

# ENGL 4008/4271/5008/5271-090 & WGST 4050/5050-090

## Video Games & American Culture

Spring 2022

Dr. Aaron A. Toscano Office: Fretwell 280F <a href="https://pages.charlotte.edu/aaron-toscano/">https://pages.charlotte.edu/aaron-toscano/</a>	Class: Fretwell 210, Thursdays (R) 6:00 pm - 8:45 pm Office hours: Tues. & Thurs. 4:00 – 5:00 pm (and by appt.) Virtual office hours can be scheduled as well
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### Course Description

Video games, like all entertainment, fulfill a demand for fun, leisure, and escape. These entertaining texts reflect Americans' collective interests and prevailing ideologies. By reading the recurring themes these virtual environments recreate, we learn what society values. Students will delve deeply into video games using several theories of interpretation to understand their significance. Through readings, discussions, and assignments, including a multimodal assignment, we will address the history and controversies surrounding video games. This class is intended for those with no experience playing video games to those with lots of experience.

### Course Objectives and Biases

This course analyzes video games as cultural products. Although there are other ways to interpret video games (game play and design to name two others), we will privilege a cultural studies approach and ask, "what do video games tell us about the culture from which they come (or the culture in which they're played)?" I also have a bias that drives my pedagogy, and I want to make this absolutely clear: **I believe that education for the sake of education is good in and of itself.** I don't make any claim that you will learn anything practical that you may directly apply to a 9-to-5 job, and I hope we engage only in abstract theoretical endeavors. Another huge bias I have is that a university education is not about reinforcing student beliefs; instead, students should consider how their own biased perspectives/experiences have constructed their tastes, convictions, and opinions as they synthesize a new (preferably broader) intellectual appreciation of texts and technologies. As a rhetorician, I have a bias that our discussions will be sound, well-thought out, and resemble a commitment to logical reasoning. In this course, students should push themselves to engage in critical thinking by developing their analytic faculties as well as field-specific vocabularies for talking about video games. ALL students will have to articulate an understanding of the material that reflects the rhetorical sophistication and level of commitment to pursuing knowledge expected in this course.

### Text and Materials

Required	Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith, & Susana Pajares Tosca. <i>Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction</i> . 4 <sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge, 2020. {9781138363052} <a href="#">{Available through Atkins}</a> Additional Readings on Canvas Willingness To Learn
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### Masks/Facial Coverings/Vaccines

**When in class, wear a facial covering that covers your mouth and nose.** They work when worn consistently and properly, but you might have to upgrade to N95 or equivalent ones. We had a chance to curtail this virus, but too many people decided not to follow the experts' guidelines and wear facial coverings and/or get vaccinated during the pandemic.

**If you experience COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms, do not attend class. Follow all University COVID protocols, which may include quarantining and follow-up testing.** You will be asked to leave class if you display COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms. Students who cannot be in class because of COVID-related symptoms, will need proper documentation for having their absences not count against them (see “Attendance” section below).

If we’re forced to go to an online environment after the first initial two weeks of remote instruction, I will create Canvas quizzes to fulfill the “Participation” grades for this course.

## Addendum Based on Faculty Affairs Directive (1/7/2022)

As the ever-evolving\* COVID-19 situation alters plans for face-to-face instruction, we must be ready to move to a online environment, which may happen at any point during this semester after our initial first two-week remote start. If a significant percentage of the class becomes ill at any point during the semester, the Provost has advised we go to an online format (asynchronous for this class).

\*Yes, mutations are proof—facts—of evolution.

## Expectations

I expect students to be prepared to participate in class discussions; therefore, students should finish all readings before the class meets. **Participation means you must thoughtfully engage in class discussions. Merely showing up will not get you participation credit—you must speak.** Asking questions is participation. Asking questions is an ancient strategy students have used for millennia. Asking questions shows that you’ve attempted to think through the reading. There is no magic number of times to participate and not all contributions are equal—some contributions are more thoughtful than others—but you should strive to be an active participant whenever possible. If you're not in class for discussions (whether they be small group discussions or class-wide ones), you can't receive credit, so your participation grade will be affected. I will note your participation (or lack thereof) daily. I emphasize participation as a way to assess your understanding of the course materials in conjunction with online posts and your writing. This class doesn't simply measure what you "read" and can regurgitate; instead, I try to evaluate how you negotiate the course material through discussions. Students can't show they're thinking critically if they don't participate in class discussions. Students in this 4000/5000-level course **MUST** show they are astute critical thinkers.

