used to the basics. This is the class server: https://https://discord.gg/fXy5Aezh
  Let me know if you want it configured differently, with different channels, settings, etc. Use a screen name that is easily identifiable as you.

- 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. You may not interview one of our guest speakers.
  Grading rubric. You found a real person with a real job, not someone working at GameStop. You had clear questions considered ahead of time rather than asked on the fly. You reported what they said, but also took the extra step to consider and analyze their meaning. You related what they said to concepts from class and/or to the real world and/or to your own potential career path. You wrote clearly, concisely, with professional grammar and formatted properly, including any references (not part of the page count). You put your questions in an Appendix at the end. A transcript is optional and won't contribute toward your grade. Consider using software to automate this so you have it for reference, not for me.

- Term project*: 30%
  Your term project will consist of a paper with 8-10 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. Use Times 12-point font, with double-spacing.
  Grading rubric. You have an approved topic that connects in some important way to your own interests or career path. You have a well-thought out hypothesis or research question. You collected original, empirical data to address it. You used an appropriate method and executed on it at a level appropriate to your skill. You presented the results in a clear manner. You discussed the results, including tying them back to your intro material and hypothesis/RQ, considered their real-world import, identified any weaknesses, and considered what you or others might do next. You wrote professionally in the format given in class and adhered to the formatting, including references: any consistent style is fine, but if you don't care, use APA 6th.

- In-class participation: 10%
  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.
  Grading rubric. It's not quantity over quality, but there is a minimum expectation of some quantity. Was it obvious that you did the reading and came prepared? Did you speak up in class, or only talk when called on? Had you thought about the readings and tied them to related material or current events? Were you present and engaged with me and the other students? Did you maintain good eye contact with me and with the other students or were you more focused on your laptop? Students who rarely participate will get 0-5 and be surprised at

their low overall grade. Students with something to say or ask, who at least occasionally chip in, will do fine.

*A note on the USC IRB (Institutional Review Board, which monitors all human subjects research, meaning basically anything we do): Papers done only for class do not need IRB review, but if you think you might want to make the results public or peer reviewed, submit an IRB application ASAP. Wait times can be 7-10 weeks, even though most of what you would do would be labeled exempt and wouldn't go to full review. *You can't do this retroactively*, i.e. if you later decide it's cool and want to publish it, you can't. You'd need to get approval and collect new data from scratch. If your class data are only a pilot project for later, more ambitious work, you don't need to worry about this.

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
Discord Participation	5	5
Industry interview	10	10
Midterm	25	25
Final Paper	30	30
In-Class Participation	10	10
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 & Disputes
Assignments are typically graded and returned within 1-2 weeks. If you have a grade dispute, you're welcome to bring it to me, but no sooner than 48 hours after you receive your grade. My standard approach is to first consider if I've made a mistake, and then to consider regrading it from scratch, which could raise or lower the score.

Course-Specific Policies: GPT
We're all still figuring out WTF to do about ChatGPT. Don't use it without consulting with me first. Until we sort out a policy, it's plagiarism.

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 email by the start of class.

Classroom Policies

My number one rule of life, OK, my number two rule of life is "Just show up." Attendance is not taken. You can skip it and simply fail at life, although it won't help your participation grade. Similarly, you all have laptops and can use them to be distracted, but then why come to class? The research on using laptops in class and comprehension is very clear: it hurts you. The more you actively listen and take notes, the better you do, period. The only exception is active Discord use during class to talk *about* class.

Lastly, but important: The classroom is a safe space for ideas and discussion, which requires that everyone does their part to create an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance. There will be no discrimination based on anyone's background, demographics, or politics, etc.

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 1/10	Introduction: Overview, taxonomy, early history, genres		
1/12	History: Origins	Read: Levy, "Spacewar!"	
Week 2 1/17	History: Atari and Nintendo	Watch: Atari's 1983 Nintendo (YouTube)	
1/19	Games Journalism Guest: Dean Takahashi	Pick three Dean Takahashi stories at random from the past month at GamesBeat. Suggestions from Dean: Workplace conditions Best of CES '23 Metaverse on the rise Predictions for 2023 Metaverse open standard	
Week 3 1/24	Industry Economics	Read: Williams, Structure and Competition Absorb: Infographic 2022	Play *Minecraft*. Send me a screenshot of your character, with a sword, underground.
1/26	Econ II: Modern Models	Read: Kiiski, Battle Pass and Shokrizade, Top F2P Monetization Tricks	
Week 4 1/31	Culture Wars: Left, Right and Players	Read: Paul, Toxic Meritocracy	
2/2	Media Constructions and Social History Lost Arcade	Read: Williams, Brief Social History	
Week 5 2/7	Effects *Assign roles for 2/14*	Read: Ferguson, Blog Post from Psychology Today	
2/9	Motivations, Ratings Systems	Read: Sherry et al, Video Game Uses and Gratifications	Fill this out, and send me a screenshot of your results. Come prepared to discuss it.
Week 6 2/14	Public Policy Debate	Read: Policy materials	Research your persona.
2/16	UX

Guest: Adams Greenwood-Erickson, Activision UX | None. Get ahead for next week. | Assemble[1]/organize your group for next week. |
| Week 7 2/21 | Identity: Gender, Sexuality, Race | One of four for presentations, assigned: Bailey et al, Gender Composition; Gilbert et al, Formidability; Lynch et al, Sexy, | Prepare your group presentation. |

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[1] Sorry, not sorry.

