MLCS 399 A2 Videogames Across Cultures

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Time: Tue & Thu, 9:30-10:50am

Place: HC 2 22

Office Hours: Thu 11:30-12:30, or by appointment

Course Website: e-Class

Course Prerequisite: Consent of department.

It is your responsibility as a student to ensure that you have the appropriate prerequisites for the course.

Course-based Ethics Approval in place regarding all research projects that involve human testing, questionnaires, etc.?

☐ No, not needed, no such projects approved.

Community Service Learning component

☐ None

Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material Available

☐ NA

Additional mandatory Instructional fees (approved by Board of Governors)

☐ No

Course Description, Objectives and Expected Learning Outcomes

This course introduces students to videogames as objects of cultural studies and vehicles for developing intercultural understanding and competence. Students will examine how pedagogical elements are built into the design of dedicated serious games for intercultural education; they will engage with theories of postcolonial game analysis with a view to developing the critical tools to analyse and evaluate commercial AAA titles with respect to their appropriation and stereotyping of foreign cultures and nations, yet they will also gain an understanding of the economic dictates and constraints underlying commercial game design. Students will engage with regional and ethnic game studies by studying a range of (mostly independent) videogames from specific historical and current regions around the world and ethnic minority and indigenous groups with regards to how these games communicate historical, social and cultural values, issues and concerns. Finally, they will study videogames as tools of computer-assisted foreign language learning and teaching – both in terms of targeted CALL/DGBLL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning / Digital Game-Based Language Learning) game designs as well as in terms of objects of incidental learning, as is the case with commercial Multi-Player Online Games such as *World of Warcraft* and *EverQuest*.

Through a variety of critical and creative assignments and activities, students will explore and familiarize themselves with a diversity of social roles that will help them develop an educated, critical, interculturally literate attitude towards gameplay and game design. These roles will include for example the critical player, the educational designer, the cultural expert, the story builder, and the game-assisted language learner and/or teacher.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will have developed:

1. an advanced and critical understanding of what intercultural competence is, and how the study of games – and video games in particular – can help players develop elements of intercultural competence;
2. the critical tools to evaluate various types of games ([non-]commercial, serious, independent) for how they (mis)represent, appropriate, simplify, stereotype, and educate their players about cultures other than their own;
3. an advanced understanding of how the industry and its many sub-sectors operate in various regions around the world, according to which constraints, commercial, aesthetic, political and socio-cultural agendas;
4. an advanced understanding of regional game studies and how games produced in specific geographic regions and by specific groups of developers can teach us about national and regional histories, identities, as well as specific ethnic issues and concerns;

5. an understanding of how both commercial blockbuster games and dedicated serious games may be used to promote and aid language learning in their players, as a form of computer-aided / digital-game-based language learning;
6. the ability to co-conceptualize (in a team effort) educational game designs that promote, in creative and innovative ways, intercultural competence in their target players.

Texts

Required readings:
- Adams, Ernest (2013) *Fundamentals of Game Design*, 3rd. Ed. Berkeley, CA: New Riders.
- Bogost, Ian (2007) *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. (move pdfs from Cyberliterature to VAC)
- Cassar, R. (2013) "Gramsci and Games," *Games and Culture*, 8: 330-353.
- Courmont, Barthelemy & Pierre-Alain Clement (2014) "When Geopolitics Meets the Game Industry. A Study of Arabic Video Games and What They Teach Us", *Hemispheres* 29(1): 31-47.
- Flanagan, Mary (2009) *Critical Play*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gee, James Paul (2013), *Good Video Games & Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning and Literacy*. 2nd ed. New York: Peter Lang.
- Kramarzewski, Adam, and Ennio De Nucci (2018) *Practical game design: learn the art of game design through applicable skills and cutting-edge insights*. Birmingham, UK: Packt Publishing
- LaPensee, Elizabeth (2017) "Transformations and Remembrances in the Digital Game We Sing for Healing," *Transmotion* 3(1), pp. 89-108.
- Meloche, Katherine (2017) "Playing in the Digital Qargi: Iñupiat Gaming and Online Competition in *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa*," *Transmotion* 3(1), pp. 1-21.
- Mukherjee, Souvik (2018) "Playing Subaltern: Video Games and Postcolonialism," *Games and Culture*, 13(5), 504-520.
- Nakamura, Lisa (1995) "Race In/for cyberspace: Identity tourism and racial passing on the internet." *Works and Days* 13: 181–193. Available online: http://faculty.humanities.uci.edu/poster/syllabi/readings/nakamura.html
- Navarro-Remesal, Víctor (2018) "Goddesses in Japanese Videogames: Tradition, Gameplay, Gender, and Power," in Lorenzo J. Torres Hortelano (ed.) *Dialectics of the Goddess in Japanese Audiovisual Culture*, Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 111-134.
- Opoku-Agyemang, Kwabena (2015) "Lost/gained in translation: Oware 3D, Ananse: The Origin and questions of hegemony", *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, 7:2, 155-168.
- Penix-Tadsen, Phillip (2016) *Cultural Code: Video Games and Latin America*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pham, Alex (2009) "Racism in Resident Evil 5? Capcom, two black actors respond," *Los Angeles Times blog*, Feb 12th, 2009, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2009/02/resident-evil-5.html.
- Rankin, Yolanda and Edwards, Mya (2017) "The Choices We Make: Game Design to Promote Second Language Acquisition," *CHI EA '17 Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference Extended*

Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems, May 06-11, 2017, Denver, CO, USA, pp. 907-916.

- Reinders, Hayo (2017) "Digital Games and Second Language Learning," in Steven L. Thorne & Stephen May (eds) *Language, Education and Technology*, Springer, pp. 329-343.
- Spitzberg, Brian H. and Gabrielle Changnon (2009) "Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence," in Darla K. Deardorff (ed) *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Los Angeles: Sage, pp. 2-52.
- Sterczewski, Piotr (2016) "This Uprising of Mine: Game Conventions, Cultural Memory and Civilian Experience of War in Polish Games," *Game Studies*, 16(2), http://gamestudies.org/1602/articles/sterczewski.
- Struppert, Annika (2009). Developing Intercultural Competence Through Playing Electronic Games and Simulations. In G. Siemens & C. Fulford (Eds.), *Proceedings of ED-MEDIA 2009-- World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia & Telecommunications* (pp. 3813-3820). Honolulu, HI, USA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). Retrieved June 25, 2018 from https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/32030/.
- Westin, Jonathan and Ragnar Hedlund (2016) "Polychronia – negotiating the popular representation of a common past in Assassin's Creed", *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds*, 8:1, 3-20.
- You, Jiwon & Yevtukh, Nikita (2017) "ChinaAlive: Integrating Cultural learning and Gaming", unpublished seminar paper, MLCS 499.

Games:

- 11 bit studios (2014) *This War of Mine*. Warsaw (PL): 11 bit studios. https://store.steampowered.com/app/282070/This_War_of_Mine/
- Bizo Mobile (2018) Lingo Games - Learn Spanish. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mobile.bizo.fiszki.es&hl=en_US
- Capcom (2017) *Okami HD*. Osaka: Capcom. https://store.steampowered.com/app/587620/OKAMI_HD/
- Creative Assembly (2009) *Empire: Total War*. Tokyo: Sega. https://store.steampowered.com/app/10500/Empire_Total_War/
- DMD Enterprise (2014) Uprising44: The Silent Shadows. DMD Enterprise. https://store.steampowered.com/app/280380/Uprising44_The_Silent_Shadows/
- DrinkBox Studios (2014) Guacamelee!. https://store.steampowered.com/app/275390/Guacamelee_Super_Turbo_Championship_Edition/
- Educational Simulations (2009) *RealLives 2010*, https://reallivesworld.com.
- Hardtalk Studio (2017) *21 Days*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/607660/21_Days/
- Innovative Mobile Apps (2017) *Learn Spanish with Lingo Arcade*. *https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/learn-spanish-with-lingo-arcade/id592986630?mt=8*
- InterFUEL (2006) *Darfur Is Dying*, http://www.gamesforchange.org/game/darfur-is-dying/.
- Kiro'o Games (2016) *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*, https://store.steampowered.com/app/368080/Aurion_Legacy_of_the_KoriOdan/

- Kobby's Hobby (2014) *Oware3D*.
  https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.kobbyshobby.Oware3D&hl=en
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2015) *Invaders*. http://survivance.org/invaders/.
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2015) *We Sing for Healing*. http://www.survivance.org/wesing/
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2017), *Thunderbird Strike*. https://www.thunderbirdstrike.com/
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2017), *Coyote Quest*. http://game.coyotescience.com/
- Leach, David (2017) Kibbuz: The Settlers of Palestine. http://www.kibbutzgame.com/
- Minority Media (2013) Papo & Yo. https://store.steampowered.com/app/227080/Papo__Yo/
- Simogo (2013) *Year Walk*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/269050/Year_Walk/
- The Soap Collective (2018) *Beyond Tokyo*. VR.
  https://store.steampowered.com/app/884460/Beyond_Tokyo/
- Ubisoft Montreal (2010) *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. Montreal: Ubisoft.
  https://store.steampowered.com/app/48190/Assassins_Creed_Brotherhood/
- Ubisoft Montreal (2013) *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*. Montreal: Ubisoft.
  https://store.steampowered.com/app/277590/Assassins_Creed_Freedom_Cry/
- Upper One Games (2014) *Never Alone (Kisima Ingitchuna)*. E-Line Media.
  https://store.steampowered.com/app/295790/Never_Alone_Kisima_Ingitchuna/
- We Are Müesli (2016) *Venti Mesi*. https://wearemuesli.itch.io/ventimesi
- You, Jiwon, Nikita Yevtukh & Mark McKellar (2018) *ChinaAlive*. http://arrw-web001.artsrn.ualberta.ca/LivingCulturesGame/Compiled/?module=China&mapname=game_1

