Introduction to Queer Game Studies

Autumn 2021 | Ohio University | Edmond Y. Chang

ENG 5930
Section 102
CN 15475
M 4-5 PM
Graduate
Reading
Autumn 2021
Ohio University

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"In this world, "gay" is a checkbox on a character sheet, a boolean, a binary bit, not an experience that greatly changes one's life, identity, and struggle. Token characters are not the product of queer experiences. Actual queer experiences offer perspectives on identity, on struggle, and on romance that could be entirely different."
—Anna Anthropy

JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ wrote in the introduction to *Cruising Utopia* that queerness "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality... Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present...Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing." This course takes up Munoz's provocation to ponder whether queer games are not yet here, why current queer games are not enough, and what is missing from queer games. This readings tutorial will introduce key concept, terms, and theoretical moves in the developing interdisciplinary field(s) of "queer game studies." This class will explore a range of scholarship, perspectives, games, and digital texts to explore: What is a queer game? How do you queer a game? What does it mean to play queerly? What are the limitations, possibilities, and challenges of queer(ing) games? How might we develop intersectional approaches to games?

A REQUIREMENT for this class is a well-developed curiosity about the world, about the culture we live in, and about the cultural productions we imagine, produce, and consume. In other words, this class is about reading, critiquing, and analyzing our culture through different texts and games. We will engage the techniques and practices of reading scholarship and playing games. We will identify and develop different ways to read different kinds of texts and understand and develop strategies, habits, and perspectives of reading, thinking, and writing. We will also close read and close play for analysis. And lastly, we will read, play, and deploy games as theory, as dramatizing the concerns, wonders, struggles, and politics of lived life and experience.

SPECIFICALLY, our course goals include:

- We will develop and demonstrate a familiarity with a range of texts, terms, and theories, engaging with queer game studies.
- We will identify and articulate different ways to explore, close read, analyze, research, and write about digital games and theory.
- We will consider questions and intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, nation, culture, and power, particularly in digital games.
- We will use digital games and popular culture as vernacular theory to think, talk, write, and interrogate the world around us.

WE WILL spend the semester asking and addressing difficult, challenging, and sometimes discomforting ideas, questions, and topics, focusing on different identities, bodies, histories, desires, experiences, and even struggles and violences. Whether on the page, screen, on campus, or in the community, we will explore and engage multiple perspectives, levels of familiarity with the material, and heady and heartfelt responses. In other words, our class will be a safe, respectful, but not necessarily comfortable space. While pushing boundaries and comfort zones are essential to critical thinking, making connections, and intellectual and personal freedom, see me with concerns and queries, for reasonable accommodations, and for further resources on campus.

"If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities."
—Maya Angelou

"Video games have an unmet potential to create complexity by letting people experience the world from different perspectives."
—James Paul Gee

Required Course Texts & Materials

- Readings will be available via Blackboard.
- Selected games.
- Web access and an active Ohio University email account.

Course
Requirements

Response Papers
(40%)
Research Proposal
(10%)
Final Project
(20%)
Class Participation
(30%)

Requirements & Grading

Your grade should not be the sole exigence or motivation for this class. It is the hope of the course that you walk away from class with something more. Find some pleasure and some edification and some knowledge from this class (or any class really) and success is usually not far behind. With that in mind, your grade will be a reflection of engagement, effort, close reading, critical thinking, writing, and participation.

Critical Response Papers (40%)

Over the course of the semester, you will complete a number short, critical, analytical response papers. These single-spaced, one-page writings serve as close readings of, analyses of, and articulations of the texts and connections you see, read, and talk about in the tutorial. These responses are more than just summaries or personal reactions and will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, critique, and your ability to concisely formulate arguments. You will be required to generate a response paper approximately every other week for **a total of 7**. See the response paper prompt for more details.

Project Proposal Memo (10%)

As part of your Final Project research and writing process, you must generate a 1-page research proposal in business memo format. You will also arrange for a conference with me to go over your proposal. Proposals will be graded for clarity, detail, completion, and manuscript format. Your proposal and conference must be completed at least 4 weeks prior to the end of the semester.

Final Paper/Project (20%)

By the end of the semester, you will complete a Final Project that integrates what you have read, explored, and written about in your Response Papers, that draws on specific terms, concepts, or issues from our discussions, and that articulates the critical value of queer games and queer game studies. The project asks you to make connections and to create an argument across different kinds of evidence and added research. Your final project can be a traditional research paper, a media production (which includes a substantive analytical component), or a hybrid of the two.

