

Spring 2026 ITLS-3500-IO1 Syllabus

ITLS 3500 Introduction to Gaming Studies

Course Description

Playing games can be fun, but at the same time, playing games can also be challenging. Expect to feel the same about this course. Game Studies is an interdisciplinary field and scholars have approached it from various perspectives (e.g., media studies, humanities, social sciences). The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of the field of game studies with a focus on Video Games. Students will be asked to engage critically with their own experiences with video games as well as perspectives drawn from disciplinary research. This course offers an interdisciplinary survey of video game studies. Each week you will be required to play a video game and complete a reading. You will also engage in a semester-long project where you analyze a video game of your choice.

Fees

\$45 online fee

You should be able to find the games chosen for this course at no cost.

Course Objectives

The goal of this course is to develop students' ability to think critically about video games as cultural, educational, and designed systems. Through engagement with a range of theoretical perspectives and hands-on gameplay experiences, students will learn to analyze how games produce meaning, shape player experience, and operate within broader social and cultural contexts. By examining a diverse set of video games, including games students may not have encountered before, the course aims to challenge and expand common assumptions about what video games are and what they can do. Students will practice connecting gameplay experiences to scholarly ideas, using theory as a lens for interpretation rather than as abstract content. Throughout the course, class sessions will emphasize discussion, analysis, and shared inquiry. Students will engage with assigned readings, participate in gameplay experiences, and develop increasingly sophisticated interpretations of games through conversation, reflection, and project-based work.

Instructor

Mengying Jiang, mengying.jiang@usu.edu

I will respond to emails within 24–48 hours, except on weekends. Messages sent on Saturdays or Sundays will receive a reply on Monday morning. You can contact me through email or Canvas. If you would like to schedule a Zoom meeting, **please share three possible time slots that work for you**. This will help us confirm a meeting time efficiently without multiple rounds of messages.

Course Resources

Learning materials will be provided on each module.

Course Requirements

Each student is expected to engage actively with both gameplay and academic analysis throughout the semester. By the end of the course, students will have developed the ability to analyze video games critically using concepts from game studies and related fields.

Specifically, each student will:

- Complete assigned weekly readings
- Play video games each week, both assigned course games and a self-selected project game
- Participate in weekly discussions, reflecting on gameplay experiences and readings and responding to peers
- Complete a course-long game analysis project focused on a single game of choice
- Submit a final synthesis and reflection at the end of the semester

Throughout the semester, we will play a variety of games that are paired with weekly reading topics. After completing the readings and gameplay, students will participate in weekly discussions in which they reflect on their experiences, connect gameplay to course concepts, and respond to at least two classmates.

Weekly discussion posts will have deadlines on **Fridays at midnight MT**. Comments are due on **Tuesdays at midnight MT**. Feel free to go in and explore the readings earlier - it's good to spread out the comments over the week so others can add to your comments! Remember these two weekly deadlines!

Course-Long Game Analysis Project

In addition to weekly discussions, you will complete a course-long project centered on the sustained analysis of a single video game of your choice. This project is broken into **four connected submissions**, each asking you to examine the same game from a different perspective.

Once you have selected your project game, you are expected to play the game regularly throughout the semester, with a recommended minimum of approximately two hours of gameplay per week. This ongoing engagement will support both your project submissions and your weekly reflections.

1. Game Selection and Rationale (1 page)

You will select a game to study throughout the semester and explain why it is worth sustained analysis. This assignment focuses on articulating your motivation for choosing the game and situating it within themes from the course.

In this submission, you will consider:

- The game's potential relevance to learning, meaning-making, or skill development
- Key design features that make the game interesting to analyze
- Your personal motivation for choosing the game
- Your prior experience with similar games, if applicable

This assignment ensures that your project game is thoughtfully chosen and well aligned with the goals of the course.

2. Reflective Gameplay Analysis (1 page)

This assignment focuses on your evolving experience with the game as a player. Drawing on your gameplay experiences and course concepts, you will reflect on moments of engagement, challenge, failure, or enjoyment and analyze how the game shapes player experience. The emphasis in this stage is on interpretation and reflection. You will begin connecting lived gameplay experiences to ideas from game studies and course readings.

3. Educational Analysis of the Chosen Game (1–2 pages)

In this assignment, you will examine your chosen game as a potential learning environment. You will analyze how the game's mechanics, narrative, and systems might support or limit learning and consider how the game could be used or adapted in an educational or training context.