Grade Distribution (see "Explanatory Notes")

Effort / activity / assignment	Description / break-down	Percentage of grade	LOs addressed
1) Participation	a. Attendance and punctuality (see 'Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components') b. Proactive engagement with class activities; regular verbal contributions that prove that reading assignments have been completed adequately; constructive/supportive in-class peer feedback following student-created code of conduct.	5% 5%	1- 6
2) Forum posts	Critical-reflexive forum posts (about 100-200 words per entry) about readings and play experiences, and personal learning outcomes from them. Submissions through eClass, by 8pm the day before class.	20%	1, 2, 4, 5
3) Presentation	a. In class: team-based presentation of a game (2-3 students per presentation) from students' culture of choice, analysis of how it teaches us about the cultural values / history / communicative preferences of this country or society, as well as the political/economic constraints of its regional games industry *Due date: allocated class session*	30%	1, 2, 3, 4

4) Intercultural game design	Team-based coursework (2-3 students per team): conceptual design of a serious game for the development of intercultural competence about one or more nations of your choice; submit co-authored design document (2,000-3,000 words) including rationale, lit review, target group analysis, market analysis, learning outcomes for educational goals, game concept (cultural-critical concepts / story / rules / mechanics / level structure / progress & feedback mechanisms, audio-visual design…) *Due date: Fri, Dec. 7th, 23:59h*	40%	1, 4, 5, 6

Explanatory Notes on Assignments:

- **Participation (10%)**: To succeed in any type of learning project, participation and active engagement with class materials and peer learners are essential. The role of the course instructor is mainly to provide students with learning facilities and materials, and to guide them in their own personal and shared learning experience. This assessment component helps students set priorities for home and classwork, which are designed to go hand in hand. Attendance, homework and active engagement with learning materials, readings and other activities in class form inextricably linked components of effective learning.

- **Reflexive-critical forum posts (20%)**: In this ongoing, episodic assignment students will be required to submit, through eClass, short, critical reflections in journal form (about 100-200 words per entry) on their personal reading and play experiences, or elements thereof, and how these experiences have contributed to their understanding of other cultures. Elements of these posts will be discussed in class. Students are expected to post comments before every class (by 8pm, the day before class) and will be assessed on both the quantity and the intellectual quality of these posts. That said, it is better to post a short comment or question if a reading or play assignment was felt to be too difficult to complete or critically engage with, than not to post at all.

- **Presentation (30%)**: Students will present, in small groups of 2-3, on a game from their own culture of choice in class, following the games listed in the syllabus or proposing their own. In the latter case, they will need to have their suggested game(s) approved by the instructor at least three weeks before their scheduled presentation date and, if possible, to suggest suitable reading(s) that will replace the reading(s) originally scheduled for their slot. Presentations will introduce the game itself (narrative, rules, player actions, victory/termination conditions etc.). They will offer a brief analysis of the game's context of production, its cultural and political embedding, and how it teaches us about the cultural values / history / communicative preferences of this particular country or society, as well as the political and economic constraints of its regional games industry. If possible, the presentations, or the ensuing discussion led by the presenters, will also engage with the assigned reading. Each presentation should be about 10 min long and be followed by class discussion. The presentation teams will lead class discussion and raise important concerns for the group to debate. Students will be assessed on intellectual rigor, critical prowess, depth of background research, and effectiveness of presentation.

- **Intercultural game design (40%):** In this small group assignment, teams of 2-3 students will collaborate, in the second half of term, on a joint creative project: the conceptual design of a serious game for the development of intercultural competence about one or more nations of their choice. They will submit a co-authored design document (2,000-3,000 words) including a literature and game review (mentioning games and other media that inspired their designs), target group analysis, learning outcomes for educational goals, and main design elements (story / mechanics). This assessment also has a metacognitive element, involving student self-reflection about their and others' preferred ways of learning. The design documents will be assessed in terms of clarity, relevance and plausibility of content; feasibility of design; depth of background research; as well as pedagogic and innovative potential for the target audience.

Required Notes:

Policy about course outlines can be found in the [Evaluation Procedures and Grading System](#) of the University Calendar.

Student Responsibilities:

Academic Integrity:

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

All students should consult [the Academic Integrity website](#). If you have any questions, ask your instructor.