Participation and Preparedness (30%)

Preparedness and participation form a large component of your final grade. It is essential that you prepare for class, attend class, and participate. Missing class or participation may seriously compromise your ability to do well in this class. Moreover, negative participation will hurt your participation grade. Participation is determined by 1) your **respectful** presence in class and interactions with me and others, 2) your **willingness** to discuss, comment, and ask questions, 3) your **preparation** for class, which includes having the required materials and doing all of the assigned reading or work for class, 4) your **engagement** and **collaboration** in group work, presentations, office hours, and course events, and 5) your care and use of the class *Blackboard* or "Bb"—bookmark the address, check regularly, comment as required, and think of the blog as an extension of class:
https://blackboard.ohio.edu/ultra/courses/_585498_1/cl/outline

Attendance

Attendance is required. If you are absent, you miss the explanation of an assignment, the discussion of a reading, the chance to participate, and overall, the class as a community of learning. Also, you are expected to be in class on time. Class will start immediately at the appointed time. In the first minutes of class I

may make important announcements, establish the agenda for the day, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions. If you come in after we start class, even by only a few minutes, you are late and will be mark as such. Chronic or conspicuous attendance problems will negatively affect your overall participation grade for the class. **Moreover, absences for more than 7 class sessions (50% of class time or more) will result in a failing grade regardless of reason. There are no excused or unexcused absences.** If you know you are going to or must miss class, please let me know (via email) as soon as possible and make any necessary arrangements. When you do miss class, always find another student to get class notes or see me during office hours in order to make up missed work in a timely manner. You are always responsible for all material covered during your absence.

Assignment Format

All papers must be typed or produced on a word processor. All documents should be saved in Microsoft Word format (or if necessary Rich Text Format). All papers must follow the manuscript format outlined by the assignment. Unless instructed otherwise, **all papers must use MLA citation and documentation conventions**. All papers must be neatly printed (in black), stapled in the top, left-hand corner if necessary, and should not be three-hole punched. Papers that do not follow these format guidelines will not be accepted. They will be returned unread to you. Papers will be regarded as late until they are resubmitted in the proper format.

Always make a backup copy of every paper you turn in, lest you be one of the unhappy people whose paper is eaten by the computer. You may even want to take the precaution of e-mailing your paper to yourself as an attachment during the drafting process and certainly before you exit the document and leave the computer. Or you may want to invest in cloud-based file storage like OneDrive (which all OU students have already have access) or DropBox.

Evaluation Rubric

Over the course of the quarter, your assignments will receive feedback and comments that will identify what you are doing well and what still needs improvement. Your grades assess your fulfillment of the assignment, the quality of work, detail, analysis, and argumentation, overall effort, and finally, style, polish, and risk taking. Consider the following evaluation rubric as signposts or a kind of legend to your progress and evaluation:

• **Outstanding** (A/A+): Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.
• **Strong** (B+/A-): Offers a proficient demonstration of the trait(s) associated with the course or assignment goal(s), which could be further enhanced with revision, additional support, and creativity.
• **Good** (B-/B): Effectively demonstrates the trait(s) associate with the course or assignment goal(s), but less proficiently; could use revision to demonstrate more skillful and nuanced command of trait(s).
• **Acceptable** (C/C+): Minimally meets the basic course or assignment requirement, but the demonstrated trait(s) are not fully realized or well-controlled and would benefit from significant revision.
• **Inadequate** (D/D+): Does not meet the course or assignment requirement; the trait(s) are not adequately demonstrated and require substantial revision on multiple levels.

Late Assignments

All assignments must be done completely and turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized half a grade for every day that they are late. So, if your essay is late by one day and you received a B- for your work, then your final grade would be a C+. Moreover, I will not comment on late work. However, you still need to complete late work or you will receive a zero. If you miss class on the due date of a paper, you must notify me and make arrangements to get the paper to me as soon as possible. **Unless previously arranged, I DO NOT accept assignments via email**. Remember that a paper has not been officially handed in until it is in my hands. Never turning anything in late is always the best policy.
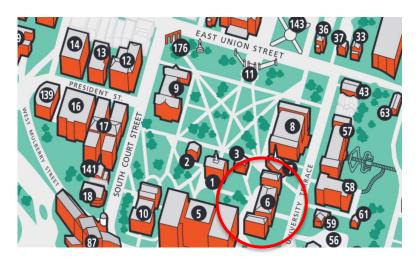
Finding Help

My office and office hours are listed in the left sidebar. I am available during that time and by appointment to help you. I encourage you to come see me early in the term even if it is just to talk about the class, about the assignments, or about school in general. I may ask you to meet with me when I think a conference would be useful. My office is located on the third floor of Ellis Hall (east of Alden Library), Room 331.