## Instructional Modifications

Students who have a condition that may impair their ability to complete assignments or otherwise satisfy course criteria are encouraged to meet with professionals to identify, discuss, and document any feasible instructional modifications or accommodations. Please inform me about circumstances as soon as possible. I don’t need specifics, but I do need to know what accommodations to make. For information and assistance, contact the Disabilities Resource Center: <https://ds.charlotte.edu/>.

## Work Requirements

The ability to read college-level texts critically is a major requirement. In addition to the textbooks above, you might have readings on Canvas if I feel you need more background in a particular area. I expect you to do research for your assignments, so that—in addition to the textbooks—might be enough. You won’t have to print out the readings and bring them to class, but I still expect you to be able to discuss them. In addition to participation,

students will complete two written essays, a multimodal essay/project, online posts/responses, and a presentation.

The final presentations will be submitted to Canvas by during the regularly scheduled final exam time: **Monday, May 9, 2022, 11:00 pm**. This time may change depending on any changes to the Study Abroad Program for Summer 2022: ["Intercultural Communication on the Amalfi Coast."](#)

## Attendance

I will take attendance every day. It is very important that you attend every class in order to keep up with the work and reading. Your grade will be lowered after missing **2** classes. Your final grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for each day missed beyond **2** absences. After **4** absences you will receive a failing grade for the course. Please make an effort to come to every class on time. Don't just skip class because you feel you have two "free" days. Save your absences for emergencies. There are no such things as excused absences. Only students participating in UNC Charlotte sponsored activities (with the proper documentation) will not be penalized for missing class. I will ask you to request a meeting with the Dean of Students if you have situations that you feel should allow you an exception to missing more than 2 classes. Cars break down, parking is limited, students get sick, and traffic is brutal, but class still happens. Your participation may also be lowered for excessive tardiness. (See "Masks/Facial Coverings/Testing" above for more details on students and sickness)

Please note that UNC Charlotte is under a federal mandate to comply with a financial aid rule that requires professors to identify the last date of attendance for students receiving unsatisfactory grades. Please visit the following webpage for more information: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/gradingholds/last-date-attendance>.

## Participation

This is not a drill-and-skill type of course. I expect everyone to be involved in class discussions, which are extremely important for critical thinking. You must contribute to class discussions. Fifteen percent (15%) or twenty percent (20%) of your grade is based on participation. This isn't a huge class, so there will be ample opportunity to contribute. Maintaining silence just shows you don't care about thinking, which means you don't care about learning. Non-participating students will not get credit for participation.

Please see me ASAP if you're concerned about your participation grade because you're shy or if you don't understand these requirements. Telling me at the end of April that you didn't participate because you're the quiet type or because you didn't understand what "thoughtful" meant will be too late. Even worse, emailing me after the semester is over to complain that participation isn't a "valid" class assignment is too late. The purpose of discussions is for students to have control over their own learning and to reinforce critical thinking generally and dialogic exchange of ideas specifically. I am willing to provide a quasi-alternative to supplement a student's participation grade, but please note that discussion, which allows speakers to exchange ideas, is an extremely important component of critical thinking. Alternative assignments are rare and based solely on my discretion.

## Late Work

This is an Honors and Graduate class. There's absolutely no reason an assignment should be late. However, I have to have a policy. An assignment is due at the beginning of the class for which it was assigned. All late work will reduce the assignment by 50% for each class period it is late. Therefore, an assignment worth 100 points that is one class meeting late will not be able to have a grade higher than 50. If you will not or cannot be in class on the day an assignment is due, you should make arrangements to get the assignment to me via another student or put

it in my mailbox. Do not e-mail me an attachment (for final assignments or drafts you'd like me to review). I will not accept assignments attached to e-mails.

