

**Pittsburg State University**  
**English 557/757: Persuasive Gaming**  
**Grubbs Hall 207, Spring 2015**

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### **Course Description**

Even those outside of the “hobby” recognize games as the fastest growing media field. Despite their increasing popularity and sophistication, games receive an underwhelming lack of scholarly attention. And though growing, their pedagogical impact is even lower—rarely do games show up in education. In designing this class, I hope to correct these oversights by addressing two important, interlocking issues:

- First, how can traditional humanities/critical methods inform the way we think about and appreciate games?
- Second, how can games help us invent new critical methods?

For many in the humanities the first question is the easier to address, since it simply encourages us to apply our existing critical models to new, emerging forms of media (note the use of the plural here--to refer to video games as one monolithic genre is akin to referring to literature as one amorphous pile of books; game genres, like literary genres, are diverse and uneven). The second aspiration is a bit more ambitious, since it suggests that attending to games will require us to invent new methods for critical analysis—and that games might render some of the older methods irrelevant.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. To help you develop the critical thinking skills necessary to understand complex texts.
2. To model the many ways that scholars talk about games and game studies and to encourage you to use these tools of analysis.
3. To give you practice in creating written discourse about games.
4. To help you appreciate games as aesthetic objects, rhetorical performances, and cultural artifacts.
5. To familiarize you with the game development and project management processes.

### **The Journey Begins**

This class is designed as a multiplayer fantasy game.

Class time will be divided between fighting monsters (avatar creation, game worksheets, presentations, etc.), completing quests (game nights, field trips, etc.), and crafting (game proposal, game prototype, etc.).

Everyone in the class will choose and name their avatars. The first task is to craft the premise of a persuasive board game you would like to design. Guilds to craft these games will be chosen, balanced as possible by 1337 skillz and interests. Guilds will choose their names, and membership will be determined by final class size.

Each guild will be composed of at least one member from each of the following character classes:

Warlord (Game Master – Professor Level Only)  
Warrior (Project Manager – Grad Level Only)  
Acolyte (Assistant Project Manager – Undergrad Level Only)  
Mage (Designer)  
Ranger (Writer)  
Healer (Artist)  
Necromancer (Producer)

It is not compulsory to be 1337 in any character class. For example, not every guild may have a strong artist. Since the final assignment is a prototype meant only for class consumption and for educational purposes, buffs such as Internet Graphics from the Creative Commons may raise the player to the level necessary to succeed.

Warrior class guild members will be expected to meet with the warlord outside of class to discuss battle plans (extra readings on project management and game design).

### Necessary Loot

Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost. *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0262012577.

Frans Mayra. *An Introduction to Game Studies*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008. ISBN: 978-1412934466.

George Skaff Elias, Richard Garfield, and K. Robert Gutschera. *Characteristics of Games*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012. ISBN: 978-0262017138.

Ian Bogost. *Persuasive Games*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010. ISBN: 978-0262514880.

*Papers, Please* Game. Available on Steam (<http://store.steampowered.com>) and for the iPad through the App Store.

Small contribution to help produce game prototype (probably around \$5).

Outside materials available for download from Canvas.

### Leveling Up

You will begin on the first day of class as a Level One avatar. Level Twenty is the highest level you can achieve. Your class letter grade will be determined by your final level. **You must be at least Level Ten to pass this course.** Your avatar will gain new skillz as they level up. These skillz are awarded with extra credit, and may be applied to any assignment.

Level	Skillz	XP	Letter Grade
Level Twenty		970+	A+
Level Nineteen		930	A
Level Eighteen		900	A Minus
Level Seventeen	5	870	B+
Level Sixteen		830	B
Level Fifteen		800	B Minus
Level Fourteen	5	770	C+
Level Thirteen		730	C
Level Twelve		700	C Minus
Level Eleven		670	D+
Level Ten	5	630	D
Level Nine		510	
Level Eight		410	
Level Seven		320	
Level Six		240	
Level Five	5	170	
Level Four		110	
Level Three		60	
Level Two		20	
Level One		0	F

Your level will be determined by experience points (XP) on a 1000 XP scale. You gain XP by defeating monsters, questing, and crafting.

