ITLS 3530 Gaming, Culture & Technology

Course Description

In this course, we will examine video games and other electronic technologies as cultural phenomena. We will critically analyze who is included and excluded in the design of games and technologies, examining topics such as gender and video games, race and video games, and serious games.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Students will develop their understanding of how to define a game, a technology, and the concept of culture.
2. Students will recognize that all cultures have games and technologies.
3. Students will develop an understanding of video games, apps, and other technologies as culturally patterned and targeted at particular audiences.
4. Students will be able to apply course materials to critically analyze a video game or other technology, as approved by the instructor.

IDEA Objectives

1. Gaining factual knowledge (terminology, classifications, methods, trends)
2. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual-cultural activity (video games!)
3. Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

Instructor

Kristin Searle, PhD, Education & Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

kristin.searle@usu.edu

Course Resources

Textbooks

Kafai, Y.B., Richard, G.T., Tynes, B.M. (Eds.). (2016). Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press.

Course Requirements

Assessment /Assignment Expectations

Class Participation (30%)

Knowledge is not acquired in a vacuum, but rather through social interaction with your peers and the course instructor. Because I believe this interaction is so important to learning the course content, it is a significant part of your grade and reflects the time you will be spending engaging with the course materials, the instructor, and your peers.

Each week, you will be required to participate in **the class discussion board** on Canvas. This may include completing an activity and posting about it, posting comments and questions about the readings, and responding to other students. Be thoughtful, ask questions, provide answers, really dig into the texts and ideas! Each week of discussion post(s) is worth two points and counts towards your overall class participation. I make these discussion posts graded because I believe they help us all learn better. While there are better and worse responses, I mostly want to see you actively engaged in the course material. Many of these ideas are challenging and it will be a far richer (and more fun!) course if we work through them collaboratively.

I ask that your first post of the week be posted by **midnight on Thursday** and that you will respond to at least two of your classmates by **midnight on the following Monday**. This way, we can have a meaningful conversation over time rather than a last-minute Monday night brain dump. After everyone has submitted, I will post a summary of our discussion from the week.

Gaming Autobiography (10%)

We often think of culture as something that other people have. This assignment asks you to reflect on your own cultural norms and preferences related to gaming.

For this assignment, you will either write a brief narrative of your own game play (1-2 pages) or create a short video (5-10 minutes) about your own experiences with playing games. These could include video games, but also casual games you might play on your phone, card games, board games, etc. What are you earliest memories of playing games? How has your game play changed over time? What attracts you to the games you play now? How, where, and when do you play them? Do you have routines around your own game play? People you always play with? What tools and resources support your game play?

Game Blog (20%)

In order to understand gaming and gaming culture, we need to immerse ourselves in this culture.

In week 3, you will be asked to select a game that you will play for 6 weeks over the course of the semester. This should be a game that is new to you rather than a game where you are already an expert. The article by Schissel in Week 2 provides many options, including free options, if you are new to gaming. Beginning in week 4, you will write a weekly blog post (about

1,000 words) about your game play. These posts can be written informally but should focus on (1) how you are learning to play the game (including resources like YouTube) and (2) how the game connects to the "big ideas" from our readings for that week. Each week, you will submit your blog entry as a Word document or PDF.

Game Play Observation (10%)

Because we will spend a lot of time talking about how people play games, I would like you to conduct a first-hand observation of how someone plays a game.

You will spend at least an hour watching someone play a game. Because of COVID-19, this should be someone already in your household. Alternately, you could observe the person playing a game virtually using Zoom and Discord, or other appropriate tools of your choosing. Does the person play the game alone or with others? Are they in the same room or virtually connected? How long does the play session last for? What resources does the person use outside of the game itself? Where do you see evidence of some of the big ideas from class in their game play?

Once you have completed your observation, you will write up a 3-5 page, double-spaced summary of what you observed. To preserve your participant's privacy, please use a made-up name for them so I do not know who the person is.

Game Play Interview (10%)

Humans are complicated and contradictory beings. To get a more complete picture of someone's game play, you will follow-up on your game play observation by interviewing (ideally) the same person about their game play. The interview will take 30-60 minutes and should be audio and/or video-recorded for your reference. When you are done with the assignment, you should destroy the associated audio and video files. Because of COVID-19, this interview should be with someone in your household or take place virtually. If you use Zoom, it is easy to record the interview.

