Anthropology 140: Games and Society
— COURSE SYLLABUS [DRAFT]—

Section 001, Spring 2020

FACE-TO-FACE COURSE

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30 pm – 4:45 pm
CLASS LOCATION: Mitchell 191
INSTRUCTOR: Thomas Malaby (he/him/his)
          Office: Sabin 325       Office Hours: Wed, 1:30-3 pm
          Email: malaby@uwm.edu       Phone: 414-229-4175

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as an introduction to the place of games in human society. With the games industry now vast (its more than $130 billion in annual revenue makes it approximately equal to the film industry), its power to command the daily attention of increasing number of human beings worldwide is undeniable. To understand where that power comes from, and what is it doing, this course examines several facets of this phenomenon, including: the anthropological foundations of why human beings play, what makes games distinctive as an arena for playfulness, to what extent games are used by human institutions to accomplish certain goals, and how games reflect and engage with other meaningful aspects of human life.

To do this, the course approaches games themselves as artifacts – that is, as things that people make. But, importantly, they are not simply designed and built – in a way, they are performed. That is, games (like music, or theatre), exist only as they are played, and this means, among other things, that they are always at least potentially in the process of changing, much like NBA basketball changed in the 1970s when certain players took it “above the rim.” This processual nature of games creates real challenges for our efforts to interpret and understand them, as we must always keep in view the changing human practices and meanings they generate.

In order to introduce you to how scholars in the social sciences are tackling this challenge, this course is structured to ask four questions about games: **What** is a game? **Why** do we play them? **Where** do games take place, under what kinds of institutional control? **Who** are “gamers,” and how does exploring that rather new social category open up broader questions about identity, privilege, and meaning? These questions serve to organize our introduction, and consider in a broader way how to make sense of games’ increasing economic and social power. We may better understand the power of games, this course suggests, by recognizing that they are a meeting point of several phenomena, including: (1) the human propensity both to notice patterns and to seek to influence them through our own actions, (2) the potential to find in any outcome of a game something meaningful, and (3) the usefulness of games for human institutions (governments, businesses, families, schools) in their capacity to incent and direct human behavior.

At the end of this course, you should have gained a broader understanding of why games command human attention and for what purposes they can be used, as well as to what extent they are sites for
potent contests not only over who wins and loses, but even over meaningful identities and social action.

This class will be taught in lecture format, combined with some periods of discussion, media viewing, and other less formal engagement, including playing select games in small groups.

COURSE GOALS

After completing this course, a successful student will be able to:

• Understand basic anthropological theories of play and human attention
• Discuss games from a scholarly, critical perspective (as opposed to the perspective of a player or a fan), both orally and in writing
• Recognize the relationships between games and the institutions that sponsor or create them, and
• Examine claims about identity and meaning as they relate to games, including claims about skill, achievement, fair play, and inclusion, among others.

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course. Having played games (online or offline!) will be helpful background.

COURSE TEXTS & TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Readings for this course will all be available online on Canvas (or sent out over email); there is no cost for these readings. If you have any problems accessing the course readings, let me know as soon as possible. Apart from online access to our Canvas site, including for these materials, there are no technology requirements for this course.

STUDENT EFFORT

This class meets twice weekly for 75 minutes, for a total of 37.5 hours of required lecture time. You should expect to take at least 60 hours over the course of the semester reading the textbook and other required texts. There are also 3 out-of-class assignments which you should expect to require at least 12 hours each. You should reserve at least 13.5 hours to study for and take the final exam. All told, this class is likely to take at least 147 hours of your time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Component</th>
<th>Required Time in Hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Readings/Viewings</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class Assignments</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam &amp; Prep</td>
<td>13.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
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Important: These estimates are each the minimum for an average student. You may need to spend more time developing your academic skills and knowledge in this field to achieve your goals.
COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The grading scale and assignment percentages tables below provide at-a-glance information on how your work will be assessed and each component’s contribution to your final grade. Be sure to read the subsequent description of each carefully.

### Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94.0 – 100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.0 – 93.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87.0 – 89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>84.0 – 86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.0 – 83.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77.0 – 79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74.0 – 76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.0 – 73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67.0 – 69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>64.0 – 66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60.0 – 63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt; 60.0</td>
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</table>

### Assignment Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-class Writing</td>
<td>25% (5% x 5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Essay 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Essay 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Essay 3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Reading & Other Media

For each course meeting you are expected to have read, viewed, played, and/or listened to the assigned reading or other media, available on or through Canvas. In written pages, your average assigned reading per week is approximately 50 pages. Attend to this material thoroughly and critically, taking notes and preparing any questions or comments you may have. While this preparation is not graded directly, you will periodically be asked to complete in-class writing exercises (see below) based on your knowledge of this course material.

