2020-2021   MLCS 345-A2: Videogames Across Cultures
(Fall Term)

Note: Remote Delivery

Instructor: Astrid Ensslin Time: Tue 10:00-10:50 a.m. (synchronous meetings)

Office: (home) Place: online – see eClass

E-mail: ensslin@ualberta.ca Office Hours: Thu 9:30-10:50 a.m., or by appointment

Personal Website: Teaching Assistant (TA): Morgan Cselinacz;

https://apps.ualberta.ca/directory/person/ensslin cselinac@ualberta.ca

Course Website: eClass

Bachelor of Arts / Major in Modern Languages and Cultural Studies:
https://www.ualberta.ca/modern-languages-and-cultural-studies/undergraduate-program-information/prospective-undergraduate-students

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Course Prerequisite: n/a

Technology requirements (minimum):
Access to wifi,, email, eClass, Zoom, the University's Google Suite, standard browser
technologies, and a variety of videogame applications (via Steam download or web browser).
It is your responsibility as a student to ensure that you have the appropriate technology
for the course. Please contact Information Services and Technologies (IST) or the course
TA if you're experiencing any technical issues. If you experience any difficulties
accessing the games on the syllabus, please contact the course TA, who will assist you.
She will also stream the games on the syllabus for the entire group.

Experiential Learning Component

☐ this course has a significant experiential learning component (15% or more of
the course grade)

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

☐ Yes   X No, not needed

Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material Available

☐ Exam registry – Students' Union
http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/infolink/exam/

☐ See explanations below
X Document distributed in class
☐ Other (please specify)
☐ NA

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. We will examine how games communicate cultural meanings and how pedagogical elements are built into the design of dedicated serious games for intercultural learning; we will engage with theories of critical play and postcolonial game analysis with the goal to develop the critical tools to analyze and evaluate videogames with respect to their appropriation and stereotyping of foreign cultures and nations. At the same time, we will examine the economic dictates and constraints underlying commercial game design, that inform cultural appropriation and stereotyping. We will engage with regional and ethnic game studies by studying a range of (mostly independent) videogames from and about different regional and ethnic communities, including indigenous games. We will examine how these games communicate historical, social and cultural values, issues and concerns, and how they might contribute to the decolonizing of game design and game studies. Through a variety of critical and creative assignments and activities, we will explore and familiarize themselves with a diversity of social roles that can help us 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, and the interactive story builder.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Describe and differentiate conceptual nuances and variations of intercultural competence, including cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal elements, and demonstrate how critical play and game design can help us develop them;
2. Distinguish between and communicate effectively about diverse critical and analytical theories of games across cultures, including postcolonial, indigenous, multimodal, ludological, folkloristic and anthropological lenses;
3. Apply these theories to a variety of videogames and interactive narratives that foreground the issues of ethnic and other cultural minorities, as well as culture-specific folklore, history, and society.
4. Critically evaluate how a variety of videogames (mis)represent, appropriate, simplify, stereotype, and/or educate their players about cultures other than their own;
5. Co-design, in a team effort, a game for change that will help their target audience(s) develop key elements of intercultural competence.

Course Format:

The objectives of this course will be learned from a combination of asynchronous and synchronous materials and exercises. The bulk of the learning and teaching will happen asynchronously, via eClass activities that students can complete in their own time, yet towards weekly deadlines. These will be complemented by weekly 1-hour synchronous Zoom meetings, attendance at which will not be part of the assessment for access reasons. How to use Zoom for class collaboration and discussion will be part of the

syllabus. Meetings will be recorded and shared via eClass for students unable to attend in person. They will not be made public, and students are strongly advised not to share the recordings with third parties.

Texts:

Required
Games:
- 11 bit studios (2014) *This War of Mine*. Warsaw (PL): 11 bit studios. https://store.steampowered.com/app/282070/This_War_of_Mine/
- Capcom (2017) *Okami HD*. Osaka: Capcom. https://store.steampowered.com/app/587620/OKAMI_HD/
- Case, Nicky (n.d.) *We Become What We Behold*. https://ncase.itch.io/wbwwb
- Creative Assembly (2009) *Empire: Total War*. Tokyo: Sega. https://store.steampowered.com/app/10500/Empire_Total_War/
- Hardtalk Studio (2017) *21 Days*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/607660/21_Days/
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2015) *Invaders*. http://www.survivance.org/invaders/webgl/
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2015) *We Sing for Healing*. http://www.survivance.org/wesing/
- LaPensée, Elizabeth (2019), *When Rivers Were Trails*. https://indianlandtenure.itch.io/when-rivers-were-trails.
- Leach, David (2017) Kibbuz: The Settlers of Palestine. http://www.kibbutzgame.com/
- Pope, Lucas (2013) *Papers, Please*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/239030/Papers_Please/
- Simogo (2013) *Year Walk*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/269050/Year_Walk/
- 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