You should ask your participant about the following topics, but you are not limited to just these topics.

- Who is this person? (made-up name, age, gender, race/ethnicity)
- How did they get into playing games? (Tell me about how you got into playing games.)
- How often do they play games?
- What are their preferred games to play? Why?
- Talk me though playing a game. What's that experience like? (Where are you? Who is playing with you? Where are they? How long do you play?)
- What do they like most about these games? What could be improved?
- What are some stereotypes about gamers? Do they feel like they fit into these stereotypes? Why or why not?
- How would they describe gaming culture? What is their relationship to gaming culture?
- Their opinions about gender and gaming.
- Their opinions about race and gaming.

Once you have completed the interview, you will write a 3-5 page, double-spaced profile of this person as a gamer. You should connect their experiences to our class readings and your own experiences with gaming.

Critical Analysis of a Video Game/Technology (20%)

A major objective of this course is for you to develop the ability to critically analyze ideas. For your final assignment, you will draw upon our class readings to critically analyze a game or technology in relation to one or more major themes of the class. Your review should include an overview description of the game and then an analysis of the theme(s) you have chosen to reflect upon critically. Your completed review should be 1000-1500 words.

- [A really simple guide to getting started](#) with your game review.
- [Game review examples](#).

Assessment Alignment Summary

Assignment Category	CL 01	CL 02	CL 03	CL 04
Class Participation	X	X	X	
Game Blog		X	X	
Game Play Observation		X	X	
Game Play Interview		X	X	
Critical Analysis of a Video Game/Technology		X	X	X

Grade Weights

Assignment Category	Points	Percent
Class Participation	30	30
Game Autobiography	10	10

Assignment Category	Points	Percent
Game Blog	20	20
Game Play Observation	10	10
Game Play Interview	10	10
Critical Analysis of a Technology	20	20
Total	100	100

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%

Course Schedule/Outline

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
Module 1		
Defining Foundational Terms (culture, technology)	**Read**: Erickson, F. (2003). Culture in Society and Educational Practices. In J.A. Banks and C.A. McGee Banks (Eds.), *Mutlicultural education: Issues and Perspectives* (pp. 32-44 – Stop reading at the "Teaching and Learning Multiculturally" heading). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.	Introduce Yourself! (discussion board)

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
	Read: Kawagley, A.O. (1995). Yupiaq cultural adaptation in the contemporary world. In, A.O. Kawagley, *A Yupiaq Worldview* (pp. 105-111).	Weekly Discussion Board Game Autobiography

Module 2

The History of Gaming	**Watch**: *Gameplay: The story of the videogame revolution* (available to rent from Vimeo or itunes) **Read**: https://www.gamedesigning.org/gaming/history/ **Read**: Schissel, S. (2020, April 2). For the uninitiated and bored, an introduction to the world of gaming. *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/arts/gaming-introduction-basics-quarantine-coronavirus.html	Weekly Discussion Board

Module 3

The Game Industry	**Read**: Entertainment Software Association. (2019). Essential facts about the computer and video game industry. **Read**: Haimberg, Y. Critical literacy: Game criticism for game developers	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog Proposal

Module 4

Games & Culture	Keogh, B. (2016). You can't ignore the cultural power of video games any longer. *The Drum.* https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-06/keogh-why-you-should-care-about-video-games/7303744 Bolter, J.D. (2019, May 7). How the videogame aesthetic flows into all of culture. *Wired*. https://www.wired.com/story/how-the-videogame-aesthetic-flows-into-all-of-culture/	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog

Module 5

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
COVID-19 & Games	Prince, D. (2020, May 27). Partying on Minecraft, in a replica of a Brooklyn club. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/style/partying-on-minecraft-in-a-replica-of-a-brooklyn-club.html Khan, I. (2020, April 7). Why Animal Crossing is the game for the coronavirus moment. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/arts/animal-crossing-covid-coronavirus-popularity-millennials.html Totilo, S. (2020, April 8). When a gaming fantasy is eerily close to reality. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/arts/plague-inc-video-game-gaming-coronavirus-covid-pandemic.html	Weekly Discussion Board (students will find and share another resource about COVID-19 and gaming) Game Blog