You will:

- Identify potential learning goals and target audiences
- Consider possible educational applications of the game
- Discuss constraints or challenges involved in using the game for learning
- Support your analysis with at least two sources from course readings or external research

This stage emphasizes thinking like an educator or learning designer.

4. Design-Informed Improvement Proposal (1–2 pages)

Building on your gameplay experiences and educational analysis, you will propose and justify specific design improvements to your chosen game. These may include changes to mechanics, narrative elements, feedback systems, or other design features.

Your proposal should:

- Identify limitations or missed opportunities in the current design
- Explain how your proposed changes could improve player experience, learning potential, or both
- Draw on course readings to justify your design decisions

This assignment emphasizes thoughtful critique and creative problem-solving grounded in theory and experience.

Final Synthesis and Reflection (600–800 words)

The course concludes with a final synthesis and reflection, submitted separately from the course-long project. In this assignment, you will reflect on how your understanding of video games has evolved over the semester.

Your reflection should synthesize:

- Weekly gameplay experiences and discussions
- Course readings and theoretical concepts
- Insights gained from your course-long project

Instead of summarizing individual assignments, you are encouraged to focus on what you have learnt, connections across contexts, and how your thinking about games, learning, and design has changed over time. You should cite any course readings or external sources referenced in your reflection. This final assignment serves as a capstone to the course and a demonstration of your intellectual development over the semester.

Evaluation Methods and Criteria

1. Weekly Discussion (40% of course grade)
2. Course-long Project Assignments (40% of course grade)
3. Final Synthesis and Reflection (20% of course grade)

Late assignments will be docked 25% off their final grade for every day it is overdue. If a course participant is unable to submit an assignment or discussion by the due date, they are encouraged to contact the instructor as soon as possible. One late submission due to human error is permitted for the semester but must be indicated in a comment on the submission. *The one exception to this policy deals with the final project: late final papers, projects, and presentations will not be accepted.*

Grade Scheme

The following grading standards will be used in this class:

Grade	Range
A	100 % to 93.0%
A-	< 93.0 % to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 % to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 % to 83.0%
B-	< 83.0 % to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 % to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 % to 73.0%
C-	< 73.0 % to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 % to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 % to 60.0%
F	< 59.0 % to 0.0%

Attendance and Excused Absences Policy

A strong weekly presence is required.

Library Services

All USU students attending classes in Logan, at our Regional Campuses, or online can access all databases, e-journals, and e-books regardless of location. Additionally, the library will mail printed books to students, at no charge to them. Students can also borrow books from any Utah academic library. Take advantage of all library services and learn more at libguides.usu.edu/statewide. (<http://libguides.usu.edu/statewide>)

AI Use

You are permitted to use ChatGPT and other generative AI tools to assist you in gathering information, writing drafts, and revising your writing. However, **you are expected to include a disclosure and reflection statement** at the end of your assignment describing which AI tool you used and how you used it. For example, "*ChatGPT was used to draft about 50 percent of this assignment and to provide revision assistance. AI-produced content was edited for accuracy and style. I provided _____ as a prompt/search/etc. The AI-produced content was initially only partially correct so I revised parts including _____, _____, and _____.*"

Consider the thinking skills and practices you need to learn as a student from this course. AI often requires significant debugging (in the instructor's experience, it often takes more work to debug AI-driven writing or code than it does to do the work manually) . Also, recent (2024-25) research has shown that timing matters in using AI. Using it first, often acts as a crutch for the brain, and limits cognitive development (i.e., people do not develop or even lose certain thinking skills). If used as a later support, then in some cases using AI may support cognition.

Take-home message: Consider the outcomes you are seeking as a student and use supports and tools available to you to make the most out of this course.

Again: Every assignment in this course is read and reviewed *personally* by the instructor . All feedback (and grading) is done by hand, personally.

Classroom Civility

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 (<https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode/article5>) for more information.