## Assignments/Grade Distribution

Assignment Values—4000-level	Pts.	Assignment Values—5000-level	Pts.	Grading Scale
What Is American Culture? Essay	50	What Is American Culture? Essay	100	A = 90 – 100
Midterm Exam	100	Midterm Exam	100	B = 80 – 89
Video Game Essay	100	Video Game Essay	100	C = 70 – 79
Participation	150	Participation	200	D = 60 – 69
Canvas Posts (15)	300	Canvas Posts (15)	300	F = Below 60
Multimodal Project (lots of variations)	150	Multimodal Project (lots of variations)	150	
Final Exam	100	Final Exam	100	
Final Presentation	50	Final Presentation	50	
Total	1000	Total	1100	

**Quizzes:** If we're forced to go to an online-only environment, I will create Canvas reading quizzes for your "Participation grades and will adjust the "Multimodal Project" grade to allow for more points for these (most likely) weekly quizzes.

The What Is American Culture?, Video Game Essay, Multimodal Project, and Final Presentation must all cite the course readings. That doesn't mean you need to cite every reading, but it does mean you need to show that you're reflecting on the reading in your work. Canvas Prompts must have at least one citation from that week's reading. All of the above must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course.

## Definition of A, B, C, D, and F Grades

Remember, your final grade is a combination of the five areas above in the assignment percentage table. An 'A' means your work was excellent—not mediocre, average, or just good. A 'B' means your work was good—not quite excellent but definitely above average and thoughtful. A 'C' means your work was barely adequate enough to satisfy the assignment—showing a lack of effort or thought for the assignment guidelines. A 'D' or 'F' usually means assignments were late, missing, or incomplete—often this work does not demonstrate appropriate 4000/5000-level coursework.

## Academic Integrity

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is an academic community dedicated to teaching, scholarship, service, inclusion, and the holistic development of Students. Academic integrity is a cornerstone value of the University's intellectual community. It is important to nurture an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, trust, respect, and mutual responsibility. Integrity is essential because it ensures that Students fairly benefit from their educational experience and pursuits of knowledge. Violating the principles of academic integrity damages the reputation of the University and undermines its educational mission and goals.

The University recognizes that Academic Misconduct detracts from the value of a UNC Charlotte degree and has influence beyond the University community, including relationships with employers, other educational institutions, the business community, the UNC system, and the community at large.

The purpose of the Code is to:

1. support and promote an ethical learning environment;
2. create consistent standards for all members of the academic community;
3. assist Students in learning responsibility for one's own academic work;
4. protect the academic environment of the University community; and
5. clarify Student values and how they relate to the behavior in question.

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty

- A. **Cheating** means using or attempting to use materials, or giving assistance or materials without Authorization to another in any academic exercise that could result in gaining or helping another to gain academic advantage.
- B. **Fabrication** means providing fabricated information, including inventing or counterfeiting information, in any form in an academic exercise.
- C. **Falsification** means altering without Authorization any data or information, regardless of communication method (e.g., e-mail or other electronic communication), in an academic exercise.
- D. **Misuse of Academic Materials** means sharing, distributing, altering, acquiring, damaging, or making inaccessible academic materials without Authorization, that could result in gaining or helping another to gain an academic advantage.
- E. **Multiple Submission** means submitting academic work or substantial portions of the same academic work (including oral reports) in more than one academic exercise without Authorization.
- F. **Plagiarism** means presenting the words or ideas of another as one's own words or ideas, including failing to properly acknowledge a source, unless the ideas or information are common knowledge. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism, which is the use of one's own previous work in another context without indicating that it was used previously. **Unauthorized Collaboration** means sharing the work or effort in an academic exercise with another Student or Students without Authorization.
- G. **Research Misconduct** means a determination that Research Misconduct has occurred under [University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship](#) and its [Supplemental Procedures](#). (See Chapter 3, Section III of the Code.)

**If you try to pass off any work in full or part as your own without proper credit being given to the original source—you will receive an 'F' in this course. If you use non-sanctioned resources (e.g., other classmates) to complete tests and exams, you will receive an 'F' in this course.**