Module 6

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
Games & Gender 1: Masculinity & Femininity in Games	DiSalvo, B. (2016). Constructing masculinity with video games. In, Y.B. Kafai, G.T. Richard, & B.M. Tynes (Eds.), *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming* (Chapter 7). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press. Ochsner, A. (2016). Need to succeed. In, Y.B. Kafai, G.T. Richard, & B.M. Tynes (Eds.), *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming* (Chapter 10). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press. Braithwaite, A. (2018). Nancy Drew and the case of girl games. In, K.L. Gray & D.J. Leonard, *Woke Gaming* (pp. 139-154). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
Module 7		
Games & Gender 2: Gamergate	Parkin, S. (2014, October 17). Gamergate: A scandal erupts in the video-game community. *The New Yorker.* https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/gamergate-scandal-erupts-video-game-community Wu, B. (2019, August 15). I wish I could tell you it's gotten better. It hasn't. *The New York Times* https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/15/opinion/brianna-wu-gamergate.html	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog
Module 8		
Games & Gender 3: LGBTQA+	Gray, R. (2020, October 14). Spotlight on...Adrienne Shaw, LGBTQ Video Game Archive. *Gayming Magazine*. Retrieved from: https://gaymingmag.com/2020/10/spotlight-on-adrienne-shaw-lgbtq-video-game-archive/ DeLeon, P. (2020, August 3). LGBTQ+ Gamers on the need for Proper Representation in Today's Gaming World. Retrieved from: https://hypebae.com/2020/8/lgbtq-representation-in-video-games-gaming-diversity-inclusivity-ea-the-sims-bioware-dragon-age-veronica-nikatine-ripley-interview Explore the Gayming Magazine website (gaymingmag.com) (Optional) Watch Gaming in Color, available on Vimeo, itunes, and other streaming services. (https://vimeo.com/ondemand/gamingincolor)	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog
Module 9		
Games & Race	Siyahhan, S. & Gee, E. (2016). Understanding gaming and gender in the everyday lives of Mexican American family homes. In, Y.B. Kafai, G.T. Richard, & B.M. Tynes (Eds.),	Weekly Discussion Board (find a

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
	Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming (Chapter 6). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press. Parkinson, H.J. (2014, September 29). Alaska's Indigenous game Never Alone teaches co-operation through stories. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/sep/29/never-alone-alaskas-indigenous-game-never-alone-teaches-cooperation-through-stories Everett, A. & Watkins, S.C. (2008). The power of play: The portrayal of race in video games. http://www.bendevane.com/VTA2012/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Everett-Watkins-Digital-Learning-and-Race.pdf Explore: Neveralonegame.com (look at some of the game reviews)	review of a game or tv show that deals with race) Watch Someone Play A Game

Module 10

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
Games & Race: Intersectionality	Bryant, S.T. (2016). Black and female in tech. In, Y.B. Kafai, G.T. Richard, & B.M. Tynes (Eds.), *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming* (Chapter 9). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press. Richard, G.T. (2016). At the intersections of play. In, Y.B. Kafai, G.T. Richard, & B.M. Tynes (Eds.), *Diversifying Barbie and Mortal Kombat: Intersectional Perspectives and Inclusive Designs in Gaming* (Chapter 5). Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon: ETC Press. Zaveri, M., Menghistab, M.T., Beltran, G., & Celii, A. (2019, October 16). Fear, anxiety, and hope: What it means to be a minority in gaming. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/16/technology/game-developers.html	Weekly Discussion Board Game Blog

Module 11

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
Accessibility & Games	Read: Mut, C. (2019, October 8). Accessibility finally matters to the game industry – but it needs to do better. *VentureBeat.* https://venturebeat.com/2019/10/08/accessibility-finally-matters-to-the-game-industry-but-it-needs-to-do-better/ Explore: Can I play that? website	Weekly Discussion Board Interview Someone About Their Game Play

Module 12

Serious Games	**Watch**: What are serious games? **Read**: https://www.game-learn.com/all-you-need-to-know-serious-games-game-based-learning-examples/	Weekly Discussion Board Draft of Critical Analysis Due

Module 13

Activism & Games	Ament, R. (2017, July 23). Screen saviors: Can activism-focused games change our behavior? *National Public Radio.* Anderson-Barkley, T. & Foglesong, K. (2018). Activism in video games: A new voice for social change. In, K.L. Gray & D.J. Leonard, *Woke Gaming* (pp. 252-269). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.	Happy Thanksgiving!

