

Video Games as Visual Culture

Course Number: FILM 80V

Professor Soraya Murray

Summer 2020 Syllabus [ONLINE 5-WEEK FORMAT]



Meeting Place and Time: CANVAS Online. This is an asynchronous course, with NO live lectures.

Office Location, Hours, Email: Online by appt. Contact me for a Zoom meeting if you wish to talk.
[semurray@ucsc.edu] *Use email for the quickest response

Teaching Assistants: Dorothy Santos [drsantos@ucsc.edu]
Ebadur Rahman [ebrahman@ucsc.edu]

Please contact your TA **first**, regarding any questions you may have. If your TA cannot answer your question, they will forward your query to me.

Course Description:

This course introduces the study of video games through their cultural meanings, visual, theoretical and social contexts. **Please note that this course does not teach technical training in game development, design or programming.** Rather, it is intended to provide students with a useful understanding of how games function as visual culture, and to increase visual literacy in players, aspiring game designers, and others interested in video games. This course takes a largely critical game studies approach. Topics covered include: games and play, the history of video games from the 1950s to the present, issues in games and representation, games and politics, and the intersection of games and cinema. In addition, we will explore the aesthetics of games, as well as the ways in which they model virtual "place". Through the writings of game theorists, designers, scholars and cultural critics, we will also investigate games in context by looking at media responses to popular and controversial games, key conceptions/misconceptions about the impacts of games on its players, games and identity.

Race, gender and queerness in games will be covered, through the analysis of popular and alternative games. Students who successfully complete this course will be conversant in the "golden age" of early video games as well as key issues surrounding contemporary gaming. They will understand the aesthetic development of games, as well as the ways in which video games may have affected visual culture—and culture at large. Those students interested in game design will benefit from a focused consideration of aesthetics, reception and interpretation. Those interested in video games from a visual culture/media perspective will be introduced to existing debates and key concepts that shape this new, timely and shifting area of study.

****THIS IS AN ACCELERATED COURSE THAT TEACHES 10 WEEKS OF MATERIAL IN A 5-WEEK PERIOD.****

Student Learning Outcomes:

(PLO#3) Demonstrate the relationship between different types of form and meaning through the critical analysis of them.

(PLO#6) Demonstrate scholarly writing skills appropriate to the discipline of film and digital media.

(PLO#7) Demonstrate an ability to analyze, interpret, and critique media from a variety of theoretical perspectives using the critical vocabulary and methodologies of the discipline.

Required Texts:

All required readings are available in PDF format, downloadable from the UCSC CANVAS page for this course.

Course Website:

<https://canvas.ucsc.edu/> Log in using your Cruz ID and Gold Password.

You can learn about CANVAS here: <https://its.ucsc.edu/canvas/canvas-student.html>

I will occasionally send updates and distribute information through the CANVAS page. CANVAS only works with UCSC accounts, so, if you regularly use another email address, please be sure that your UCSC account forwards to it. Also, within CANVAS, please keep your NOTIFICATIONS ON, so that you receive announcements.

Please note that all of these lectures, are the professor's intellectual property. Do not audio- or video-record this course, sell or provide class notes, tests or recordings to any notetaking services (ie Coursehero, etc.). THIS IS UC UNIVERSITY POLICY.

A new learning module will open each week on CANVAS.

Please check into the course page frequently, try not to leave all your work for the last minute, and be sure to read my emailed announcements promptly. Thank you!

Weekly Course Breakdown

READINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE INSTRUCTOR'S DISCRETION.

WEEK 1 SUN JUL 26 - FRI JUL 31

View: Lecture 1: Introduction: Why Are We Doing This?

Learn to access CANVAS. Download required readings in PDF format.

Read: Ian Bogost, "Introduction: Nobody Asked for a Toaster Critic" in *How to Talk About Video Games* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2015), vii-xiii.

View: Lecture 2: A Speed-Run Through a History of Video Games

Videos History of Video Games
History of Video Game Consoles

View: Lecture 3: What is a Game? How Can We Approach Game Studies?