Readings:
- Barnes, Kateryna (2019) "Agniq Suaŋŋaktuq and *Kisima Inŋitchuŋa* (*Never Alone*): 'Cause Gaia Likes It Cold," *First Person Scholar*, July 24, http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/tag/never-alone/.
- Flanagan, Mary (2009) *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hawreliak, Jason (2019) "On the Procedural Mode", in Astrid Ensslin and Isabel Balteiro (eds) *Approaches to Videogame Discourse: Lexis, Interaction, Textuality*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- LaPensee, Elizabeth (2017) "Transformations and Remembrances in the Digital Game We Sing for Healing," *Transmotion* 3(1), pp. 89-108.

- Mukherjee, Souvik (2019) "Age of Empires: Postcolonialism," in Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina B. Huntemann (eds), *How to Play Video Games*, 157-164, New York: NYU Press.
- Raphael, Chad, Christine Bachen, Kathleen-M. Lynn, Jessica Baldwin-Philippi, and Kristen A. McKee (2009) "Games for Civic Learning: A Conceptual Framework and Agenda for Research and Design," *Games and Culture*, 5(2), 199-235.
- Shliakhovchuk, Elena and Adolfo Muñoz García (2020) "Intercultural Perspective on Impact of Video Games on Players: Insights from a Systematic Review of Recent Literature," *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 20(1), pp. 40-58, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1241464
- 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.
- Wardrip-Fruin, Noah (2020) "Games, Hypertext, and Meaning", keynote lecture, Hypertext 2020 / ELO 2020, University of Central Florida, Online, https://stars.library.ucf.edu/elo2020/live/plenaries/1/

Further play and reading (e.g. for student presentations; to be adjusted as appropriate):

Games:
- BBC (2015) *Syrian Journey: Choose Your Own Escape Route*, BBC News, April 1, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601.
- BioWare (2009-2014) *Dragon Age* (series). Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts.
- Capcom (2009) *Resident Evil 5*. Osaka: Capcom.
- CD Projekt Red (2007) *The Witcher*. (Series). Warsaw, PL: CD Projekt.
- 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.
- 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
- Memory of God (2017) Where the Goats Are. https://memoryofgod.itch.io/where-the-goats-are
- Minority Media (2013) *Papo & Yo*. https://store.steampowered.com/app/227080/Papo__Yo/
- 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/

Readings:

- 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.
- 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
- 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
- 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.

Additional Course Fees
    ☐ Yes   X No

Important Dates: See Academic Schedule in current Calendar

First Day of Class: September 1, 2020
Add/Delete Date: September 15, 2020
50% Withdrawal Date: October 2, 2020
Fall Term Reading Week: November 9-13, 2020

Withdrawal Date: November 30, 2020
Last Day of Class: December 7, 2020

There is no final exam on this course.

Components of Course Grade (see "Explanatory Notes"):

Effort / activity / assignment	Description / break-down	Percentage of grade	LOs addressed
1) Posts to online fora and discussion boards	Critical-reflexive forum posts (about 100-200 words per entry) about readings and play experiences, and personal learning outcomes from them. Minimum two posts per week. For *weekly due dates*, see eClass. Submissions through eClass.	30%	1-4
2) Video presentation/essay	Individually or in teams of 2-3: 10-min video essay/presentation of a game from the students' culture of choice; including a critical analysis of how it teaches us (or fails to teach us in adequate ways) about the cultural values / history / communicative preferences of its target culture(s), as well as the political/economic constraints informing its design. Submission via YouTube link ("unlisted video") to instructor's email: ensslin@ualberta.ca *Due date: the Friday before your allocated week - sign up via eClass Google sheet link*	30%	1-4

