DIGITAL AND GAMING CULTURE  
JMC:3122:0001  
FALL 2020  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11AM-12:15PM  
140 Shaeffer Hall  
Prof. David Dowling  
Office: E334 Adler Journalism Building  
david-dowling@uiowa.edu  
Office hours: 24/7, via email and Canvas Chat

Course Description and Objectives  
This course examines the culture, technology, and art of gaming. We will explore the industry, aesthetics, storytelling, rewards, and risks in the world of video games. Topics include mobile, open world, RPG, casual, and serious game genres; we will discuss esports, vloggers, online communities, Twitch celebrities, and a case study of Rockstar Games, producer of the Grand Theft Auto series. Two midterms and a final paper are required along with brief assessments, participation in in-class multimedia activities, and debates.

Required Texts Available at University Bookstore  
- David Kushner, *Jacked: The Outlaw Story of Grand Theft Auto* $19.49  

SJMC Learning Outcomes  
This course contributes to SJMC learning outcomes in the following areas:  
- *Media Law and Ethics* (Learning Objective 4.)  
- *Media Literacy*  
- *Multiculturalism*  
- *Media History*

Policies:  
- **Always bring your laptop and print version of the assigned reading to class**
- **Please stay focused.** Keep phones and laptops put away unless the activity requires their use. Come to class on time and remain for the full class period. Do not pack your bags until class is over.
- **Missed exams and assignments** without forewarning automatically fail. If a calamitous event occurs that prevents you from taking an exam at the scheduled time, please contact me *before the exam; documentation must be provided 48*
hours after the exam. No makeup exams will be offered to students whose absence is not covered by documentation under the following categories:

1. Extenuating circumstances beyond the students control such as the death of a family member, a car accident, or other unfortunate and harmful event (and not a wedding, vacation, or work obligation, etc.)
2. Conflicts with other university obligations, typically for athletes or those in performances or productions officially sanctioned by UI.

- It is the student’s responsibility to obtain the content of classes missed through classmates who were in attendance. Exchange contact information with a partner who will agree to give you the class notes in case you are absent.
- No email submissions. Submit your written assignment to Canvas only.

Assignments and Grades
- Participation: 100 points
- 3 Midterms: 100 points each/300 total
- Final Paper: 100 points

Total: 500 points

Participation
KCs: I will assess your preparation through a series of Knowledge Checks on key concepts drawn from the reading material. KCs, as we call them, will occur on selected Tuesdays and consist of 2-5 items you will be asked to identify and discuss verbally. Be prepared to answer these questions verbally in class.

Game Log: Each entry should be posted on the appropriate Canvas Discussion before class on the date listed on the syllabus. You will keep a game log (a.k.a., GLOG) of your reactions to gameplay done specifically for this class (not prior to this semester), commenting on the game’s aesthetics, technology, and sociocultural implications. GLOGs require deep reflection on playing games within specific genres that align with our readings. Your GLOG will be an excellent resource for your Final Paper, as each entry represents a potential topic to develop into a research paper or review. GLOGs are free space for your thoughts, but must examine games in the assigned genre listed on the syllabus. Each entry should consist of several substantial paragraphs containing unique, authentic reflection. Did anything motivate you beyond points, badges, and leaderboards? Were you driven by meaning, mastery, and autonomy? Your classmates will see your entries and may post responses to them.

Discussion: Interact with your classmates! We need to hear your voice in our discussion activities, which can take on a variety of forms from debates to answering open-ended questions, selecting and discussing passages from the reading, and conducting online searches.

KCs, GLOGs and discussion activities (including debates) will not be scored individually, but will be assessed holistically and factored into the participation grade.
Three midterms will be open book and note; they will take place on Canvas. Many questions cover material presented in class only that does not appear in the reading. Each midterm is worth 100 points.

Final Paper In lieu of an in-class final exam, students will complete a 5-10 page paper that draws on course concepts to examine an element of digital and gaming culture of your choice. Selecting from topic areas of YouTube celebrities, online youth culture, digital communities, and video games, you will explore a specific form of media applicable to what has been covered in the course. It can take the form of a review of two games of your choice, one you are familiar with and one you have not played before. The purpose is to provide an account of your selected topic’s significance to digital and/or gaming culture. Your paper is due on the last regular meeting of class and is worth 100 points.

Grading Scale
Rounding only from .5 up; 4 will not be rounded up: A = 93% and above; A- = 90-92%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%; C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 63-66%; D- = 60-62%; F = 59% and below

COURSE CALENDAR

I. DIGITAL CULTURES

Week 1— INTRODUCTION: IMMERSIVE MEDIA TECHNOLOGY
August 25 Welcome and course overview
August 27 Reading: Rothman, J. (2018) “As Real as it Gets: Are We Already Living in Virtual Reality?” On Canvas

Week 2 — THE STREAMING INDUSTRY
Sept. 1 Knowledge Check (KC1); Reading: Clark, T. (2017) “Revenue Streaming” On Canvas
Sept. 3 GLOG: Comment on the experience of playing any game (other than Fortnite) featured of Twitch and/or YouTube streams

Week 3 — AUDIENCE
Sept. 10 DEBATE: Do the risks of IRL streaming outweigh its rewards?

