

Computer Game Design Program
College of Visual and Performing Arts
Fall 2017

GAME 399

Research Methodologies for Game Design (3 credits)

Instructor: Seth Hudson

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Department Contact 703-993-5734

Office Hours: M 12:00-3:00 / AB 2021

Lecture: W 1:30-4:10 / AB 2002

Prerequisite: 60 credits in the student's program of study, or permission of the instructor.

- **Note:** Students who fail to meet the credit-hour requirement are strongly encouraged to wait and take the course until further along in their course of study—if this applies to you, see your academic advisor immediately.

Required Texts:

Smith, J., Egenfeldt-Nielsen, S., & Tosca, S. (2013). *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. New York: Routledge. (eBook available)

Other required readings available through our Bb site.

Recommended Reference:

Wolf, M. J., & Perron, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Routledge Companions: The Routledge Companion to Video Game Studies*. Florence, GB: Routledge. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/mutex.gmu.edu/lib/gmu/detail.action?docID=1588622>

Course Description:

This seminar-style course focuses on development of independent research projects in game design, theory, philosophy, criticism and production. Explores principal methods of researching, exploring, and documenting game design and contemporary and historic practice. Along with traditional methods of library research, this course emphasizes new processes of examination and investigation through play and other qualitative methods; with the aim of writing a publishable paper following best practices in their chosen field. Assigned readings in the class will be augmented and supported by visual presentations, game play, guest lecturers and field work.

Objectives:

To build student awareness about the contemporary research tools and techniques available to pursue academic research, as well as about current and historical trends in 'serious' and entertainment game theory, philosophy, and criticism.

Requirements and Evaluation:

At each class meeting, students should be prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Additional out-of-class viewings and game play will be assigned.

SEMESTER ASSIGNMENTS

FINAL PROJECT (40 points)

Further details will be provided on Bb, but the project will include:

- Idea Memo (5 pts)
- Abstract, Outline, and Literature Review (10 pts)
- Midterm Progress Presentation (5 pts)
- Final Paper and Presentation (20 pts)

All papers submitted and presented must be in APA format (unless specific submission specifications dictate otherwise) and cleanly edited for mechanics, grammar, and style. In the final two classes, students will give a 10-minute presentation and discuss the pertinent/critical aspects of their chosen game. Regular in-class consultations will provide extensive guidance and advice for each student throughout his or her research and presentation. Students should also find a relevant publication for their paper, preparing submission materials for the actual journal/publication.

The games-focused project will analyze a game or games through a specific theoretical lens, using relevant literature in addition to documenting gameplay, player reactions, etc., culminating in a final written assignment (APA format) and in-class presentation. Your project should discuss:

- Your interest in the topic (game or games);
- Any relevant scholarship regarding its production and historical significance;
- A detailed overview of aesthetics and formal aspects;
- The cultural factors surrounding the game and its players
- A thesis-driven synthesis of relevant scholarship & literature regarding the game and/or your specific lens of analysis

Papers will be 8-10 pages in length, not including the digital media you may require to craft an effective piece.

**At any point in the semester, students wishing to engage the class in a consultation session should contact me to set one up. These are informal (not graded) and a great way to gain collective insight from peers and the instructor.*

***If you wish to deviate from the guidelines above in response to specific professional or scholarly goals, schedule a meeting with the instructor to discuss possible augmentation.*

WEEKLY READING REFLECTIONS (10 points)

To facilitate more meaningful class discussion and deeper engagement with our texts, students will be required to participate in Blackboard (Bb) discussions in conjunction with each reading assignment. The form these take are largely up to the individual student, but all posts:

- **Are due at least 48 hours prior to our scheduled meeting;**

- Should demonstrate either breadth of understanding for all reading, or depth of understanding for one reading in particular (with rationale regarding your choice), citing specific parts of the text when necessary;
- Should raise questions for further discussion in class;
- Must identify a source of interest from the author(s)' references, simply stating why you would be curious to pursue it further (though you're not required to read it).

BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION REPORT (10 points)

In conjunction with our weekly reading reflections, students will sign up to give a report on one of our weekly online discussions. After reviewing discussion board activity, the student will prepare a brief 10-minute summary of the pertinent topics mentioned in peers' posts, developing questions for class discussion. This 1-page report, including in-class discussion questions and any other reflections you wish to share, will be submitted via Bb Assignments following our usual submission criteria.

CRITICAL GAME ANALYSIS PROJECTS (40 points)

Students (working in pairs) will complete FOUR critical game analyses, focusing on specific topics in game design/culture/criticism. These analyses will require students to play games and do some field work. Plan on allotting several hours to each of these projects, though the final written component will generally be 2 to 4 pages in length. You are encouraged to add digital media (screenshots, photographs, game play clips) to accompany your analysis. Details are available on our Bb Site.