Read: Espen Aarseth, "Computer Game Studies, Year One" in *Game Studies* vol. 1 issue 1 (July 2001).

Markku Eskelinen, "The Gaming Situation" in *Game Studies* vol. 1 issue 1 (July 2001).

Janet Murray, "The Last Word on Ludology v Narratology" (2005)

View: Lecture 4: What is Visual Culture?

Read: Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking* [Read Excerpt only 9-16, 21-33.]

Discussion: DUE THU, 11:59PM

Assignment: 1000-word response on DUE FRI, 11:59PM.

WEEK 2 SUN AUG 2 - FRI AUG 7

View: Lecture 5: Video Games in Culture

Read: Is the "Culture" in Game Culture the "Culture" of Cultural Studies? in Soraya Murray, *On Video Games*, Introduction [Read Excerpt only 1-7, 17-27, 35-42].

View: Lecture 6: Video Games and Moral Panics

Read: Carly A. Kocurek, "The Agony and the Exidy: A History of Video Game Violence and the Legacy of Death Race," *GameStudies.org*, v 12 iss 1 (September 2012) **[Read Excerpt only 1-10]**

Carly A. Kocurek,, "Night Trap: Moral Panic" in Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina Huntemann, eds., *How to Play Video Games* (NY: NYU Press, 2019), 309-316.

View: Lecture 7: Issues of Representation

Read: Media Education Foundation, "STUART HALL: Representation & the Media" [Transcript] 1997: 3-22.

Stuart Hall, "The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media" in *Gender, Race and Class in Media* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995), 168-173.

Richard Dyer, "Introduction" and "The Role of Stereotypes" in *The Matter of Images* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1-5, 11-18.

View: Lecture 8: Queerness and Games

Read: Bonnie Ruberg and Amanda Phillips, "Special Issue -- Queerness and Video Games: Not Gay as in Happy: Queer Resistance and Video Games (Introduction)," *Game Studies* 18, no. 3 (December 2018), http://gamestudies.org/1803/articles/phillips_ruberg.

Discussion: DUE THU, 11:59PM

Assignment: 1000-word response on DUE FRI, 11:59PM.

WEEK 3 SUN AUG 9 - FRI AUG 14

View: Lecture 9: Arab Stereotypes

Read: Vit Sisler, "Digital Arabs: Representation in Video Games" in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, SAGE Publications, 2008, pp. 203-220.

View: Lecture 10: Asian Representation

Read: Khai Trung Le, "The Invisible People: Why Asians Need to Be Better Represented in Video Games" Vice.com, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/mvk3px/the-invisible-people-why-asians-need-to-be-better-represented-in-video-games-950

Koichi Iwabuchi, "How 'Japanese' is Pokémon?" in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (Durham: Duke U Press, 2004), 54-79. **[Read Excerpt of 56-58 only]**

View: Lecture 11: Masculinity

Read: Soraya Murray, "The Last of Us: Masculinity" in Matthew Thomas Payne and Nina Huntemann, eds., *How to Play Video Games* (NY: NYU Press, 2019), 101-109.

Discussion: DUE THU, 11:59PM

Assignment: 1000-word response on DUE FRI, 11:59PM.

guidance of the assignment prompt. Please use paragraph format, and spell-check—no bullet points or lists. Keep a copy for yourself on your computer or storage device in the event that the submitted assignment is lost or destroyed. Responses will be assessed based upon the quality and specificity of your response, and proper length. Please adhere to the word count. Opinion is fine, but ground it in the readings and game examples.

Midterm/Final Examinations (40% of Final Grade: 20% midterm + 20% final)

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. The midterm examination will cover everything up until the date of that examination. The final will cover all information after the midterm, however, as we will build on ideas over the term, there might be general reference to earlier material. These will be 25 questions long, in multiple-choice, true/false, matching form. **Note: Students are required to take both exams to pass the course.**

Online courses require you to stay engaged and check in often. Check in at least 3 times weekly. Stay self-motivated and engaged, since we are not meeting in person. If you are confused, contact your TA right away.

