

English 2090: Video Games as Storytelling

Instructor: Lis Moberly

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Digital Office Hours: Thursday and Friday, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. MST

Textbooks

Foster, Thomas C.

How to Read Literature Like a Professor, Revised Edition

- ISBN 978-0-062-69685-4 (hardcover)
- ISBN 978-0-062-30167-3 (paperback)
- ISBN 978-0-062-34420-5 (ebook)

Tremblay, Kaitlin.

Collaborative Worldbuilding for Video Games

- ISBN 978-1-032-38558-7 (hardcover)
- ISBN 978-1-032-38554-9 (paperback)
- ISBN 978-1-003-34561-9 (ebook)

*****Note on Buying Textbooks:** Inclusive Access is available for both books. *Collaborative Worldbuilding for Video Games* can be digitally accessed for free through the Marriott Library. are not required to use Inclusive Access or digital copies through the Marriot Library, but if that is the case you will need to obtain physical copies, which can be purchased at the Campus Bookstore or online. Please make sure your textbooks match the editions listed above. Please obtain your books within the first week of class.

Games

Florence

Venba

Papers, Please

What Remains of Edith Finch

The Rise of the Golden Idol

Inscription

Pentiment

Outer Wilds

Hades

*****Note on Buying Games:** On Canvas there will be list of these games, where they're available, and the best ways of accessing them. **Please read it before purchasing games you do not already own.**

Course Description

Per the University of Utah catalog, English 2090 explores the interplay between game and story in videogame media. Students will play and analyze videogames, specifically those with strong

narratives, and engage with broader literary/theoretical issues in videogame studies. Texts include videogames, films, fiction, and critical/theoretical resources.

Course Outcomes

Upon successful completion of English 2090, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a solid understanding of a wide range of ideas, questions, and concepts surrounding the topic of video game storytelling.
- Demonstrate their abilities to think critically using written academic argument, inquiry, analysis, critique, evaluation, and evidence.
- Analyze and interpret the texts by applying the concepts, questions, and theoretical paradigms discussed in class and in the assigned readings.
- Formulate illuminating and persuasive claims in their writing and exam responses. These ideas should reflect a solid internalization of the course material.
- Use textual evidence (via quotation, analysis, and documentation of pertinent passages) to ground their arguments and back up their claims.
- Express their ideas in clear, logical, organized, concise, and persuasive ways, in both written and oral forms.
- Analyze video game media to question the effects of such games on themselves as players as a part of life-long learning.

Course Requirements

Because this is a 3-unit course, this online course will require anywhere from 10-15 hours of work a week if you include listening and reading all lectures, writing assignments, and discussion participation. Please plan accordingly.

Here is are the following categories of assignments:

Response Papers: 37% of final grade

Once a week you will be required to write a one-page response paper to the assigned game and the accompanying reading material. These are due every Monday by 11:00 a.m.

Essay Assignments: 24% of final grade

Your final paper of the semester will be a comprehensive literary game analysis of one of the games we'll cover in the course. There are three units in this class: Design, Narrative, and World. At the end of each unit, you will write an analysis from that unit that will be included in your final paper if you so wish so you're not caught writing it from scratch at the end of the semester and have plenty of time to get my feedback.

Discussion Threads: 48% of final grade

Each Tuesday and Thursday online Discussion forums will take place on Canvas. Regular and meaningful participation is required. Because this class does not meet in a traditional classroom, it requires your active and consistent participation through online discussions.

There are two types of online discussions in this class:

- Lecture Discussions: There are two types of lecture discussions:

- Game Concept Discussion: These discussions require students to engage with a lecture on a game concept.
- Literary Concept Discussion: These discussions require students to engage with a lecture on a literary concept.
- Critical Discussions: Critical discussions require students to respond to their personal playthroughs of the game assigned that week.

Some items of note about Discussion forums:

- Each week there are four discussions: two lecture discussions, and two critical discussions.
- Each discussion is required.
- Each discussion thread will be open for a week.
- Each discussion is worth ten points:
 - Six points for your post.
 - Four points for replying to two classmates (2 points per classmate reply).

Conferences: 1% of final grade

I will hold one-on-one conferences with each student two times throughout the course. This is required. Extra conferencing is always available with me upon request.

Extra Credit

There will be occasions over the semester where I'll invite a developer to come answer questions from the class about the game they worked on or about how they view storytelling. Each Q&A session is worth thirty points and requires a 1 ½ page response. Attendance is not mandatory. If you cannot make the live Q&A session it will be recorded for the class to watch.

Classroom Dynamics

This is a class that is meant to challenge your thinking about video games and storytelling. It is also a small community. As with any community, there are those we do and do not get along with. There will be disagreement at times, along with vibrant discussion about art, storytelling, literature, and games. As such, you will encounter opinions and attitudes you won't always find agreeable or familiar. Please maintain a steady respect for others' opinions, but feel free to express your own thoughts, as long as they have the goal of contributing to the conversation in a way that is meaningful and expands the discussion. If anything discussed in class provokes questions, that is a good thing. If you personally have trouble processing the vein of a conversation you're participating in during the course, please come speak with me and we will set up a time to talk about it.

Racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, or ableist language is not tolerated in my classroom, in-person or online.

******Note on Sensitive, Potentially Offensive and Upsetting Material:***

I quote my fellow professor, Dr. Alf Seegert, who originally taught this course:

“Video games are a form of art. Art provokes, and often disturbs. Moreover, scholarly

engagement with literary, theoretical, and other cultural texts (which might include mature video games and irreverent game reviewers who freely use obscenity) often involves encountering material from outside an individual's philosophical, religious, political, or personal comfort zones. Please be advised that this course may contain such material. Such material may include – but is not limited to – obscenity, profanity, representations of sexuality, violence, religion, anti-religion, politics, encounters with controversial issues in the media, etc.”

If you feel like any of the course content will be of concern to you – most especially if there are specific psychological triggers – you must email me immediately after the first class session.

Participation

Interacting in the classroom is a huge part of your grade and it will be impossible to pass this class if you don't engage with the people and material you are working with. Posting and replying in discussion threads are vital components of this class. Additionally, you will be conferencing with me throughout the semester. Conferencing is required and if you miss your time slot, it counts against your participation score.

Final Grade Distribution

A = 100-94% A- = 93.9-90%
B+ = 89.9-87% B = 86.9-84% B- = 83.9-80%
C+ = 79.9-77% C = 76.9-74% C- = 73.9-70%
D+ = 69.9-67% D = 66.9-64% D- = 63.9- 60%
E = 59.9% and below

Grading Policy

I do my utmost to return large papers two weeks after the due date. For response papers please expect an endnote. For essay submissions expect in-line comments and endnotes. Please come to me if any confusion results from these comments. I read your papers twice over before I assign a grade and I take my time with each paper to make sure I've considered every aspect of your work. You are not graded on a curve, but according to what was laid out in the rubric and writing prompt you received for the assignment. For smaller assignments, depending on the nature of the paper or project, I follow the same principles. I will not release your grade unless you have submitted the electronic copy of the assignment as detailed in the online description.

At the end of the semester, I drop the two lowest Response scores from your grade.

Submission Deadlines

- All work should be submitted by 11:59 P.M. on the posted due date.
- For response assignments and discussions, I allow late submissions to be made for up to a week after the due date but 50% of the total score will be deducted from the assignment.
- All assignments and lectures are available to view three weeks beforehand in case you need to plan ahead.

- The only exceptions for late work are for absences due to circumstances such as sudden illness, injury, family emergency, etc. Please message me as soon as is reasonably safe and calm for you to do so.

Communication Policies

Office Hours:

- Thursday and Friday, 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. MST

If you wish to consult with me during office hours, please email me directly and I'll send you a link to a shared Zoom call.

I work very hard to respond to emails in a timely manner within these time frames:

- 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. MST Monday through Thursday
- 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. MST Friday
- Unavailable from 3 p.m. Friday to 9 a.m. Monday MST

Emails sent outside of these time frames will be responded to on the following day during the weekday or on Monday if it's sent on the weekend.

Style, Documentation, and Citation

For all papers and assignments, please format with:

- 1" margins
- Times New Roman
- Double-spaced
- 12 pt. font
- [MLA formatting](#)

These requirements may change based on the rhetorical nature of a specific assignment and that those alterations will be clearly explained on those assignments' instructions.

Style, Documentation, and Citation

The use of generative AI is not permitted in my class for any reason. Do not use it for brainstorming, grammar, spelling, punctuation checks, or for writing any portion of your essays, responses, or discussion threads. If you use AI regularly as a translation tool please come and speak to me during the first week of class.

If the use of AI is found in an assignment submitted in my class it will result in an automatic failing grade for the assignment and it will be sent to the English Department for review. If deemed necessary, the English Department make take further disciplinary action with the university.

Department Policies

Diversity and Mutual Respect

Literature, film, and video games help us to imagine the lives of others and to broaden our perspectives. How we talk about them together is part of that process. Our diverse identities and experiences will inform and enhance those discussions. As we tackle sometimes difficult topics, each member of the class is expected to foster a respectful, generous, and supportive classroom environment that makes room for productive difference and reasoned debate.

Incompletes

The English Department offers Incompletes only under extraordinary circumstances.

Course Withdrawals

See this semester's *Class Schedule* for deadlines and procedures.

AI

Official Department Statement

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: [Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct](#).

If you are having trouble with this course, please talk to me before resorting to AI or plagiarism of any form. I am always happy to work with any student and find a way to make the course work as long as they are acting in good faith with transparency and honesty.

University Policies

Students with Disabilities (ADA)

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the [Center for Disability and Access](#). The CDA will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability & Access. To read the full accommodations policy for the University of Utah, please see Section Q.