In addition to the above identification of Academic Dishonesty, students should be aware of technology-mediated concerns related to Academic Integrity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "integrity" as "The condition of having no part or element taken away or wanting; undivided or unbroken state; material wholeness, completeness, entirety." A second definition states that integrity means, "The condition of not being marred or violated; unimpaired or uncorrupted condition; original perfect state; soundness." Therefore, anything that draws students' attention away from course activities and goals violates the essence of academic integrity because it corrupts the soundness and condition of learning. For instance, engaging in critical thinking/awareness is a sound, perfect state activity for this course; on the other hand, devoting attention to Facebook, texting/messaging, non-class-related internet activities (e-mailing, etc.) violates or corrupts the learning goals of this course. Although we may point to the internet in general and social media sites specifically in our discussions of 21st-Century rhetoric, engrossing oneself in them during class to "catch up with friends" divides your attention and may be distracting to members of this class. This violation is as serious as plagiarism and will result in an 'F' in participation (30% of your overall grade) the first time and an 'F' in this course for a subsequent violation. This syllabus section is your warning. Yes, it is obvious when you are using laptops and handheld devices to take notes or when you use them to corrupt the learning environment.

You will also receive an 'F' in the course for other academic integrity violations. Do not expect another warning—this is it. Please see me if you need further clarification regarding cheating, fabrication or falsification of information, multiple submission of academic work, plagiarism, or complicity in academic dishonesty. Again, so there's no confusion, you will most likely fail the course if you violate any part of the academic integrity code.

## Title IX Mandated Reporting

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. UNC Charlotte has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that many UNC Charlotte employees, including all faculty members, are considered [Responsible Employees](#) who are required to relay any information or reports of sexual misconduct they receive to the Title IX Coordinator. This means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must [report the information to the Title IX Coordinator](#). Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can contact any of the following on-campus resources, who are not required to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator: (1) [University Counseling Center](#) (7-0311); (2) [Student Health Center](#) (7-7400); or (3) [Center for Wellness Promotion](#) (7-7407). Additional information about your options is also available at <https://titleix.charlotte.edu/> under the "Students" tab.

## Safety and Security Information

UNC Charlotte's Department of Safety and Security offers the following safety tips:

- Ensure your cell phone number is in the Banner Self-Serve system (Emergency Text Phone Number box) to receive text message NinerAlerts. NinerAlerts are sent via a variety of methods when there is a threat to campus safety or a change in operating condition.
- For every NinerAlert that is issued, an action directive is also included in the body of the message. Action Directives can include run, hide, fight; seek shelter; or evacuate. Visit <https://emergency.charlotte.edu/> for more information on what each directive means.
- Download the Livesafe app. This connects you to campus police via phone or text 24/7.
  - 911 dialed from a mobile phone connects to CMPD and can slow down response.
  - Alternatively, you can put the UNC Charlotte Police emergency number in your phone: 704-687-2200.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and know the quickest escape routes: exit doors, windows, etc.
- Safety and Security offers a variety of trainings to students. For more information, visit: <https://police.charlotte.edu/safety>
- Remember: Personal pepper spray is allowed on campus. However, guns and knives are not.

### **Action Directives included in NinerAlerts:**

**Run-Hide-Fight** is the individual's Action Directive for an active assailant.

- **RUN:** If outside or in a building and it is safe to flee, run and leave the campus if possible.

- **HIDE:** *If you are in a building and unsure of where the threat is, find the closest room in which to hide. Close, lock and/or barricade doors if they do not lock. Do not huddle in one location. Remain quiet.*
- **FIGHT:** *This is a last-resort option. Do not seek the assailant. If you come into direct contact with the individual, use any means necessary to defend yourself.*

A **Seek Shelter** directive is normally issued during severe weather or hazardous material releases.

If a Seek Shelter is ordered:

- *Stay inside if you are indoors.*
- *If outside, quickly go to the nearest building.*
- *Once indoors, find a fitting room or space in the building to shelter. Stay away from windows.*

An **Evacuation** can be for either a single building, area, or the entire campus. Further information and direction will be included in the NinerAlert.

## Statement of Academic Freedom

I strongly encourage students to use class as a place for free inquiry and intellectual growth. Although we as a class will not always agree or be comfortable with the views of others, every student has the right to his or her own tastes and convictions (but don't mistake those for sound, well-reasoned opinions). I promise to be fair and always support your right to look at the world from your own position, but I encourage all students to branch out and consider multiple perspectives. If you think design elements have single, universal, or straight-forward meanings...well, you're about to get a radical new perspective in this course. Our biases filter our interpretations of the world around us. Family, culture, media, law, religion, etc. influence how we perceive the world. Your perspectives might be similar to those close to you, but your worldview isn't universally held. **I will not tolerate any harassment or abuse (emotional or physical) or any instance where others adversely affect students' learning. Remember, harassment isn't just verbal—making harassing or abusive posts won't be tolerated.**

## Inclement Weather/Building Issues

Some buildings can have HVAC problems. Occasionally, the powers that be close buildings and classes are canceled because it is too brutally hot to remain inside. If a building related "issue" cancels class, continue to keep up with the class webpage, readings, and [Canvas](#) posts. The library has lots of space and many computers. We'll pick up where we left off on the syllabus when we return to class. This also goes for inclement weather.