University Policies & Procedures

Appropriate Use of Canvas and Other IT Resources

Canvas and all other course technologies are information technology services provided as tools to further the mission of the university. By using these services, users agree to comply with USU Policy 550: Appropriate Use of Computing, Networking, and Information Resources (<https://www.usu.edu/policies/550/>) and the accompanying Terms of use for USU IT (https://usu.service-now.com/aggies?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0015388) resources, as well as Article V-3.B.25.c (<https://www.usu.edu/student-conduct/student-code/article5>) of the USU Student Code. Using course technologies in ways that are inconsistent with the university's mission or are disruptive will not be tolerated. Disruptive behavior includes any activity that interferes with either the faculty member's ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to profit from the instructional program.

Classroom Behavior

Utah State University supports the principle of freedom of expression for both faculty and students. The University respects the rights of faculty to teach and students to learn. Maintenance of these rights requires classroom conditions that do not impede the learning process. Disruptive classroom behavior will not be tolerated. An individual engaging in such behavior may be subject to disciplinary action. Read Student Code Article V Section V-3 (<https://www.usu.edu/student-conduct/student-code/article5>) for more information.

Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibilities

Academic freedom is the right to teach, study, discuss, investigate, discover, create, and publish freely. Academic freedom protects the rights of faculty members in teaching and of students in learning. Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Faculty members are entitled to full freedom in teaching, research, and creative activities, subject to the limitations imposed by professional responsibility. Policy 4002: Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility (<https://www.usu.edu/policies/4002/>) further defines academic freedom and professional responsibilities.

Academic Integrity – "The Honor System"

Each student has the right and duty to pursue his or her academic experience free of dishonesty. To enhance the learning environment at Utah State University and to develop student academic integrity, each student agrees to the following Honor Pledge:

"I pledge, on my honor, to conduct myself with the foremost level of academic integrity."

A student who lives by the Honor Pledge is a student who does more than not cheat, falsify, or plagiarize. A student who lives by the Honor Pledge:

- Espouses academic integrity as an underlying and essential principle of the Utah State University community;
- Understands that each act of academic dishonesty devalues every degree that is awarded by this institution; and
- Is a welcomed and valued member of Utah State University.

Academic Dishonesty

The instructor of this course will take appropriate actions in response to Academic Dishonesty, as defined the University's Student Code. Acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- **Cheating:** using, attempting to use, or providing others with any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, examinations, or in any other academic exercise or activity. Unauthorized assistance includes:
 - Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done "individually;"
 - Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
 - Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
 - Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
 - Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
 - Submitting substantially the same work for credit in more than one class, except with prior approval of the instructor; or engaging in any form of research fraud.
- **Falsification:** altering or fabricating any information or citation in an academic exercise or activity.
- **Plagiarism:** representing, by paraphrase or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person as one's own in any academic exercise or activity without full and clear acknowledgment. It also includes

using materials prepared by another person or by an agency engaged in the sale of term papers or other academic materials.

For additional information go to: ARTICLE VI. University Regulations Regarding Academic Integrity (<https://www.usu.edu/student-conduct/student-code/article6>)

Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct

General Overview

USU strives to provide an environment for students and employees that is free from discrimination (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/non-discrimination>) and sexual misconduct (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/sexual-misconduct/Sexual-Misconduct-Terms>). If you experience sexual misconduct or discrimination at any point during the semester inside or outside of class, you are encouraged to contact the USU Title IX Coordinator via Distance Education room 400 in Logan, 435-797-1266, titleix@usu.edu (<mailto:titleix@usu.edu>), or at [equity.usu.edu/report](https://www.usu.edu/equity/report) (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/report>). You can learn more about the USU resources available for individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct at [sexualrespect.usu.edu](https://www.usu.edu/sexual-respect/) (<https://www.usu.edu/sexual-respect/>). Resources for individuals who have experienced discrimination are listed at [equity.usu.edu/resources](https://www.usu.edu/equity/resources) (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/resources>).

Required Reporting of Sexual Misconduct and Threats of Harm

USU cares about our students and provides a number of resources and supportive measures to students who may be experiencing thoughts of self-harm or who have experienced sexual misconduct. To ensure students are informed about resources and services available to them, including available grievance or criminal processes for incidents of sexual misconduct, USU has implemented reporting policies and practices (<https://www.usu.edu/policies/340/>) that require designated employees to report any information they receive about incidents of sexual misconduct. This reporting policy also assists USU with its efforts to prevent sexual misconduct and keep our campus community safe.