4) Intercultural game design	Team-based coursework (3-4 students per team): conceptual design of a serious game for the development of intercultural competence about one or more cultures of your choice; submit co-authored design document (3,500-5,000 words) including rationale, lit review, target group analysis, market analysis, educational learning outcomes, and game concept. Note: You are **not** required to actually make the game. The assignment is the design brief (a written document) that may inform the future development of a game. *Due date: Tue, 24th November 2020, 23:59h - via eClass submission link*	40%	1-5

Explanatory Notes on Assignments:

- **Reflexive-critical forum posts (30%)**: In this ongoing, episodic assignment students will be required to submit, through eClass, a variety of written or otherwise recorded contributions. Typically, they will take the form of short, critical reflections (about 100-200 words per entry) on your personal and/or collective reading and play experiences, and how these experiences have contributed to their understanding of other cultures. Some elements of these posts may be discussed in synchronous meetings, and students are encouraged to respond to each other's posts in a constructive, ethically sound manner. Deadlines for each post (or similar asynchronous contribution) will be clearly labeled on eClass. Posts will be assessed on both the quantity and the scholarly, intellectual quality of these posts. As a rule of thumb, 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. Remember: asking questions is one of the best ways to learn, and most of the time you're not the only one in the class who was wondering about the same thing.

- **Presentation video / video essay (30%)**: In the final unit of the course ("Games Across Cultures and Around the World", first three weeks of November 2020), students will submit, individually or in teams of 2-3, a 10-minute (+/- 1 min) scholarly-analytical video essay on a game from your culture of choice. A list of possible games is given in this syllabus, but you are more than welcome to pitch your own ideas to the instructor in the first 3 weeks of term. Your video essay should introduce the game itself (goals, narrative, rules, player actions, victory/termination conditions etc.). You should offer a culturally and/or socially critical 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/as appropriate). Your critical reading of the game will reveal any cultural biases that may lead to stereotyping, othering, discrimination, and/or other problematic meanings. You should end the video with a list of references cited, and a few questions (max. 3) for class discussion. Playing the game of your choice will not be a requirement for the rest of the class, but you are encouraged to provide links to downloadable and/or streamed content such as playthroughs.

- **Intercultural game design (40%):** In this small group assignment, teams of 2-3 students will collaborate, throughout the semester, on a joint creative project: the conceptual design of a serious game for the development of intercultural competence about one or more cultures of your choice. You should submit, by the final deadline of **24th November**, a co-authored design document (3,500-5,000 words). This document should be deeply researched and include 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) – details and examples will be available from eClass. This assessment also has a metacognitive element, asking you to reflect upon your own 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. The concept should be for a game that takes approx.. 20-30 min to play through.

- **Important note on deadlines**: It is critical that you organize your time on this course wisely. Both your video essay and the final design document will be due in November, and I'd advise you to start working on both as early as you can. You can submit your video essay anytime during the semester. The design document will need more in-depth collaborative work, and you'll be developing it in iterations, so it may not be wise to submit it before you get a chance to pitch it to the class and obtain feedback (scheduled for October). Your posts to eClass will be ongoing, starting in Week 1 and assessed throughout. Rubrics for all assessments will be available from the main course section in eClass.

- **Important note on participation**: 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 you in your own personal and shared learning experience. There will be opportunities to meet synchronously, as a whole class, in small groups and individually, but for ethical reasons attendance and participation in synchronous activities will not be assessed. Please be aware, though, that attendance (if feasible), homework and active

engagement with learning materials, readings and other activities in class are inextricably interconnected components of effective learning, and they are key for your emotional stakes and sense of belonging. So if you can attend live sessions, I'd warmly recommend you to do so, and if you'd rather switch off your video for confidentiality reasons, you're welcome to do so. For speakers it's always nice to see the audience, but you will not be penalized if you'd rather remain invisible. You can always use the chat function, or use your microphone if you have one. Students who cannot attend synchronous meetings for a variety of reasons will not fall behind if they keep to the weekly eClass deadlines. Unlisted video recordings of the full class sessions will be made available via eClass, and the asynchronous learning activities will help you reflect on and process the material in personalized ways.

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](#) 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 work and study 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.

Sexual Violence Policy:
It is the policy of the University of Alberta that sexual violence committed by any member of the University community is prohibited and constitutes misconduct. Resources and more information can be found at https://www.ualberta.ca/campus-life/sexual-violence

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).

Recording of Lectures:
Audio or video recording, digital or otherwise, of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the instructor or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Student or instructor content, digital or otherwise, created and/or used within the context of the course 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 in synchronous meetings are not assessed.

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 working day** 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**