## Important Dates and Administrative Information

The syllabus schedule on the last two pages has important dates for readings and assignments. Students are responsible for not only knowing course deadlines but also knowing UNC Charlotte deadlines (drop/add, billing, vacation, etc.). Please visit the following link for the registrar's calendar: <https://registrar.charlotte.edu/printable-calendar>.

## Right to Make Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus when necessary to meet learning objectives, to compensate for missed classes, to deal with pandemic-related issues, and to make our lives easier.

## Schedule for Readings and Assignments

(Have readings and assignments done before class.)

**First two class meetings, January 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> will be asynchronous.**

January 13*	Introduction to the course Asimov, Isaac. "A Cult of Ignorance." <i>Newsweek</i> . 21 Jan 1980. <i>The Video Game Debate</i> Ch. 1: "A Brief History of Video Games" <i>Video Games and American Culture</i> "Introduction" (All readings available on Canvas)
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\*January 18<sup>th</sup>: Big day for the semester:

- Last day to register. If you're not registered, you will not be allowed to continue in the course.
- Last day to submit a grade replacement request.
- 2nd Cancellation for non-payment at 11:59 pm (all deadlines are 11:59 pm).

January 20	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> "Introduction," Ch. 1, and Ch. 2
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January 27	<b>Face-to-Face class meetings begin</b> <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 3
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February 3*	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 4 "History"
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\*February 11<sup>th</sup>: Deadline to apply for May 2022 graduation

February 10 <b>**Workshop**</b>	What Is American Culture? Essay Workshop <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 5 & Ch. 6
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February 17 <b>**DUE**</b>	<b>What Is American Culture? Essay DUE</b> <i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 7
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February 24	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 8
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March 3	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 9
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### March 7<sup>th</sup> – March 11<sup>th</sup>: No Class—Spring Break

March 17* <b>**EXAM**</b> <b>**Workshop**</b>	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b> Video Game Essay Workshop
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\*March 21: Last day to withdraw from a course or courses; [grade subject to cumulative Withdrawal Policy](#).

March 24	Kennedy, Helen W. " <a href="#">Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?: On the Limits of Textual Analysis.</a> " <i>Game Studies</i> , vol. 2, no. 2, 2002. Cowlshaw, Brian. " <a href="#">Playing War: The Emerging Trend of Real Virtual Combat in Current Video Games.</a> " <i>American: The Journal of American Popular Culture</i> , 2005. Toscano, Aaron. " <a href="#">Enacting Culture in Gaming: A Video Gamer's Literacy Experiences and Practices.</a> " <i>Current Issues in Education</i> , vol. 14, no. 1, 2011.
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March 31 <b>**DUE**</b>	<b>Video Game Essay Due</b> <b>Wolf, Naomi.</b> "The Beauty Myth." <i>The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women</i> . New York: William Morrow, 1991. 9-19. <b>Steinem, Gloria.</b> "Why Young Women are More Conservative." <i>Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions</i> . New York: Henry Holt, 1995. 229-237.
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April 7	<i>Video Games and American Culture</i> Ch. 4
April 14	<i>Video Games and American Culture</i> Ch. 5 <b>Mulvey, Laura.</b> "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." <i>Screen</i> 16.3 (1975): 6-18.
April 21	<i>Video Games and American Culture</i> Ch. 6 and Conclusion
April 28 <b>**DUE**</b> <b>**EXAM**</b> <b>**Workshop**</b>	<b>Last Day of Class</b> <b>Final Exam</b> <b>Multimodal Project DUE</b> Final Presentation Workshop
May 9	<b>FINAL Presentations DUE by 11:00pm</b> Let me know ASAP of any conflicts you may have with our Final Exam time.

**Commencement May 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> (congratulations)**