Safety at the U

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more safety information and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu.

To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, contact:

Campus Police & Department of Public Safety

801-585-COPS (801-585-2677)

dps.utah.edu

1735 E. S. Campus Dr.

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Addressing Student Misconduct

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status, or genetic information.

If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to university officials:

Title IX Coordinator & Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

801-581-8365

oeo.utah.edu

135 Park Building

201 Presidents' Cir.

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Office of the Dean of Students

801-581-7066

deanofstudents.utah.edu

270 Union Building

200 S. Central Campus Dr.

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

To file a police report, contact:

Campus Police & Department of Public Safety

801-585-COPS (801-585-2677)

dps.utah.edu

1735 E. S. Campus Dr.

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

If you do not feel comfortable reporting to authorities, the U's Victim-Survivor Advocates provide free, confidential, and trauma-informed support services to students, faculty, and staff who have experienced interpersonal violence.

To privately explore options and resources available to you with an advocate, contact:

Center for Campus Wellness

801-581-7776

wellness.utah.edu

350 Student Services Building

201 S. 1460 E.

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Academic Misconduct

It is expected that students comply with University of Utah policies regarding academic honesty, including but not limited to refraining from cheating, plagiarizing, misrepresenting one's work, and/or inappropriately collaborating. This includes the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools without citation, documentation, or authorization. Students are expected to adhere to the prescribed professional and ethical standards of the profession/discipline for which they are preparing. Any student who engages in academic dishonesty or who violates the professional and ethical standards for their profession/discipline may be subject to academic sanctions as per the University of Utah's Student Code: [Policy 6-410: Student Academic Performance, Academic Conduct, and Professional and Ethical Conduct](#).

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on an individual assignment, and/or failure in the course. Academic misconduct, according to the University of Utah Student Code:

"...Includes, but is not limited to, cheating, misrepresenting one's work, inappropriately collaborating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification of information...It also includes facilitating academic misconduct by intentionally helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic misconduct."

For details on plagiarism and other important course conduct issues, see the U's [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Further Resources

Writing Lab

The University Writing Center provides a space where students of all disciplines may further their understanding of writing principles and enhance their writing skills. This is primarily achieved through one-on-one tutorials focused on specific writing assignments and tailored to the individual student's needs.

<https://writingcenter.utah.edu/>

1-801-587-9122

Basic Needs

If you need assistance with any basic needs – food, emotional support, childcare, transportation, etc. – see here for helpful resources: <https://basicneeds.utah.edu>

English 2090: Spring 2025 Schedule

Jan 6-12: Intro Week/Games as Storytelling

Game: Florence and Venba

Due: 12 January 2025

Jan 13-19: Genre and Immersion

Game: Papers, Please

Due: 20 January 2025

Jan 20-26: The Player

Games: What Remains of Edith Finch, Optional: Begin The Rise of the Golden Idol

Due: 26 January 2025

Jan 27-Feb 2: How a Game Works, Part 1

Game: The Rise of the Golden Idol

Due: 2 February 2025

Feb 3-9: How a Game Works, Part 2

Game: Inscryption

Due: 9 February 2025

Feb 10-16: Art

Game: Inscryption

Due: 16 February 2025

Feb 17-23: Audio

Game: Pentiment, Act I

Due: 23 February 2025

Feb 24-Mar 2: The Journey

Game: Pentiment, Act II

Due: 2 March 2025

Mar 3-9: Story

Game: Pentiment, Act III

Due: 9 March 2025

Mar 10-16: Spring Break

Mar 17-23: Discovery and Dialogue

Game: Outer Wilds

Due: 23 March 2025

Mar 24-30: Characters
Game: Outer Wilds
Due: 30 March 2025

Mar 31-Apr 6: Level Design
Game: Outer Wilds
Due: 6 April 2025

Apr 7-13: UI and Combat
Game: Hades
Due: 13 April 2025

Apr 14-20: Reflection
Games: Hades
Due: 20 April 2025

Apr 21-27: Last Day of Class/Finals

Apr 28-30: Finals
FINAL DUE: 29 April 2025

Please keep the following Fall 2024 University Calendar dates in mind:

EVENT	DATE
Classes begin	Monday, January 6
Last day to add without a permission code	Friday, January 10
Last day to waitlist	Friday, January 10
Last day to add, drop (delete), elect CR/NC, or audit classes	Friday, January 17
Tuition payment due	Friday, January 17
Last day to withdraw from classes	Friday, February 28
Last day to reverse CR/NC option	Friday, April 18
Classes end	Tuesday, April 22
Reading day	Wednesday, April 23
Final Exam period	Thursday, April 24–Wednesday, April 30
Grades Due	Monday, May 12

Here are holidays. I will be sure not to have any due dates fall on these holidays.

HOLIDAY	DATE
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Monday, January 2
President's Day	Monday, February 17
Spring Break	Sunday, March 9–16

