INSTRUCTOR | SHANE SNYDER
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OFFICE HOURS | Shatzel Hall 347 | Office Hours: Wed 2-3PM (or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

For this online only course on video game studies we will investigate how changing attitudes about identity (such as race, class, gender and nation) have transformed the video games industry, its products, and its consumer culture. We will pay special attention to video game rhetoric and representation, subversive and unconventional video games, and attitudes in online gamer communities about important changes in the games industry and American culture at large. We will focus on particular games and online gamer communities that help us to confront simple questions with complicated answers, like "What is a game?" "What is a gamer?" and "Who gets to be called a gamer?" Finally, we will look at what is now the four year old GamerGate controversy to understand ongoing problems in the games industry and consumer culture whose solutions are not entirely clear.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Games: *The Stanley Parable, The Beginner's Guide, Gone Home, Undertale,* and *Celeste* (can be purchased on Steam or, for the last three, on consoles).
- All readings will be posted to Canvas

COURSE POLICIES:

Participation:
You'll eventually find—if you haven't already—that participation is key to a productive and rewarding college career. Having the luxury of discussing issues that affect us all is a privilege, and we would do well to remember it. Having said that, some of the material in this course is bound to offend some of you, which may cause some to shut out dissenting voices. I encourage us to test opinions in an open discussion forum without fear of a backlash. As such, I ask that everybody respect their peers as we discuss occasionally divisive and galvanizing content. In other words, let's keep it productive. I will not tolerate insults or bullying during our online

interactions. In order to have meaningful discussions in class, it is absolutely vital that we learn to balance listening with speaking.

Guidelines for Writing Papers:
When writing the longer papers for the class (like the six page final project), make sure they conform to the following guidelines: they should be in **12-point font, double-spaced, written in Times New Roman, with one-inch margins on all sides**. On the top of your paper on the **left-hand side, include your name, date, and course number**. Below that, **centered, a basic title (doesn't have to be anything super fancy unless you're feeling particularly creative).**

Late Work:
I do not accept late work except in cases of emergency. Please keep in mind that all assignments are due on their designated dates. Failure to turn an assignment in the day it is due will result in a **0 grade** for that assignment.

Academic Honesty:
The BGSU student handbook defines plagiarism as "representing as one's own in any academic exercise the words or ideas of another including but not limited to quoting or paraphrasing without proper citation." A more detailed explanation of the university's academic honesty policy can be found at the following link:

https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/catalog/academic-honesty/official-policy.pdf

I take plagiarism very seriously and will check every paper for it. Please make sure your work is entirely your own. If you are unsure of whether or not you've plagiarized something in your work (it happens), don't hesitate to contact me. We will discuss.

Students with Disabilities:
If you have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible so I can arrange something.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Participation (20%):
This is a holistic score, meaning I take into account a number of factors, including whether or not you participate on time in the discussion boards, evidence (or lack thereof) that you've done the reading, evidence of improvement over the course of the semester, and the quality of your input during our online interactions.

Discussion Board Posts (20%):
Discussions are integral to any college class, online or otherwise. In order to ensure we consistently interact with each other, every Wednesday by **8PM** you will write a discussion board post answering a question or questions that I ask all of you about the games and/or readings for that week. By the end of every Thursday (also **8PM**) you should have responded to *at least* two of your classmates' posts (though you can of course do more than that). This is meant to mirror an online discussion forum, to any extent possible, so try to have fun with these. Here's all I ask:

- Your Wednesday posts should be about **200-300 words**, though they can exceed that range if you have more to say. In addition to answering my questions, feel free in your posts to ask some of your own. If a game angers you, discuss why that is. If you have a question you want me to answer, include it in your post.
- The *at least* **TWO** responses to your fellow classmates due every Thursday by 8PM should likewise substantively engage with your fellow students' ideas, so try to make your responses **100-200 words** each.
- I will frequently respond to your posts, since this is where I get to interact with you all.