Module 14

eSports & Class Wrap-Up	Excerpts from *Raising the Stakes* by T.L. Taylor	Weekly Discussion Board (find esports references in popular media) Peer Review of Critical Analysis Assignments

Module 15

Finals Week		Critical Analysis

Module Objectives (CO alignment)	Learning Resources (Readings/Videos/Presentations)	Activities (Discussions, Assignments, Quizzes/Exams)
		Assignment Due 12/14 by midnight

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/rc.

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 for more information.

University Policies & Procedures

COVID-19 Classroom Protocols

In order to continue to provide a high standard of instruction at USU, and to limit the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic, students are asked to follow certain classroom protocols. These protocols are in place not only for your safety but also the safety of the rest of the campus community. You will be asked to clean your desk area at the start of each class, sit in designated seats, wear face coverings, and follow dismission instructions. There may be individual medical circumstances that prevent some students from using face coverings. These circumstances will be rare, but if they do exist, we ask that everyone be respectful. It is imperative that we each do our part so that on-campus instruction can continue.

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. Faculty Code Policy #403 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:
  o Working in a group when the instructor has designated that the quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity be done "individually;"
  o Depending on the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments;
  o Substituting for another student, or permitting another student to substitute for oneself, in taking an examination or preparing academic work;
  o Acquiring tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty member, staff member, or another student without express permission;
  o Continuing to write after time has been called on a quiz, test, examination, or any other academic exercise or activity;
  o 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

Sexual Harassment/Title IX

Utah State University is committed to creating and maintaining an environment free from acts of sexual misconduct and discrimination and to fostering respect and dignity for all members of the USU community. Title IX and USU Policy 339 address sexual harassment in the workplace and academic setting.

The university responds promptly upon learning of any form of possible discrimination or sexual misconduct. Any individual may contact USU's Office of Equity for available options and resources or clarification. The university has established a complaint procedure to handle all types of discrimination complaints, including sexual harassment (USU Policy 305), and has designated the Office of Equity Director/Title IX Coordinator as the official responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of sexual harassment.

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) as early in the semester as possible (University Inn # 101, (435) 797-2444, 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 at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19 or who contract COVID-19 may also be eligible for accommodations.

Diversity Statement

Regardless of intent, careless or ill-informed remarks can be offensive and hurtful to others and detract from the learning climate. If you feel uncomfortable in a classroom due to offensive language or actions by an instructor or student(s) regarding ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, contact:

- Division of Student Affairs: https://studentaffairs.usu.edu, (435) 797-1712, studentservices@usu.edu, TSC 220

- Student Legal Services: https://ususa.usu.edu/student-association/student-advocacy/legal-services, (435) 797-2912, TSC 326,
- Access and Diversity: http://accesscenter.usu.edu, (435) 797-1728, access@usu.edu; TSC 315
- Multicultural Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/multiculture, (435) 797-1728, TSC 315
- LGBTQA Programs: http://accesscenter.usu.edu/lgbtqa, (435) 797-1728, TSC 3145
- Provost's Office Diversity Resources: https://www.usu.edu/provost/diversity, (435) 797-8176

You can learn about your student rights by visiting:
The Code of Policies and Procedures for Students at Utah State
University: https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode

Grievance Process

Students who feel they have been unfairly treated may file a grievance through the channels and procedures described in the Student Code: Article VII.

Full details for USU Academic Policies and Procedures can be found at:

- Student Conduct
- Student Code
- Academic Integrity
- USU Academic Policies and Procedures
- Academic Freedom and Professional Responsibility Policy

Emergency Procedures

In the case of a drill or real emergency, classes will be notified to evacuate the building by the sound of the fire/emergency alarm system or by a building representative. In the event of a disaster that may interfere with either notification, evacuate as the situation dictates (i.e., in an earthquake when shaking ceases or immediately when a fire is discovered). Turn off computers and take any personal items with you. Elevators should not be used; instead, use the closest stairs.

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).

Students are also encouraged to download the ["SafeUT App"](#) 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.