### In-Class Writing

At six of our class meetings over the course of the semester, without prior notification, you will be asked to complete a brief, hand-written in-class assignment, responding to some aspects of the course material (reading or other media, see above) for that day. These exercises will not be difficult – they are intended to ensure that everyone is prepared for the day’s lecture and/or discussion; because of this, they will be graded on a simple check system. These assignments cannot be made up. I will drop one of these assignments when calculating their contribution to your final grade. [5% of final grade per assignment, 25% total.]
Critical Essays (3)

Students will write three papers in this class, each responding to some aspect of our explorations of games and their relationship to society. More details about specific essays will be made available in class.

1. **Games and Play**: Summarize in your own words how different scholars we have read make sense of play and being human. [Due Week 6]

2. **Games as Artifacts**: Consider one game with which you are familiar and write a paper that considers the game’s structure as a product of design and/or tradition. [Due Week 9]

3. **Games and Context**: Pick one game, beyond those discussed in the course material, and discuss how it connects to institutions in and around it. [Due Week 12]

Each essay should be around 800 words in length. Use a standard, business-like font, size 10 or 12 pt. At the top of the paper, be sure to include your name and page number. Including a title for the essay is optional (but recommended!). You may include any images you deem necessary.

Your essay should not have footnotes or a references section. If you quote one of the readings, use the format (Turkle 1995) to cite it in text. If you refer to another work (which is not required but is welcome), cite it in text using a format similar to (Ross, J., 2011, “Secrets of citing references”, Journal of Made-Up Papers).

All essays are due at **12 midnight** on the specified date. Essays should be uploaded to the appropriate Canvas drop box in .pdf format. [15% of your final grade per essay, 45% total.]

**Final Exam**

Your last assignment for the class will be a final exam. The format will be a mix of identifications, short answers, and an essay. In the final week of class one course meeting will be devoted to a review in preparation for the final exam. [30% of your final grade.]

**COURSE POLICIES**

**No Griefing**

This class may involve in-class, or online, discussion of topics on which you and your classmates may have differences in opinion. Please be respectful of others at all times. Although we are interested in seeking out assumptions and flaws in arguments, we are also all here to help each other learn.

**Discussion Etiquette**

Some of class will be spent talking about games and practicing analyzing them as a group. As students in this class, you are responsible for participating in these discussions—for sharing your ideas, experiences, and views with the rest of us. At the same time, allow other students to contribute as well, and be willing to consider alternate points of view.
Email Etiquette

When emailing me, please try to use proper grammar and make sure to sign your emails. This will help me to better answer any questions. Also include “Anthro 140” in the subject line to make sure I see your email!

Course Announcements

I may send out course announcements by email to the official course mailing list, so you should check your email daily. Note that this mailing list goes to the email address that the registrar has for you (your UWM ID).

Attendance

Attendance in class is mandatory – you will get the most out of in-class discussions, and the lectures will contain material not otherwise covered in course readings. While attendance will not be taken, the in-class assignments are unscheduled, and as a consequence your mandatory attendance is checked by the possibility of missing an in-class assignment.

Technology In Class

Please turn off all cell phones/pagers/etc. before the beginning of each class. No computers or other digital devices may be used for any purpose in class, even for taking notes, without special permission granted by the instructor, based on certification from the student accessibility office.

Late Work

Essays turned in late will lose one full letter grade for every day past the deadline. Papers will not be accepted more than 3 days after the original deadline.

UWM Policies

Please note that the Dept. of Anthropology subscribes to UWM's Uniform Syllabus Policy regarding student rights and responsibilities. The complete Uniform Syllabus Policy may be accessed online at the following url: www.uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/SyllabusLinks.pdf. Cheating or plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you are not sure what constitutes either, refer to plagiarism.org's helpful website: https://www.plagiarism.org/understanding-plagiarism. The simple rule is: do not claim anyone else’s words or ideas as your own. If you’re in doubt, come talk to me in advance.

Special Accommodations

Any student who feels he or she needs an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Student Accessibility Office as soon as possible for support, and also contact me privately to discuss specific needs.