## **Monsters, Quests, and Crafts**

Participating in Guild Meetings: 125 XP total, 5 pts. per day of attendance with three free days)

Avatar Creation: 25 XP

At Least Five Quests (One-Page Formal Reflections on an Event; Includes One Mandatory Quest): 125 XP total – bonus points awarded for extra quests

Game Essay

- Abstract: 50 XP
- Discourse Community or Analysis of Game/Game Culture: 150 XP

Persuasive Game

- Proposal and Presentation: 50 XP
- Game Worksheets: 75 XP
- Prototype and Supporting Documents: 200 XP
- Playtesting: 50 XP
- Final Boss Fight: 100 XP
- Peer Review Secret Ballot: 50 XP

**You must fully fight all monsters, complete all quests, and craft all objects in order to receive passing XP. Otherwise, a Beholder attacks and zaps all of your XP.**

## **Expansion Packs**

This game is currently in closed beta, so a number of changes may occur throughout the semester. The development team is working on the following for future expansion packs. For example:

- The Canvas site will mature and expand throughout the semester.
- Leaderboards will be added and published online. However, we must juggle hardcore competition with privacy, so in a university setting this is harder than it sounds. The leaderboard will indicate the number of students at each level to help track personal progress, particularly in the lower levels.

## **Crafting**

### *Philosophy of Writing*

The philosophy behind using writing as a way to learn course material is that as students write about concepts, they become active learners, articulating ideas in their own words and thinking about ideas from their own perspectives. Writing about course content is a skill that needs to be practiced; that is why you will be writing often and why the kinds of writing assignments may vary.

### *Statement of Intent*

This is a Writing to Learn class. In this course we will write frequently as a way to learn course material. The writing may range from quizzes and in-class writing assignments to formal journals and essay exams. But expect to write about course content regularly.

### *Writing to Learn Requirements*

- This is a Writing to Learn course, which means that in addition to earning an overall passing grade on other course components, you must also earn an average passing grade on the formal writing assignments to pass this course. If you do not earn an average passing grade on the formal writing assignments, you cannot pass this course.
- You will receive feedback from me on all your writing assignments. Pay attention to that feedback and use it to help improve your writing.
- If/when you use sources in your essay assignments, give credit for the words or ideas of others by documenting your sources, using the MLA style of documentation.

- In this course, you will write a minimum of 15 pages of formal writing in the form of essays. See the assignment handouts, available on Canvas.
- The due dates for all assignments are indicated in the course schedule.
- All writing assignments will be evaluated according to the rubrics available on Canvas.

### **Dark Magic**

Cell phones should be turned off or on silent during class. If I see you using your phone for either phone calls or text messaging or if the ringer is not turned off, you will receive a “0” in participation for the day. If you must keep your phone on for emergencies or another reason, please let me know.

You may use a laptop, e-reader, or other electronic device to take notes or to bring in readings or assignments that are available via Canvas or the Internet. You may not use your electronic device to do anything other than reviewing class-related material or taking notes. If you use your electronic device for any purpose other than these, your privileges will be suspended. I maintain the right to revise this policy at any point during the semester if improper usage becomes a problem.

### **Training for Battle**

This class depends upon actively engaged speakers, listeners, and writers. Your responsibility is to be an active participant. As a result, this class demands that all reading assignments are completed, **in full**, on the day they are due and that you **bring the assigned text to class**. In addition, all assignments are to be typewritten and done according to directions. I encourage you to think for yourself, challenge each other, and assume pride and ownership in every text you produce. While I will at times lecture on some material, my overall expectation is that we will work together as a group to come to more complex and varied understandings of the texts covered over the course of the semester.

According to federal guidelines, you should expect to spend two out-of-class hours devoted to coursework for each hour spent in the classroom or in direct faculty instruction. Therefore, for this three-credit class, you should expect to devote at least six hours per week on average to prepare your work. Of course, some weeks may require more time, and some weeks will require less.

In this course, we may discuss games that portray content and themes that may be disturbing to some students. We will be analyzing and discussing, in a scholarly manner, the meaning and significance behind these representations. Students with questions or concerns about course content are encouraged to see me immediately for a short meeting.

### **Show Up for Battle**

I reserve the right to decrease the grade of late work by ONE FULL LETTER GRADE for every day it is late including the first. For example, if an essay is two days late and the original grade is a B+, the final penalized grade would be a D+. If you have a problem with an assignment, please see me or call me BEFORE the due date. Any student who accrues excessive absences (four or more) will most likely fail the course. If you do miss class for any reason, you are still accountable for the work given and due that day unless prior arrangements have been made. Finally, I also expect you to be on time to class. Any student who is tardy more than three times will be marked absent according to my discretion. If you have a problem getting to class on time (i.e., you have class on the other side of campus), please let me know as soon as possible.

