Writing Through Media: Simulation Games
ENG 1131 Section 01G9
Summer A 2014, MTWRF 2 (9:30 am - 10:45 am) & TR 5-6 (2:00 pm – 4:45 pm), CSE E211A

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Course Description
Given the current popularity of digital games studies, this course is ideally positioned to offer students both a critical lens for studying games and an introduction to English composition. Our discussions will focus primarily on simulation games, as we attempt to understand players' engagements with these digital environments as a form of writing and as "open-ended" or creative play. The semester will be divided into four units, the first of which will serve as a general introduction to game studies, reviewing scholarly approaches to games and game genres. The following three units will each explore a specific subgenre of simulation games (construction and management, life, and vehicle) and how we may understand their unique play experiences as forms of writing about culture. Students will read excerpts from Frans Mäyrä's *An Introduction to Game Studies* and Ian Bogost's *How to Do Things with Videogames* along with texts by other contemporary game scholars. We will examine a wide range of simulation games across different genres, platforms, and modes of production. Some of the well-known franchises we will work with include, but are not limited to *SimCity*, *Zoo Tycoon*, *The Sims*, *Tamagotchi*, *Surgeon Simulator 2013*, and *Train Simulator 2014*. Course screening times will give students an opportunity to play these games both individually and as a group. Students will contribute to course discussions, give one presentation to the class, and complete three essays for the course—a definition paper, a rhetorical analysis, and a creative multimedia game narrative assignment.

Student Learning Outcomes
On completion of the course, students will have learned and demonstrated their ability to:
- Understand, apply, and critique theoretical concepts.
- Identify, describe, and discuss the major themes and arguments of a video game.
- Write a well-organized and developed essay.
- Synthesize academic research and provide appropriately formatted citations.

Required Texts
- Frans Mäyrä. *An Introduction to Game Studies: Games in Culture*. SAGE Publications Inc., 2012. ISBN 978-1-4129-3446-6.
- Ian Bogost. *How to Do Things with Videogames*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8166-7647-7.

- William Strunk Jr. & E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 4th Edition. Allyn & Bacon, 2000. ISBN 978-0-205-30902-X.

- Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. 3rd Edition. W. W. Norton & Company, 2014. ISBN 978-0-3939-3584-4

    All other readings and games will be provided to you by the instructor on E-Learning

Assignments

Assignments must be submitted on E-Learning Services by the start of the class period on the day they are listed as due (see course reading schedule). Written work should be uploaded either as Microsoft Word documents (.doc or .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf) to the appropriate assignment box. Please title your files with your last name, first initial, and the title of the assignment (see below). All assignments should be written following Modern Language Association (MLA) formatting guidelines. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner with the appropriate in-text citations and a works cited page. **Late papers will not be accepted.**

- **Definition Argument** (200 points) – 1500 words, Minimum 5 academic sources
  Choose one of the following four terms: game, play, simulation, or writing. Write an essay in which you synthesize other author's definitions of these terms to produce your own particular definition. Argue in favor of your definition, explaining how it may impact the way we understand digital games and writing within the context of a Writing Through Media classroom.

- **Rhetorical Analysis** (200 points) – 2000 words, Minimum 5 academic sources
  Choose a digital game from the course and identify an argument that it makes to its players. Your paper should explain what the game argues as well as *how* the game makes its argument. While you should attend to the conventional elements of rhetoric, you should also address how visuals, sounds, and procedures contribute to the game's argument. Provide evidence from the game to support your claims.

- **Multimedia Game Narrative** (200 points) – 2500 words, Minimum 5 academic sources
  This is a two part project. First, take a stance on a problem or issue you are interested in or passionate about. Using one of the digital games from the course, create a narrative that addresses this issue and persuades readers to approach the topic from your perspective. Take screenshots and video of your game and create a sort of digital scrapbook, collage, Prezi, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Vine, etc. that tells your narrative to readers who are unfamiliar with your topic and may not agree with your point of view. Then, in an essay, describe your process. Answer the following questions: What problem or issue did you choose and why? What game did you select and why? How did you go about writing and constructing your multimedia game narrative? What obstacles did you encounter? In what ways do you see your project addressing the problem or issue you selected? What do we stand to gain or lose in adapting and appropriating simulation games and play in this way?

- **Game Presentation and Discussion** (200 points) – Minimum 5 sources
  This assignment is meant to test your research, communication, and critical thinking skills. Each student is required to give a presentation to the class on one of the games we will be exploring during the semester. Presentations should offer an account of the game's social, cultural, and historical context as well as a description of its game mechanics, interface, hardware, narrative, etc. The presentation should also work towards tying the game to the theoretical readings in the course and raise questions for class discussion and debate (those not presenting should be active participants in discussion). Because digital games are multimodal, it is vital that your presentation be accompanied by some form of audio or visual aid. You may choose to demo the game itself, screen related videos, show screen shots, construct an in-depth Prezi, etc. or all of the above. Accompanying handouts with notes and sources are also a must. No PowerPoints, please.