	Group presentations	Strong and Secondary; and Hayes, Girls, Gaming and Trajectories of IT Expertise. Optional: Riot games lawsuit Virtual Census	
2/23	Identity and representation overflow/debrief Game Analytics I: Fundamentals		
Week 8 2/28	Game Analytics II: Advanced stuff, from funnels to MLMs	Read: Seufert, Mapping the UA Stack Also, come with questions you would like to answer based on your WoT experience.	Play World of Tanks through boot camp and at least 5 battles after. Those 5 must be with classmates. Send me a screenshot of your Player Record screen after 5.
3/2	PR in games Guest: Mark Van Lommel, Niantic	For our guest: Two short articles from Axios: This and this (section #3 and 4).	
Week 9 3/7	Game Analytics III: Social Value and Influence Secondary topic: Advanced research methods in practice	Skim: Williams et al, Social Value. Get the general idea. You aren't expected to follow the math.	Industry Interviews are due by class.
3/9	Analytics overflow, midterm review	None	Before class, fill in two questions for the midterm here.
Spring Break Dates: 3/13-3/17	No Class		
Week 10 3/21	Midterm. Note: Class will be remote due to GDC	None	
3/23	Midterm Debrief, Term Paper Workshop Note: Class will be remote due to GDC https://usc.zoom.us/j/4932258731	None	Email me, and have handy a one-paragraph idea and a rough hypothesis

			Fill out and submit field trip waivers (this is posted as a Blackboard assignment, with the forms)
Week 11 3/28	Midterm debrief, Gamification discussion, then advanced and Social Value overflow from analytics earlier. ~~Flow, Eudaimonic and Hedonic models~~	Read: McGonigal, Chapter 2	
3/30	In-game advertising Guest: Dom MacAree, EA	TBD	
Week 12 4/4	International Localization Guest: Sean Bender (Zoom)	Skim overall but read a section on a country or area of interest: Opportunity Markets Special Report (Proprietary doc: please do not circulate or share outside of this class).	Play LoL tutorial (if needed) and one game of Summoner's Rift. Send me a screenshot of the stat screen at the end. You must play with classmates. Circle your classmate's name(s) on that stat screen.
4/6	eSports. Riot site visit FYI, [Metro directions](#)	Watch: "Explained" (Netflix) S1, eSports	Watch one full LoL eSports match. Send a screenshot of the recap screen.
Week 13 4/11	The Future of Games: AI, AR, VR, GaaS, NFTs, Cloud and . . .	Watch: (Netflix) "The Future of Games" for AR, Read: Hill, 24 Hours in the Metaverse Skim: Pew Internet Metaverse Predictions	Come in with some insight/idea about gaming futures
4/13	AI, NFT, Cloud overflow Term paper mini-workshop		
Week 14 4/18	Online Games and Community I: Ultima, Role Play, Social Capital	Read: Williams et al, From Tree House to Barracks	Play *World of Warcraft* and send me a screenshot of your character at level 5 or higher, with a classmate also in the picture.

4/20	Online Games and Community II: Governance, Mr. Bungle, The Order of Light	Read: Dibbell, J., A Rape in CyberSpace and Chiarella, The Lost Boys. Optional: "Murder Incorporated"	
Week 15 4/25	TBD slot. Online III, Streaming or Gamification, or overflow.		
Dates: 4/27	Final boss battle	None	
USC STUDY DAYS	4/29-5/2		
Paper Due May 6	May 6, by 5pm via TurnItIn on Blackboard Submit by May 4 at 5pm get +3% to your paper's grade.		

Policies and Procedures

Additional Policies
Instructor: Add any additional policies specific to your class that students should be aware of missed classes, attendance expectations, checking USC email, use of technology in the classroom, dress code, etc.

Communication
Instructor: Include a line that encourages students to contact the instructor outside of class and if they cannot come to office hours to arrange a meeting time by whichever method you prefer (email, text, etc.). In addition, include a timeline for replying to emails or calls (e.g., within 48 hours).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:
The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - *(213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - *988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call*
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - *(213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call*
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - *(213) 740-5086*
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.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - *(213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - *(213) 740-0776*
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - *(213) 740-0411*

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101
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
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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

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.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund
https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards
Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.