

LUDOPOLITICS: EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF PLAY

Course: CHID 250 C / Au 2014
Time: TTh 2:30-4:20pm
Place: MGH 271 ([map](#))

Instructor: Terry Schenold
Hours: 4:30-5:30 TTh or appt.
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<http://staff.washington.edu/schenold/chid250/>

“Play adorns life, amplifies it, and is to that extent a necessity both for the individual - as life function - and for society by reason of the meaning it contains, its significance, its expressive value, its spiritual and social associations, in short, as a cultural function. The expression of it satisfies all kinds of communal ideals.” – Johan Huizinga

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the politics of historical and present conceptions of play and gameplay with a particular focus on understanding problems and potentials of contemporary digital game culture. We will discuss a broad range of topics including ancient Greek connection between education and play, the influence of American Puritanism on our valuation of play, Native American use of games as conflict resolution and intergenerational community formation, the South Korean professionalization of digital gaming, the emergence of "games for change" and "serious games," issues of diversity and cultural difference in the making and reception of video games, first and second wave "indie" game culture, play and cultural evolution, the conceptual separation of "play" from "work," codifications of sexism, racism, and classicism in videogame design culture, the threats of a "military entertainment complex," and more.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Develop historical and critical understanding of key concepts of play and gameplay.
2. Explore the political dimension of play in the American context.
3. Generate critical thinking about contemporary game culture.
4. Provide resources for individual inquiry into subtopic in politics of play.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The course will be conducted as a large seminar with great emphasis on discussion of assigned texts and media. There will be short framing lectures and some work-shopping of assignments, but the core experience will be careful analysis and open exploration of ideas found in both assigned and student-selected materials. The topics and materials of some of the later sessions in the seminar will be determined collaboratively based on various factors, including collective interests, casebook topic proposals, and availability of material for study. Typical sessions will include framing lecture or inquiry into the assigned materials, student-guided discussion of particular passages, and open, whole-class discussion. Finally, a note on reading: the reading for this course is dense and argumentative in some cases, requiring more effort than textbook-style readings that summarize, outline, and didactically present information and ideas.

MATERIALS & REQUIREMENTS

1. Course Reader – There are no required texts that must be purchased for the course. The reading and media materials will be distributed online through the course website as PDFs which should be printed for reference in discussion. Printing costs stand in for textbook costs.
2. Course Wiki – The course website runs on *Mediawiki*, a hypertext system that allows web-based collaborative publishing, editing, and file sharing. We will use this course wiki to organize and submit our work, plan projects, and reference in discussion. You will be required to monitor the activity on the site regularly as part of “Discussion Participation,” so daily Internet access is essential.

EXPERIMENTS & EVALUATION

Detailed assignment documents with specific instructions and evaluation methods will be given in class, however the list below outlines the required work and its weight in determining the final course grade. The course website will have additional information and resources.

1. Discussion Participation [30%] – As mentioned above, the core experience of this seminar will be lively and reflective discussion, harnessing the cognitive diversity of our learning community focused through the careful attention to common texts. Students are expected to come to class having read and *reflected on* the assigned materials, ready to share insightful questions and commentary. In addition to daily impromptu participation students will have assigned sessions for more formal participation.
2. Passage Commentary [20%] – Students will write an analytical commentary on a specific passage in one of the assigned texts in the first phase of the seminar.
3. Source One-Sheet [20%] – Students will research and write a “one-sheet” summarizing and critiquing a self-selected outside source on the topic of play. These will be published to the website for reference by the class.
4. Casebook Project [30%] – We will all collaborate to create a “casebook” on the theme of the “significance of (game)play in contemporary society” wherein students will generate short reports on various play phenomena and comment on their significance.

ABSENCES & LATE WORK

Participation is a very important component of this course. If something comes up and you must miss a session please email me in advance (when possible), and in addition to any face-to-face communication. Unexcused late work will be accepted, but with a penalty of .3 grade points for each day the work is late.

UW POLICIES

Plagiarism: <http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/plag.html>

Disability: http://www.washington.edu/students/gencat/front/Disabled_Student.html