Propose a Game (20%)
This is your final project. It is more or less a creative project that will amount to at least **SIX (6)** pages of writing but no more than **NINE (9)**, with each section of the project comprising at least **TWO (2)** pages of writing. Here's what I want you to do:

- First, imagine a game you'd want to create.
- Devote **2-3 pages** to describing the game's story and setting.
- Write another **2-3 pages** describing some of the mechanics and game design ideas you would implement (e.g. is it a shooter, a narrative game, does the protagonist kill, is it challenging by design, is it meant to be relaxing, etc.).
- Finally, write another **2-3 pages** of an analysis of your own creative process. During this last part, make sure to discuss how mechanics, design, story, and setting are all connected. How do the mechanics and story work together? For example, are you making a game about nonviolence, yet the main character is tasked with mowing down enemies with huge guns? Or does the game encourage your character to choose not to be violent? Who is the game's audience, and why? Who do you expect not to want to play this game? Who do you expect it to attract (e.g. women, men, trans people, people of color, all of the above, and so on)? As you write, think about the creative decisions you made and why. Consider your own point of entry into games and gaming while writing this section. For this section, use *at least **TWO (2)*** readings from the class and/or find some peer reviewed/scholarly examples of your own to inform your analysis of your own creative

process. This should be your attempt to consider yourself in relationship to the art you would make and why you would make it that way.

Keep in mind that this imaginary game can be whatever you want it to be. The main goal of this project is to get you to think about the kinds of creative decisions you might make and what the implications or outcomes of those decisions would be. In other words, there's technically no wrong answer. Have fun with it. And by the way, if you're a good visual artist, know how to use visual art programs, and want to include some of your work, contact me and we'll discuss how to implement it effectively.

Weekly Short Responses (20% collectively)

Over the course of this short six week session, you will turn in **three (3) 300-500** word (that's **1-2 page**) responses directly to me over Canvas. These responses are staggered, with one being due every other week (**weeks 1, 3, and 5**). Unlike the discussion board posts for which you answer questions I ask, you will devote these more formal responses to drawing connections between the games, readings, online communities, and/or video content for the week. Be sure to cite author(s) and texts in your response. In addition to the games, there'll be one to two readings/videos each week. You can decide whether to reference one or all of the readings/videos for the week. As this is distinctly your response, this assignment has minimal guidelines outside of the requirement that you reference reading(s) for the week. I just want to know that you're making connections between the games and other assigned material.

Public Game Review (10%):

By the end of **week 2** I will require you to **write a 500-750 word review** on a game of your choice and post it to Steam, GOG, Amazon, Reddit, or whatever online community makes you most comfortable. You will then share the link to the public review on a discussion board that I'll create for that purpose. Your review doesn't have to be on any of the games we covered in this class, but it should be something for which you can give a meaningful analysis. When writing your review, try to consider the following:

- Story and setting
- Characterization (if applicable)
- Game mechanics
- Sound and art style
- Do the mechanics make sense in relationship to the story (e.g. is the story about the importance of nonviolence, yet you're forced to murder people throughout)?
- And of course, how do you feel about it?

There's no need to turn in a Word document to me. The link to the review will suffice.

Online Gamer Community Report (10%)

At the end of **week 4** you'll turn in a **short 500-750 word (2-3 pages)** report about an online community. Maybe it's a community you frequent. Or maybe it's a community you're just

curious about. Regardless of what you choose and why, be creative about how you look at the community. For example, if you're close to the community or a member of it, try to think of how one might view the community as an outsider. Here are some suggestions for what your report might consider:

- Where is the community located? Is it a specific website or platform, a subreddit on Reddit, a private forum, Steam? Is it a YouTube or Twitch streamer? Or is it through something like Xbox Live or PS Network (i.e. are you playing online or with strangers)? Describe the site and how it's set up (e.g. Reddit has a novel upvoting and downvoting mechanism, so you would no doubt consider including mention of this in your description).
- How big is the community? Is it a small community of ten people, or are there thousands? Is the membership active?
- What does the community value? Are there specific games they love and hate? Are you finding any controversies or disagreements? What is the community currently talking about?
- Does the community take any political stances? What do they care about outside of gaming? Maybe games for them, for instance, are linked to outside cultural systems or political developments.