Final Grade

Your final grade will be based upon the quality of your written responses, discussions, and your midterm and final exam scores. A final grade of C-, D+, D, D-, or F cannot be used to satisfy a course prerequisite or to satisfy major or general education requirements. Any course graded P is equivalent to a C or better and can be used to satisfy general education requirements.

Lateness and Extensions

All assignments and exams must be turned in on time. **Assignments will not be accepted after 11:59PM on the day they are due.** If you are confused about an assignment, or having difficulty completing the course, contact your TA right away. If you are having a serious medical or family emergency, communicate with me if you know you won't be able to keep up with coursework, so that we can make a plan.

Workload Distribution (30 hours per week)

For this course, this breaks down approximately as follows:

- Lecture: 8 hours per week
- Readings: 8 hours per week
- Assignments: 6 hours per week
- Discussion: 6 hours per week
- Additional testing/test prep 2 hours per week

Disability Resource Center: UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. At this time, I would also like us to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT POLICY Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty. Acts of academic misconduct during the course, including plagiarism, will result in failure of the course. Your case will be reported to the College Provost as per the Academic Integrity guidelines found on the web at: https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct

Title IX and CARE Statement:

UC Santa Cruz is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free of all forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which are explicitly prohibited under Title IX. If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, know that you are not alone. The Title IX Office, the Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) office, and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) are all resources that you can rely on for support.

Please be aware that if you tell me about a situation involving Title IX misconduct, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. This reporting responsibility also applies to course TAs and tutors (as well to all UCSC employees who are not designated as “confidential” employees, which is a special designation granted to counselors and CARE advocates). Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that you are aware of the range of options available to you and that you have access to the resources you need.

Confidential resources are available through CARE. Confidentiality means CARE advocates will not share any information with Title IX, the police, parents, or anyone else without explicit permission. CARE advocates are trained to support you in understanding your rights and options, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. You can contact CARE at (831) 502-2273 or care@ucsc.edu.

In addition to CARE, these resources are available to you:

- If you need help figuring out what resources you or someone else might need, visit the Sexual Violence Prevention & Response (SAFE) website, which provides information and resources for different situations.
- Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide confidential counseling support. Call them at (831) 459-2628.
- You can also report gender discrimination and sexual harassment and violence directly to the University’s Title IX Office, by calling (831) 459-2462 or by using their online reporting tool.
- Reports to law enforcement can be made to the UC Police Department, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1.
- For emergencies, call 911.

UCSC PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY

In this course, we abide by the UCSC Principles of Community, so please familiarize yourself with these important principles.

INCLUSIVITY

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please submit your Accommodation Authorization Letter from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me privately during my office hours or by appointment, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. At this time, I would also like us to discuss ways we can ensure your full participation in the course. I encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at drc@ucsc.edu.

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https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct

Information on subject specific research guidelines is available at:

<http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/>

DISTRIBUTION OF COURSE NOTES

Please note that selling, preparing, or distributing for any commercial purpose course lecture notes or video or audio recordings of any course is explicitly forbidden by campus policy, unless authorized by the University in advance – for instance, by the Disability Resource Center, which can assign students who need one a notetaker with a laptop or other recording device – and explicitly permitted by the course instructor in writing. (DRC notetaking accommodations should, and usually will, be announced to the instructor in advance in formal communication from the DRC.)

GRADE DISPUTES

If you have questions about the grading of your work, please make arrangements to meet with your teaching assistant (TA). If your questions are not resolved, please see me in office hours. If the matter still remains unresolved, I will advise you on further options.

ONLINE COURSE EVALUATIONS

Course evaluations for faculty will be available online through CANVAS for students to complete towards the end of quarter. You will receive a notification from CANVAS in your UCSC email account when online evaluations become available. Please be thoughtful in your responses, as we take these evaluations seriously. Course evaluations help faculty consider ways to improve instruction.