### **The Worst Monster Ever**

Plagiarism includes the presentation, without proper attribution, of another’s words or ideas from printed or electronic sources. It is also plagiarism to submit, without the instructor’s consent, an assignment in one class previously submitted in another. I reward plagiarism with a zero. Further action by the university may also be taken. Please familiarize yourselves with the university policy on plagiarism. If you feel that you need extra help with your assignments, tutors are available in the Writing Center in Axe Library (235-4694). If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or how to cite sources properly, do not hesitate to ask me for help. Please also consult PSU’s Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy available online at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/audiences/current-students/policies/rights-and-responsibilities/academic-misconduct.dot>

Also, make sure to consult the Syllabus Supplement, which can be thought of as a “one-stop” place for students to access up-to-date information about campus resources, notifications, and expectations. It is available at

<http://www.pittstate.edu/dotAsset/fb38ac9b-9c03-4b77-9bc4-7e71f5584060.pdf>

## **Quest Strategies**

All students are more than welcome to drop by during office hours or schedule an appointment to ask questions, continue discussion of issues from class, or to offer comments. This is especially true during the first week of class and especially true for students with disabilities who are registered with the Center for Student Accommodations (235-4309) and who may need individual arrangements. **Make use of your teachers!!** We are here to help you learn, and we do not expect you to be perfect (who is?). We regard intelligent questions in and out of class and an eagerness to improve one’s abilities as evidence of an A student more than written work alone. There is no such thing as a stupid question!

## **Tentative Schedule of Training Sessions and Quests (ALL DATES AND ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE!)**

IGS: *An Introduction to Game Studies*

PG: *Persuasive Games*

CG: *Characteristics of Games*

RB: *Racing the Beam*

**Master Quest: TBA Field Trip to 1984 Arcade in Springfield (counts as two normal quests)**

**Consult the Wise One: TBA Skype Interview with Game Studies Professional**

Other quests will be available on Canvas and can be completed at any time, including pick-up games with members of other guilds, reflections on playing other persuasive games, a critical analysis of a game of any type, a critical analysis of an issue from game culture, a critical analysis of a gaming space or discourse community, participation in an alternate reality game (ARG), and a discussion of a game or platform’s history.

## **Week One**

Jan. 13: Introduction to the Course

Jan. 15: IGS, Chs. 1 and 2

## **Week Two**

Jan. 20: PG, Ch. 1

Jan. 22: PG, Continue Ch. 1

## **Week Three**

Jan. 26: **Quest 1: Game Night, Time and Location TBA**

Jan. 27: PG, Chs. 2 and 3

Jan. 29: Discussion of *Papers, Please*

## **Week Four**

Feb. 3: PG, Ch. 7

Feb. 4: **Quest 2: View *The King of Kong* and Participate in Discussion, Time and Location TBA**

Feb. 5: PG, Ch. 10

### **Week Five**

Feb. 10: Game Proposals

Feb. 12: Game Proposals and Formation of Guilds

### **Week Six**

Feb. 16: **Quest 3: Game Night, Time and Location TBA**

Feb. 17: CG: Chs. 1 and 2

Feb. 19: CG: Ch. 3

### **Week Seven**

Feb. 24: CG: Ch. 4

Feb. 25: **Quest 4: View *Chasing Ghosts: Beyond the Arcade* and Participate in Discussion, Time and Location TBA**

Feb. 26: CG: Ch. 5

### **Week Eight**

Mar. 2: **Quest 5: Game Night, Time and Location TBA**

Mar. 3: CG: Ch. 6

Mar. 5: CG: Ch. 7

### **Week Nine**

Mar. 10: Game Workshop

Mar. 12: Game Workshop

### **Week Ten**

Mar. 17: Spring Break

Mar. 19: Spring Break

### **Week Eleven**

Mar. 24: Game Workshop

Mar. 26: No Class – Game Workshop

### **Week Twelve**

Mar. 31: IGS: Ch. 4

Apr. 2: IGS: Ch. 5

### **Week Thirteen**

Apr. 7: RB: Chs. 1 – 5  
**Abstract Due by 11:59 p.m.**

Apr. 8: **Quest 6: Game Night, Time and Location TBA**

Apr. 9: RB: Chs. 6 – 8

#### **Week Fourteen**

Apr. 13: **Quest 7: Open Gaming Discussion, Time and Location TBA**

Apr. 14: IGS: Ch. 6

Apr. 16: IGS: Ch. 7

#### **Week Fifteen**

Apr. 21: Playtesting

Apr. 22: **Quest 8: Game Night, Time and Location TBA**

Apr. 23: Playtesting

#### **Week Sixteen**

Apr. 26: Playtesting

Apr. 28: Playtesting

#### **Final Exam Week**

Thursday, May 7, 12:30 pm – 2:20 pm: **Final Boss Monster Fight!**

**Final Crafted Essay Due on Canvas by Friday, May 8, at 11:59 pm.**