An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. See the [Academic Discipline Process.](#)

Learning and Working Environment:

The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring all students; faculty and staff are able to study and work in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The Department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the Office of the Student Ombuds. Information about the University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures is described in UAPPOL.

Territorial Statement:

"The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community." (*from* the beginning of the Calendar).

University of Alberta Sexual Violence Policy:

The Sexual Violence Policy was approved by GFC in June 2017. It plays a vital role in ensuring a safe and respectful learning and working environment.

As defined in the policy, **sexual violence** is any sexual act or act of a sexual nature, or act targeting sexuality, whether physical or psychological, committed without consent. **Sexual violence** is a complex and serious problem in society and on university campuses. Sexual violence can affect individuals of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations, as well as those from all ages, abilities, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. Through this policy, the University of Alberta recognizes its responsibility to reduce sexual violence in the University community. The university aims to do so by fostering a culture of **consent** and support through education, training and policy. The University recognizes the possible effects of trauma on those who have experienced sexual violence and supports the efforts of individuals to seek support and recover.

To read the policy in more detail, please visit:
https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Policies/Sexual-Violence-Policy.pdf

Recording of Lectures:

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the content author(s) or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components:

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days. Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult sections Attendance and Examinations of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the "attendance and participation" component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result.

Deferral of term work is a privilege and not a right; there is no guarantee that a deferral will be granted. Misrepresentation of facts to gain a deferral is a serious breach of the Code of Student Behaviour.

In this course, attendance and participation are defined in the "grade distribution" section. Specific descriptions are provided in the online rubric, available from eClass.

Policy for Late Assignments:

Students who consult in advance with an instructor regarding contingencies preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at the discretion of the instructor, be granted an extension. Otherwise, assignments will receive a 5% **per day** (not per class) penalty.

Disclaimer:

Any typographical errors in this syllabus are subject to change and will be announced in class and posted on eClass. The date of the final examination is set by the Registrar and takes precedence over the final examination date reported in this syllabus.

(Note that the above is a mandatory clause for UofA syllabi. There is no final exam in this particular course.)

Student Resources:

The best all-purpose website for student services is: https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students.

Accessibility Resources: (1 – 80 SUB)

The University of Alberta is committed to creating work and learning communities that inspire and enable all people to reach their full potential. Accessibility Resources promotes an accessible, inclusive, and universally designed environment. For general information to register for services visit the Accessibility Resources webpage.

The Academic Success Centre: (1-80 SUB)

The Academic Success Centre offers a variety of workshops on effective study and exam strategies. There are in-person and online sessions available for a modest fee.

The Centre for Writers: (1-42 Assiniboia Hall)

The Centre for Writers offers free one-on-one writing support to students, faculty, and staff. Students can request consultation for a writing project at any stage of development. Instructors can request class visits and presentations.

Health and Wellness Support: There are many health and community services available to current students. For more information visit the Health and Wellness Support webpage.

Office of the Student Ombuds:

The Office of the Student Ombuds offers confidential interviews, advice and support to students facing academic, discipline, interpersonal and financial difficulties.

Grading:

Assessment of the individual course components may be in the form of   numerical marks or letter grades. The final letter grade will be based on "a combination of absolute achievement and relative performance in a class" (University Calendar, Evaluation Procedures and Grading System). The   University Grading Procedure mandates that "a student's level of achievement of the goals/outcomes of a course, their grade, and the descriptor of that grade must be aligned" (https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/). The following guidelines have been adopted by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies:

"MLCS Undergraduate Grading Scale"

Descriptor	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	%
Excellent. A+, A or A- is earned by work which is superior in content and form and demonstrates an exceptional grasp of the subject matter. The grade of A+ designates work that far exceeds course expectations. Grades in the A range are normally achieved by a small number of students.	**A+** **A** **A-**	4.0 4.0 3.7	**97-100** **93-96** **90-92**
Good. B+, B or B- is earned by work that demonstrates a thorough comprehension of the course material and a good command of relevant skills. Grades in the B range are normally achieved by the largest number of students.	**B+** **B** **B-**	3.3 3.0 2.7	**87-89** **83-86** **80-82**
Satisfactory. C+, C or C- is earned by work that demonstrates an adequate grasp of the course material and relevant skills. Grades in the C range designate work that has met the basic requirements of the course.	**C+** **C** **C-**	2.3 2.0 1.7	**77-79** **73-76** **70-72**
Poor/Minimal Pass. D+ or D is earned by work that demonstrates minimal familiarity with the course material. Grades in the D range generally indicate insufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the subject matter.	**D+** **D**	1.3 1.0	**65-69** **60-64**
Failure.	**F**	0.0	**0-59**