Under USU's sexual misconduct reporting policy, I am designated as a "reporting employee" (<https://www.usu.edu/civilrights-titleix/reporting/reporting-employees>). This means that if you share information with me about incidents of sexual misconduct (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/sexual-misconduct/Sexual-Misconduct-Terms.php>) (sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, or sex-based stalking), including within a course assignment, I *will report* that information to the USU Title IX Coordinator (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/sexual-misconduct/Title-IX-Coordinator.php>). I will also share with you information about designated confidential resources (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/sexual-misconduct/confidential-resources>), supportive measures (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/Supportive-Measures.php>), and how you can file a report (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/report.php>) with the USU Title IX Coordinator.

Self-disclosures about sexual misconduct that you experienced are not required for your course work.

Similarly, if you disclose thoughts of harm to self or a threat to others to me, including within a course assignment, I will report the information to the appropriate campus administrators. I will also share with you information about the mental health and wellness resources (<https://www.usu.edu/aggiewellness/caps/>) available to you.

Withdrawal Policy and "I" Grade Policy

Students are required to complete all courses for which they are registered by the end of the semester. In some cases, a student may be unable to complete all of the coursework because of extenuating circumstances, but not due to poor performance or to retain financial aid. The term 'extenuating' circumstances includes: (1) incapacitating illness which prevents a student from attending classes for a minimum period of two weeks, (2) a death in the

immediate family, (3) financial responsibilities requiring a student to alter a work schedule to secure employment, (4) change in work schedule as required by an employer, or (5) other emergencies deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Students with Disabilities

USU welcomes students with disabilities. If you have, or suspect you may have, a physical, mental health, or learning disability that may require accommodations in this course, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) (<http://www.usu.edu/drc/>) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, drc@usu.edu (<mailto:drc@usu.edu>)). All disability related accommodations must be approved by the DRC. Once approved, the DRC will coordinate with faculty to provide accommodations.

Students Who are Pregnant or Have a Pregnancy-Related Condition

If you need academic accommodations related to pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, recovery, or other pregnancy related conditions, please contact the Office of Equity as early as possible. All accommodations related to pregnancy must be approved by the Office of Equity. The Office of Equity will then coordinate with instructors to provide accommodations. The University will not exclude a student from participating in any part of an educational program based on the student's pregnancy or pregnancy related conditions.

Office of Equity: Distance Education, Room 400, Logan Campus, 435-797-1266, Office of Equity: Pregnancy and Pregnancy Related Conditions (<https://www.usu.edu/equity/pregnancy-accommodations>).

Inclusive Excellence

USU provides resources to help all students feel included as part of the campus and broader USU community. To learn more about the resources available and how to access them, visit the Student Affairs Office (<https://www.usu.edu/student-affairs/>).

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Academic Grievances section of the Course Catalog (<https://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=39&navoid=30452>).

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures

- Acceptable Use of University Computing Resources (<https://www.usu.edu/policies/550/>)
- Academic Policies and Practices (USU Catalog) (<https://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=39&navoid=29998>)
- Student Conduct (<http://www.usu.edu/studentconduct>)
- Student Code (<https://www.usu.edu/student-conduct/student-code/>)
- Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy (<https://www.usu.edu/policies/403/>)

Emergency Procedures

In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building via USU official communication channels. Those channels will be: an audible alarm, such as a fire alarm; an Aggie Alert notification; or a notification by a USU representative. In the event of a disaster that does not permit enough time for notifications, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., when shaking ceases in an earthquake; immediately when a fire is discovered, or in the event of other immediate life safety concerns). If it does not inhibit safety, turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs. See USU Emergency Management (<https://www.usu.edu/dps/emergency/>) for more information.

General Health Protocols

The cold, flu, COVID-19, and other illnesses can have an impact on the health of our university community. USU welcomes the wearing of masks in all university buildings and encourages taking measures to mitigate risk as recommended by federal and state public health officials: getting vaccinated, staying home if you are sick, and frequent hand washing.

Mental Health

Mental health is critically important for the success of USU students. As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Utah State University provides free services for students to assist them with addressing these and other concerns. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (<https://counseling.usu.edu>).

Students are also encouraged to download the “SafeUT App” (<https://safeut.org/>) to their smartphones. The SafeUT application is a 24/7 statewide crisis text and tip service that provides real-time crisis intervention to students through texting and a confidential tip program that can help anyone with emotional crises, bullying, relationship problems, mental health, or suicide-related issues.