Email is the best way to contact me. I will do my best to answer your emails and Bb posts, usually **within twenty-four hours**. If there is an emergency and you need to reach me, please contact the main English office in 201 Ellis Hall. Furthermore, when time permits, I will supplement my office hours with virtual hours via Google Talk (**nickname: EDagogy**); if I am logged in, during reasonable hours, you are more than welcome to discuss the class or ask questions. Please, when you initiate an IM conversation, **use a greeting**, please identify yourself to me, and be **patient** because my responses may not be immediate.

You can also find additional writing and academic help at the Graduate Writing and Research Center (GWRC) on campus, a good resource for this class and other classes. The GWRC is located in Alden Library (Room 309) and offers a variety of services including help with theses, dissertations, journal articles, grants, job search materials, conference presentations, posters, or multimedia projects. See https://www.ohio.edu/graduate/graduate-writing-and-research-center for more information and to make an appointment.

Accommodations

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should see me or contact me **in the first week of class** to discuss their specific needs and provide written documentation from Student Accessibility Services. If you are not yet registered as a student with a disability, please contact Student Accessibility Services at 740-593-2620 or visit the SAS offce in 348 Baker University Center. The SAS website is: https://www.ohio.edu/uc/sas/index.cfm

COVID-19

All students are required to abide by the university's pandemic strategies and protocols, which are updated and outlined: https://www.ohio.edu/coronavirus. Please follow all guidelines and recommendations regarding masking, social distancing, testing and symptom reporting, and vaccination. If you have physical or mental health concerns, changes in employment, housing, or responsibilities, or face other challenges, insecurities, or problems, please seek out Ohio's health services: https://www.ohio.edu/wellness/student-resources, counseling center:

Academic Integrity

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing—as long as you cite them. Many students do not have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, so feel free to ask questions at any time. For our class, plagiarism includes:

• a student failing to cite sources of ideas
• a student failing to cite sources of paraphrased material
• a student failing to site sources of specific language and/or passages
• a student submitting someone else's work as his or her own
• a student submitting his or her own work produced for another class

If you have any doubt about how to cite or acknowledge another's writing, please talk to me. Any plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in failure of an assignment or of this course. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Please review the Ohio University's Academic Misconduct page at https://www.ohio.edu/communitystandards/academic/students.cfm

Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Misconduct

Ohio University and this course are committed to a safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environment. Title IX makes clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, and so on. As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter and am required by law to share with the University any information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime that may have occurred on campus. For more information about policies and resources or confidential reporting options, see the Office of University Equity and Civil Rights Compliance: https://www.ohio.edu/equity-civil-rights/ or the Division of Student Affairs page on Student Conduct & Community Standards: https://www.ohio.edu/communitystandards/process/sexualassault.cfm

syl·la·bus: *n* 1: a summary outline of a discourse, treatise, or course of study or of examination requirements 2: subject to change

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Week 1: August 23-27: CLOSE PLAYING
Chang, "Close Playing, a Meditation on Teaching (with) Video Games"
http://www.edmondchang.com/2010/11/11/close-playing-a-meditation/
Payne, "Play," *Keywords*

Week 2: August 30-September 3: DEFINING QUEER
Clark, "What *Is* Queerness in Games, Anyway?"
Ruberg, "Introduction," *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*
Somerville, "Queer," *Keywords*

Play:
Loved (2010): https://ocias.com/works/loved/

"Reality is broken. Game designers can fix it."
—Jane McGonigal

"My imagination makes me human and makes me a fool; it gives me all the world and exiles me from it."
—Ursula K. Le Guin

"The idea that kids can play video games like *Grand Theft Auto* or any video game is amazing. The video games are one step before a whole other virtual universe."
—Vin Diesel

First Day of Classes

August						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

Week 1 or 2 CR is recommended.