POLICIES & IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Formatting/Professionalism

All projects must be submitted in the format dictated by the assignment. Generally, this means papers to be produced in the APA style (with title page) and delivered as instructed (a stapled hard copy will sometimes be requested; all electronic submissions must be in the form of student/assignment-specific PDF).

Professionalism

Many of the policies below relate to professionalism. Being courteous to the professor and other students is mandatory. All guidelines for assignments must be followed. If unsure about a policy, contact the professor immediately. This is the same for late work, absences, etc. Sending notice after the fact just doesn't look good; unless, of course, your absence is due to illness or other factors beyond your immediate control. Be professional.

All work should be cleanly edited: free of careless mistakes. Any questions you have regarding the use of the English language or other conventions should be researched thoroughly before taking them to the instructor—we will follow APA format in the headings of assignments and with citation unless noted otherwise.

Assumptions

It is assumed that students have regular access to email and the Internet, so they will be able to receive updates and participate electronically when necessary. It is also assumed that students will diligently back up their work, rendering technical difficulties harmless.

Failure to turn work in on time due to this type of issue will be treated like all other late work. When hard copies are required, they are *required*.

Late Work

Late work will only be accepted without penalty in the case of a documented medical illness or another situation that is out of your control. Late work will be reduced by a letter grade for each class period it is late. *WHEN IN DOUBT notify the instructor if the situation is tenuous.*

Writing Center

The Writing Center is available for writers of all levels. Tutors in the Writing Center will talk with you about how you can improve your revision and editing strategies; they will not, however, edit or proofread your work—professionalism, once again. You can make an appointment online: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Writing Assignments

Due dates and revision guidelines will be clearly outlined at the outset of each assignment. Digital copies of assignments will be available on Bb. Some writing assignments will be assigned in class and completed in our time together, calculated into your grade via class participation.

Class Participation

Many of our sessions will operate like a traditional writing workshop. You will be expected to read others' work aloud and give thoughtful input to aid their revision process. The best way to get a good mark for class participation is to participate meaningfully every day. Respecting each other's opinions and work is crucial.

Online Participation

Blackboard (Bb) will be your friend in exchanging ideas and communicating with one another during the term, as will individual student websites. Student may be randomly assigned to Bb Groups. These groups will be responsible for peer review and weekly discussion periodically throughout the semester. The frequency and depth of online participation will factor into your grade.

Email Policy

Students must use their MasonLIVE or gmuedu email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information.

Mason Emergency Information

You may want to sign up for emergency alert messages. If so, go to <https://alert.gmu.edu>. You'll also find information about emergency procedures at <http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert>.

Students With Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the [Office for Disability Services \(ODS\)](#) at 993-2474, <http://ods.gmu.edu>. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the [ODS](#).

Honor Code

George Mason University has an Honor Code that requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

University Catalog

Students are to be aware of the policies listed in the University Catalog: <http://catalog.gmu.edu/>. University dates concerning withdrawal are not negotiable by the professor. Other questions regarding university and program policies can be directed towards the Assistant Director outside of class time.

OTHER RELEVANT RESOURCES

Additional Texts of Note:

- Note: When beginning your final paper process, these texts may be a good place to start. Keep in mind that many e-books are available to you free of charge with your university access—see me for details.

Benjamin, W. (2010). *The Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (online)

Bogost, I. (2008). *Unit operations: An approach to videogame criticism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.

Cassell, J. & Jenkins, H. (1998). *From barbie to mortal combat: Gender and computer games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Fernandez-Vara, C. (2014). *Introduction to Game Analysis*. New York: Routledge.

Hoglund, J. (2008). Electronic empire: Orientalism revisited in the military shooter. *Game studies: The international journal of computer game research* (8,1). Retrieved from <http://gamestudies.org/0801/articles/hoeglund>.

Kline, S. (2003). *Digital play: Interaction of technology, culture, and marketing*. Quebec, CA: McGill-Queen's University Press

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Mäyrä, F. (2008). *An Introduction to Game Studies*. London: Sage. (eBook available)

Newman, J. (2013). *Videogames* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Ruch, A.W. (2012). Grand theft auto IV: Liberty city and modernist literature. *Games and Culture*, vol. 7, 331-348. Retrieved from <http://gac.sagepub.com/content/7/5/331.full.pdf+html>

Links:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/03601315?sdc=1>

<http://journals.sagepub.com/home/gac>

<http://www.gamestudies.org/0401/>

<http://gamescriticism.org>

<http://press.etc.cmu.edu/content/well-played-10-video-games-value-and-meaning>

<http://press.etc.cmu.edu/content/learning-education-and-games-volume-one-curricular-and-design-considerations>

<http://www.gamesforchange.org>

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