A Note About Written Work:
I will check for the following things in all of what you write: evidence you've done the reading, evidence you've thought through the material, and grammar. While grading, I also consider evidence of improvement over the course of the semester.

Grade Breakdown:
Participation – 20%
Discussion Posts – 20%
Propose a game – 20%
Short Responses – 20% collectively
Public Game Review – 10%
Online Community Report – 10%

Total Possible – 100%

A -90-100%: Exceptional work. Generally, getting this grade means you've gone to great lengths to think through the reading and consistently contribute provocative ideas to class discussion.

B 80-89%: Good work. You clearly followed instructions and did a serviceable job.

C-70-79%: Average. Pretty good, but you didn't engage thoroughly enough with the material and/or didn't follow instructions.

D-60-69%: Not good. You didn't follow or didn't understand the instructions and you didn't care to put in much effort.

F-59% and below: This grade is reserved for those who put in very little or no effort

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:*

Week 1 (5/14-5/18) – Player vs. Game

M-W - Play: *The Stanley Parable*

      Read: Jesper Juul – *Half Real* "Introduction"

      Watch (YouTube): "The Stanley Parable – Easter Egg – Broom Closet"; "The Stanley Parable – Secret White Board Ending" (Both links on Canvas)

Th – Watch: Lecture PPT on Canvas

F – Due: First response paper (by **12AM**)**

Week 2 (5/21-5/25) – Game Developer vs. Game Player

M-W – Play: *The Beginner's Guide*

      Read: Laura Hudson – "The Beginner's Guide Doesn't Want to be Written About" (Link on Canvas)

Th – Watch: Lecture PPT on Canvas

F – Due: Public game review (Possible options include Steam, GOG, Amazon, etc.)

Week 3 (5/28-6/1) – Queering the Narrative

M-W – Play: *Gone Home; Dys4ia* (Link on Canvas)

      Read: Merrit Kopas – "On Gone Home" in *Queer Game Studies;* Adrienne Shaw "Introduction" in *Gaming at the Edge*

      Visit: Look at reviews of *Gone Home* on Steam and GOG (instructions on Canvas)

Th – Watch: Lecture PPT on Canvas

F – Due: Second Response Paper

Week 4 (6/4-6/8) – Mechanics, Storytelling, and (Non)Violence/Online Gaming Communities Part 1

M-W – Play: *Undertale; September 12* (Only works with Firefox browser. Link on Canvas)

Read: Ian Bogost – *"The Rhetoric of Video Games"*

Watch (on YouTube): First couple minutes (or more, if you want) of "*Gears of War Walkthrough Part 1 No Commentary Playthrough*" (Link on Canvas)

Visit: the following subreddits /r/Games, /r/Gaming, /r/GamerGhazi, /r/KotakuInAction (instructions on Canvas)

Th – Watch: Lecture PPT on Canvas

F – Due: Online Gaming Community Report

Week 5 (6/11-6/15) – Challenging Games/Online Gaming Communities Part 2

M-W (6/11-6/13) – Play: *Celeste; Depression Quest*

Read: Zoe Quinn – *Crash Override,* Chapter 1 (Optional: Also read short introduction); Adrienne Shaw and Shira Chess "A Conspiracy of Fishes, or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying About #GamerGate and Embrace Hegemonic Masculinity"

Look Through: the Know Your Meme page for #NotYourShield (Link on Canvas)

Watch (YouTube): Ian Bogost – "Fun" (Link on Canvas)

Th – Watch: Lecture PPT on Canvas

F – Due: Final response paper

Week 6 (6/18-6/22) – Online Gamer Communities Part 3

M-W - Read: Adrienne Shaw – "On Not Becoming Gamers" in *Ada New Media* (Link on Canvas); Adrienne Massanari "#GamerGate and the Fappening: How Reddit's Algorithm, Governance, and Culture Support Toxic Technocultures"; Keith Stuart – "Gamer Communities: The Positive Side" in *The Guardian*

Th – Watch: Final PPT Lecture

F – Due: Final Project – Propose a game

Note: I reserve the right to change aspects of this schedule if it becomes necessary

All Friday assignments are due by 12AM