September						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Week 3: September 6-10:
    Labor Day Holiday

Week 4: September 13-17: INTERACTIVITY/IMMERSION
    Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace"
    Salen and Zimmerman, "The Immersive Fallacy," *Rules of Play*
    Chen, "Flow in Games"

    Play:
        Night in the Woods (2017):
        https://store.steampowered.com/app/481510/Night_in_the_Woods/

Week 5: September 20-24: GENDER
    Shaw, "Introduction," *Gaming at the Margins*
    Phillips, "Introduction," *Gamer Trouble*
    Butler, "Heterosexual Matrix," *Gender Trouble*
    Halberstam, "Gender," *Keywords*

    Play:
        Gone Home (2013):
        https://store.steampowered.com/app/232430/Gone_Home/

Week 6: September 27-October 1: GENDER & DISABILITY
    Harvey, "Twine's Revolution: Democratization, Depoliticization, and the Queering of Game Design"
    Parker, "Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest*"
    https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/zoe-quinns-depression-quest
    Orland, "What *Depression Quest* Taught Me About Dealing with Mental Illness"
http://arstechnica.com/gaming/2014/08/what-depression-quest-taught-me-about-dealing-with-mental-illness/
    Adams, Reiss, Serlin, "Disability," *Keywords*

    Play:
        Depression Quest (2013): http://www.depressionquest.com/

Week 7: October 4-8: RACE
    Nakamura, "'It's a Nigger in Here! Kill the Nigger!' *User-Generated Media Campaigns Against Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in Digital Games*"
    Gray & Leonard, "Introduction," *Woke Gaming*
    Gray, "Race," *Keywords*

    Play:
        Hair Nah (2017): https://hairnah.com/

Week 8: October 11-15: RACE (cont.)
    Nakamura, "Queer Female of Color: The Highest Difficulty Setting There Is? Gaming Rhetoric as Gender Capital," https://adanewmedia.org/2012/11/issue1-nakamura/
    Gray, "*Introduction*," *Intersectional Tech*
    Ferguson, "Race," *Keywords*

    Play:
        SweetXHeart (2019): https://cattsmall.itch.io/sweetxheart

October

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

Week 9: October 18-22: QUEER & SEX
  Yang, "The Politics and Pleasures of Representing Sex between Men"
  Squinkifier, "Nonbinary Characters, Asexuality, and Game Design as Joyful Resistance"
  Burgett, "Sex," *Keywords*

  Play:
    Radiator 2 (2016); https://radiatoryang.itch.io/radiator2
    Ace in Space (2020):
    https://store.steampowered.com/app/1220710/Ace_In_Space/

Week 10: October 25-29: QUEER & ROMANCE
  Chang, "Love is in the Air: Queer (Im)Possibility and Straightwashing in *FrontierVille* and *World of Warcraft*"
  McDonald, "Romance in Games: What It Is, How It Is, and How Developers Can Improve It"

  Play:
    Dream Daddy (2017):
    https://store.steampowered.com/app/654880/Dream_Daddy_A_Dad_Dating_Simulator/

Research Proposal Memo Due

Week 11: November 1-5: QUEER & INTERFACE
  Pow, "Reaching Toward Home: Software Interface as Queer Orientation in the Video Game *Curtain*."
  Lauteria, "Ga(y)mer Theory: Queer Modding as Resistance"

  Play:
    Curtain (2014): https://dreamfeel.itch.io/curtain

Week 12: November 8-12: QUEER & TRANS
  Thach, "A Cross-Game Look at Transgender Representation in Video Games"
  Anthropy, "The Problem with Video Games"

  Play:
    Dys4ia (2012): https://jayisgames.com/games/dys4ia/
    Secret Little Haven (2018):
    https://store.steampowered.com/app/827290/Secret_Little_Haven/

Week 13: November 15-19: QUEER & FAILURE
  Ruberg, "Playing to Lose: The Queer Art of Failing at Video Games"
  Consalvo, "There is No Magic Circle"

  Play:
    Coming Out Simulator (2014):
    http://ncase.itch.io/coming-out-simulator-2014

Week 14: November 22-26: QUEER & MECHANICS
  Engel, "Perverting Play: Theorizing a Queer Game Mechanic"
  Chang, "Queer Dystopias, Queer Mechanics, and Queers in Love at the End of the World," http://mediacommons.org/imr/content/queer-dystopias-queer-mechanics-and-queers-love-end-world-0

  Play:
    Queers in Love at the End of the World (2013):
    https://w.itch.io/end-of-the-world

December

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Week 15: November 29-December 3: QUEERGAMING
Chang, "Queergaming"

Week 16: Finals Week

Final Project Due