- **Preparation, Participation, and Engagement** (200 points)

You are responsible for attending all of our class sessions and for completing the course readings and assignments prior to the day they are listed below unless otherwise indicated by the instructor (see course attendance policy and reading schedule). During class time, you are expected to listen intently and are encouraged to respond with relevant questions and helpful comments. You should be respectful of and attentive to the ideas and readings of your peers, as well as offer your own thoughtful examinations. Discussions should be an open, engaging, and enjoyable dialogue in which the class listens and responds to one another with courtesy and care. Above all, be mindful of how you comport yourself and what you contribute to the course so that we can ensure that this class is productive for both you and your peers. **Homework assignments** and **unannounced reading quizzes** may be administered as deemed necessary by the instructor.

Note: Assignment word counts do not include footnotes, endnotes, and lists of works cited

Course Policies

- *Attendance* is mandatory. You are, however, allowed up to three unexcused absences. Missing more than the allotted three class periods will result in a full letter grade drop for every subsequent absence thereafter. Upon missing six class *periods*, you will automatically fail the course. Absences related to university-sponsored organizations or events, religious holidays, family emergencies, and health issues are considered excused provided that the instructor receives official documentation regarding the absence. Additionally, tardiness will not be tolerated. For every three class periods that you arrive late, you will incur one absence that will count towards your allotted three unexcused absences.

- *Grading* for this course will be rigorous. Assignments that exhibit a disregard for spelling, grammar, formatting and citation guidelines, instructions, or a general carelessness in the writing will not receive a passing grade.

  The writing assignments for this course are designed to meet the minimum requirements of the University Writing Requirement credit. To satisfy this requirement, every assignment's word count must be fulfilled. Submitted assignments short of the minimum word count will receive zero credit.

  Grading Scale:

Grade	GPA	%	Points	Grade	GPA	%	Points
A	4.0	93-100	930-1000	C	2.0	73-76	730-769
A-	3.67	90-92	900-929	C-	1.67	70-72	700-729
B+	3.33	87-89	870-899	D+	1.33	67-69	670-699
B	3.0	83-86	830-869	D	1.0	63-66	630-669
B-	2.67	80-82	800-829	D-	0.67	60-62	600-629
C+	2.33	77-79	770-799	E	0.00	0-59	0-599

  You must pass this course with a "C" or better to satisfy the CLAS requirement for Composition (C) and to receive the 6,000-word University Writing Requirement credit (E6). You must turn in all papers totaling a minimum of 6,000 words to receive credit for writing 6,000 words.

NOTE: a grade of "C-" will not confer credit for the University Writing Requirement or the CLAS Composition (C) requirement.

Additional Policies
- The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/

- UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/

- All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php

Course Schedule
   ***Note: Readings and game screenings may change based on students' needs and interests ***

Week 1 (5/12):
   M   Course Overview and Definition Argument Assignment
             Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's "What is Play?" and "What is a Game?" (on ELS)

   T   José P. Zagal and Amy Bruckman's "Novices, Gamers, and Scholars"
             Screening: -----

   W   Frans Mäyrä's *An Introduction to Game Studies* – Ch. 1 & 2
             Personal Game History Assignment (pp. 28-9)

   R   Frans Mäyrä's *An Introduction to Game Studies* – Ch. 8
             Screening: Miscellaneous card games (Feel free to bring your own!)

   F   Mia Consalvo and Nathan Dutton's "Game Analysis"

Week 2 (5/19):
   M   Ian Bogost's *How to Do Things With Videogames* – Introduction & Conclusion

   T   Maaike Lauwaert's "Challenge Everything?" (on ELS)
                     Screening: *SimCity* (Presentation 1)

   W   William Strunk Jr. & E. B. White's *The Elements of Style*

   R   Peer Review
             Screening: -----

F   Definition Argument Due

Week 3 (5/26):

M   No Class --- Memorial Day

T   Ian Bogost's *How to Do Things with Videogames* – Ch. 17 Work & Ch. 13 Relaxation
Screening: *Harvest Moon: Animal Parade* (Presentation 2)

W   Rhetorical Analysis Overview
Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say* – Part I

R   Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say* – Part II
Screening: *Zoo Tycoon* (Presentation 3)

F   Rhetorical Analysis Outlines

Week 4 (6/2):

M   Ian Bogost's *How to Do Things With Videogames* – Ch. 2 Empathy
Darfur is Dying

T   Mary Flanagan's "SIMple & Personal" (on Sakai)
Screening: *The Sims* (Presentation 4)

W   Multimedia Game Narrative Overview

R   Peer Review
Screening: *Tamagotchi*, *Nintendogs*, and other pet simulators (Presentation 5)

F   Rhetorical Analysis Due

Week 5 (6/9):

M   Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say* – Part 3

T   Ian Bogost's *How to Do Things With Videogames* – Ch. 6 Transit
Screening: *Train Simulator 2014* (Presentation 6)

W   Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say* – Part 4

R   Conferences
Screening: *Surgeon Simulator 2013* (Presentation 7)

F   Conferences

Week 6 (6/16):

M   Marcus Schulzke's "Rethinking Military Gaming" (on ELS)

T   Mark L. Sample's "Virtual Torture"
Screening: *Plague Inc.* (Presentation 8)

W   Peer Review

R   Presentation of Final Projects
      Screening: Presentation of Final Projects

F   Course Wrap-Up
Multimedia Game Narrative Due