

Syllabus: Concepts in Computer Games COM265

Course Meets: M 11-12:15a, and W 9:30-10:45a – LT 209

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Course overview: This course examines the emergence and development of the computer game as a major force in the modern communications environment. The course will focus on diverse areas including the history and sociology of computer games, technical aspects of game design and production, and business aspects of computer game industry.

Learning Outcomes: In this course, students will:

1. Learn the history of computer games and the computer/video game industry.
2. Become familiar with diverse genres of computer/video games.
3. Become familiar with the workings of the computer/video game industry.
4. Become familiar with the main social issues arising out of computer/video games.
5. Become conversant with the debates surrounding computer/video games.
6. Apply media and communication theories to computer/video game production and use.
7. Develop critical skills in evaluating computer/video game design and content.
8. Develop technical skills involved in computer/video game design and content.

Schedule (by week):

1. Pre-computer Games
 - Why do we play games?
 - Games and humankind
 - Computers and games
2. History of Computer Games
 - Landmarks
 - Video games as Communication
 - Video games as Art/Drama
3. Evaluating the Game
 - Concept
 - Content
 - Design
 - Interface
 - User experience
4. Narratives and Filmic Technique
 - The Story
 - The non-linear experience
 - Conflict and characters
 - Mythology, The Quest, The Hero
5. Genres
6. Interactivity
7. Pre-production

- . Concept
 - . Script/Storyboard
 - . Programming and Languages
 - . Engines
8. Production
 - . 2D graphics
 - . 3D graphics
 - . Music
 - . Actors
 - . Motion capture
 - . Visual Effects
 - . Sound editing and effects
 9. Testing and Rollout
 10. Hardware, Operating systems and Software, Media and platforms
 - . PC vs. Nintendo/SNES vs. PS/2 vs. X-Box vs. PSP vs. cell phones vs. ...
 11. Industry
 - . Statistics
 - . Development
 - . Production
 - . Distribution
 - . Jobs
 - . Independent development
 12. Group Game development begins
 13. Social Issues I
 14. Social Issues II
 15. Final Group Presentation and game rollout

Readings (will change, check back on course shell often)

Weeks 1-3

<http://www.geekcomix.com/vgh/main.shtml>

Bushnell, N. (1996). Relationships between fun and the computer business *Communications of the ACM*, 39, 8, p. 31.

Cuneo, A. Z. & Elkin, T. (2003). Fall video-game launches court shifting demographic. *Advertising Age*, 74, 35, p4.

Jayakanthan, R. (2002). Application of computer games in the field of education. *The Electronic Library*, 20, 2, p. 98.

Richard Re. (2001). From Playstation to detonation. *Harvard International Review*, 23, 1, p.30.

Weeks 4-5

Charles, F., Mead, S. J, & Cavazza, M. (2002). From computer games to interactive stories: Interactive storytelling *The Electronic Library*, 20, 2, p.103

Rosenbloom, Andrew (2000). Physically based computer animation, *Communications of the ACM*, 43, 7, p. 30.

Weeks 6-7

Flynn, R. J. & Tetzlaff, W. H. (1998). Multimedia--An introduction, *IBM Journal of Research and Development*, 42, 2, p. 165.

Weeks 8-11

Dixon, G. & Karboulonis, P. (1999). Global marketing of leisure software: a case study of Asian countries, *International Marketing Review*, 16, 4/5, p. 299.

Weeks 12-13

Beasley, B & Standley, T C (2002). Shirts vs. Skins: Clothing as an Indicator of Gender Role Stereotyping in Video Games. *Mass Communication & Society*; 5, 3, p279.

Linnett, R. & Halliday, J. (2003). Jeep taps 'Lara Croft' as its spokeswoman. *Advertising Age* 74,12, p.4.

Smith, S, Lachlan, K. & Tamborini, R. (2003). Popular video games: Quantifying the presentation of violence and its context, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 47,1, p. 58.

McDonald, D. G. & Kim, H. (2001). When I die, I feel small: Electronic game characters and the social self. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45, 2, p. 241.

Assessment

1. Your Game (10%)

- a. Outcomes: The student will develop critical skills needed to assess design and content of computer-based games.
- b. Assessment: Bring in a game of your choice, detail its history and evaluate various aspects of the game. Points will be awarded for: Use of class material 5, Exposition 5.
- c. Connection with Goals: The assignment relates to the Communication and the Arts Program mission with a focus on application of theory to the hands-on practice of communication and to the department goals that students graduating from the program should be able to speak and write effectively
- d. Connection with Learning Objectives: Develop critical skills in evaluating computer game design and content.

2. Game-on (20%)

- a. Outcomes: The student will develop conceptual and creative skills needed to design and produce computer video games.
- b. Assessment: Conceive and Design a proposed interactive computer game. Points will be awarded for: Concept 5, Content 5, Design 5, Usability 5.
- c. Connection with Goals: The assignment relates to the Communication and the Arts Program mission with a focus on application of theory to the hands-on practice of communication and to the department goals that students graduating from the program should be able to speak and write effectively
- d. Connection with Learning Objectives: This item will evaluate the extent to which the student has fulfilled learning objectives 6 through 8.

3. Blog entries (10%)

- a. Outcome: Students will demonstrate knowledge of various aspects of the computer game, its history and industry.
- b. Assessment: blog/journal entries
- c. Connection with Goals: This item relates to the college's goal of cultivation of a free and enlightened mind through the discipline of scholarly study and dialogue.
- d. Connection with Learning Objectives: This item will evaluate the extent to which the student has fulfilled learning objectives 1 through 4.

4. Mid-term Presentation and five page paper (20%)
 - a. Outcome: The student will demonstrate knowledge of details of material covered through
 - b. Assessment: A mid-term exam administered in regular class time and covering all class material from preceding classes.
 - c. Connection with Goals: This item relates to the college's goal of cultivation of a free and enlightened mind through the discipline of scholarly study and dialogue.
 - d. Connection with Learning Objectives: This item will evaluate the extent to which the student has fulfilled the following learning objectives 1 through 8.
5. Group Presentation of Proposed Computer Game and Prototype (30%)
 - a. Outcomes: Students will demonstrate the ability to apply class material and instruction to designing and producing a rudimentary computer game, to be presented to the class by website through various media types.
 - b. Assessment: Students (working in groups) will design and produce a fully functional computer based game.
 - c. Connection with Goals: This main project is grounded in the college-wide mission of career preparation and for entry into the world of work. The project relates to the Communication and the Arts Program mission with a focus on: application of theory to the hands-on practice of communication and competency in critical thinking and problem solving
 - d. Connection with Learning Objectives: This item will evaluate the extent to which the student has fulfilled learning objectives 2, 6, 7 & 8.

Attendance

There will be no re-sits of the mid-term or final presentations except for medical or college-validated absences with documentation. Both the mid-term and final presentations require your physical presence. Students will be expected to attend all sessions and hand in all assignments on time. Absence or failure to hand in assignments will be excused only with acceptable documentation from a medical practitioner, Marist College official, or other legitimate authority.

Content and Copyright

Wherever possible, students are urged to develop original content. This includes artwork, photography, video and music. Under no circumstances will the instructor condone republishing of copyright material on the web or elsewhere, unless intention is clearly articulated through other theory and purpose. Students choosing to appropriate multimedia content from any other source must obtain written permission from the relevant copyright owner.

Grading

In accordance with college guidelines, the fulfillment of all basic requirements in a course or project results in the grade of C, above average performance results in the grade of B and exceptional work results in the grade of A.