I encourage all students having difficulty, whether or not due to a disability, to consult privately with me at any time.
COURSE SCHEDULE
(Note: In-class writing assignments [see above] are unannounced.)

– Introduction –

Week 1 – The Tutorial
Tuesday Lecture: Course Overview & Expectations
Assignments: Syllabus and Canvas Course Information Documents
Thursday Lecture: Games and Us
Assignments: Geertz

– Unit I: Why Do We Play? –

Week 2 – Create Your Character
Tuesday Lecture: Human and Animal Play
Assignments: Lorenz
Thursday Lecture: Play & Human Development
Assignments: Parrott & Gleitman

Week 3 – Leveling Up
Tuesday Lecture: Attention & Learning
Assignments: Csikzentmihalyi & Bennett
Thursday Lecture: Puzzles & Problems
Assignments: Chin

Week 4 – Choose Your Own Adventure
Tuesday Lecture: Make it Up as You Go Along: Contriving Play
Assignments: Miller
Thursday Lecture: Playing Culture
Assignments: Malaby – “Anthropology and Play,” 1st Essay Assigned

– Unit II: What’s in a Game? –

Week 5 – Not All Fun & …
Tuesday Lecture: Ante Up: Games Beyond Play
Assignments: Malaby – “Beyond Play”
Thursday Lecture: Sh*t Happens: Life & Contingencies
Assignments:  Steinmüller

**Week 6 – The Unruliness of Games**

- *Essay #1 Due Sunday by Midnight*
  
  **Tuesday Lecture:** Throwing out the Rulebook: Constraints & Governance
  **Assignments:** Dibbell, Selection 1
  **Thursday Lecture:** Went to a Fight, and a Hockey Game Broke Out: Game and Ritual
  **Assignments:** Consalvo, Selection 1

**Week 7 – Your Game or Theirs?**

- **Tuesday Lecture:** According to Hoyle: Games Inherited
  **Assignments:** Taylor – *Watch Me Play*, Selection 1
  **Thursday Lecture:** Licensed Disagreement: Games Designed
  **Assignments:** Taylor – *Watch Me Play*, Selection 2, 2nd Essay Assigned

  -- Unit III: Where Are We Gaming? --

**Week 8 – Power Up**

- **Tuesday Lecture:** Culturally Charged, Part 1: Contested Meaning
  **Assignments:** Oxfeld
  **Thursday Lecture:** Culturally Charged, Part 2: Intimate Influence
  **Assignments:** Festa

**Week 9 – World Champions**

- *Essay #2 Due Sunday by Midnight*
  
  **Tuesday Lecture:** Games and Nation-States, Part 1: Olympian Achievements
  **Assignments:** 16 Days of Glory (film), Part 1
  **Thursday Lecture:** Games and Nation-States, Part 2: Civics Lessons
  **Assignments:** 16 Days of Glory (film), Part 2

**Week 10 – Just a Game**

- **Tuesday Lecture:** House Rules, Part 1: Sandboxes & Playhouses
  **Assignments:** Taylor – *Play Between Worlds*, Selection 1
  **Thursday Lecture:** House Rules, Part 2: Institutions & Labor
  **Assignments:** Taylor – *Play Between Worlds*, Selection 2, 3rd Essay Assigned
Unit IV: Who Games?

Week 11 – Making a Gamer

Tuesday Lecture: Identity & Games Before the Digital
Assignments: Reading or Media Viewing TBD

Thursday Lecture: Mediated Selves in Play
Assignments: Chee

Week 12 – Multiplayer

– Essay #3 Due Sunday by Midnight –
Tuesday Lecture: Disruptive Play: Cheating the System
Assignments: Consalvo, Selection 2

Thursday Lecture: Regulating Play: GamerGate as Symptom
Assignments: Shaw

Week 13 – Outplaying

Tuesday Lecture: Contest in the Making: Queering Game Production
Assignments: Anthropy

Thursday Lecture: Engines of Meaning: Games and Context
Assignments: Ruberg

Conclusion

Week 14 – Conclusion

Tuesday Lecture: Press W
Assignments: Review Lecture Notes, Prepare Questions

Thursday Lecture: Review Lecture for Final Exam
Assignments: Review Lecture Notes

Final Exam Date & Time: May XXth, X:XX-X:XX Location: TBA
**READING & VIEWING LIST**