Week 4 — COMMUNITY: FORTNITE
Sept. 17 GLOG: Comment on the experience of playing Fortnite and/or any battle royale game (post on CANVAS Discussion)
before class)

Supplementary Reading:
  https://www.wired.com/story/fortnite-battlefield-rise-of-battle-royale/

Week 5 — PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

Sept. 22 **KC3; Reading:** *Participatory Culture in a Networked Era,* Ch. 2.
Sept. 24 **DEBATE:** Digital Culture is Rewarding vs. Exploitative

Week 6 — COMMERCIAL CULTURE

Sept. 29 **Reading:** *Participatory Culture,* Ch. 5.
Oct. 1 **Midterm 1 (100 points)** Open book & note; on CANVAS

II. GAMING CULTURES

Week 7 — VIDEO GAME AESTHETICS

Oct. 6 **Reading:** *Understanding Video Games,* Ch. 5
Oct. 8 **GLOG:** Assess any aesthetic dimension of a game
(post on CANVAS Discussion); consider aesthetic uses/abuses of violence
- Supplementary Reading: Khatchadourian, R. (2015) *World Without End: Creating a Full-Scale Digital Cosmos*
  http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/18/world-without-end-raffi-khatchadourian

Week 8 — VIDEO GAMES IN CULTURE

Oct. 13 **Reading:** *Understanding Video Games,* Ch. 6
Oct. 15 **DEBATE:** Gender Inclusive vs. Gender Specific Games
**GLOG:** Any game that represents evidence for your side of the debate
- Supplementary Reading: Vlogger Anita Sarkeesian and #GamerGate
  http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/anita-sarkeesian-gamergate-interview-20141017

Week 9 — NARRATIVE

Oct. 20 **KC4; Reading:** *Understanding Video Games,* Ch. 7
Oct. 22 **DEBATE:** Are Video Games are Better With or Without Stories?
**GLOG:** Any game that tells a story
- Supplementary Reading: Bogost, I. (2017) *Video Games are Better Without Stories*
Week 10 — SERIOUS GAMES: WHEN ENTERTAINMENT IS NOT ENOUGH

Oct. 27  KC5; Reading: Understanding Video Games, Ch. 8;
Oct. 29  Midterm II

Week 11 — VIDEO GAMES AND RISKS

Nov. 3   KC6; Reading: Understanding Video Games, Ch. 9
Nov. 5   DEBATE: Are Video Games are Good For You?
GLOG: Any game that is considered a risk to the player and/or society

Week 12 — THE GAME INDUSTRY

Nov. 10  Reading: Understanding Video Games, Ch. 2
Nov. 12  DEBATE: Console vs. PC Games
GLOG: Any game that supports your side of the debate

Week 13 — ROCKSTAR GAMES

Nov. 17  KC7; Reading: Kushner, D. (2012). Jacked: The Outlaw Story of Grand Theft Auto, prologue-Ch. 12
Nov. 19  GLOG: Any game produced by Rockstar

Thanksgiving, Nov. 22-29

Week 14 — ROCKSTAR GAMES II

Dec. 3   Midterm III

Week 15 — Final Paper Preparation

Dec. 8   Online Peer Critique Session I (On Canvas Discussion)
Dec. 10  Online Peer Critique Session II; Final Papers Due on Canvas at 8PM

Maintaining a Professional Environment

- Be courteous and professional in your correspondence for this course, using proper grammar and proper modes of address.
- Come prepared and be ready to contribute. Do not skip class meetings. Focus on the material when in class. Power down devices unless they are required for the activity.
Media scholarship is founded upon the use of evidence and logic to formulate forceful and convincing claims. Insights and comments will be judged strictly on the merit of their content and use of textual support without regard to the individual who asserts it. The assertion of any personal, or “editorial” values beyond the scope of the course content is not required, and should be made only at the student’s discretion.

In addition to respecting one another in class, students will approach the course’s readings and films as academic material for active study rather than passive entertainment. The study of journalism and mass communication involves examining texts to discover how a culture thinks about itself. In an exciting, safe classroom environment, in which the student’s social class, ethnic background, gender orientation or other personal attributes will not come under scrutiny or judgment, satisfaction will derive from finding profound meaning in the world of mass communication. It is in this spirit of mutual respect for classmates, professor, and subject matter that we begin our intellectual journey.

**College of Liberal Arts and Sciences**

**Information for Undergraduates**

**Absences and Attendance**

Students are responsible for attending class and for contributing to the learning environment of a course. Students are also responsible for knowing their course absence policies, which will vary by instructor. All absence policies, however, must uphold the UI policy related to student illness, mandatory religious obligations, including Holy Day obligations, unavoidable circumstances, or University authorized activities ([https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/attendance-absences)). Students may use the CLAS absence form to aid communication with the instructor who will decide if the absence is excused or unexcused. The form is located on ICON within the top banner under “Student Tools.”

**Academic Integrity**

All undergraduates enrolled in courses offered by CLAS have, in essence, agreed to the College's [Code of Academic Honesty](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code). Misconduct is reported to the College, resulting in suspension or other sanctions, with sanctions communicated with the student through UI email. Visit this page for information: ([https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/academic-fraud-honor-code)).

**Accommodations for Disabilities**

UI is committed to an educational experience that is accessible to all students. A student may request academic accommodations for a disability (such as mental health, attention, learning, vision, and physical or health-related condition) by registering with Student Disability Services (SDS). The student is then responsible for discussing specific accommodations with the instructor. More information is at [https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/).
Administrative Home of the Course
The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the administrative home of this course and governs its add/drop deadlines, the second-grade-only option, and related policies. Other colleges may have different policies. CLAS policies may be found here: [https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook).

Classroom Expectations
Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the [Code of Student Life](https://studentlife.uiowa.edu/policies). This includes the policies and procedures that all students have agreed to regarding the Steps Forward for Fall 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, all students are required to wear a face cover when in a UI building, including a classroom. In addition, the density of seats in classrooms has been reduced. In some instances, this will allow 6 feet or more of distance while other cases, it may be less. Regardless, wearing face coverings and maintaining as much distance as is possible are vital to slowing the spread of COVID-19. In the event that a student disrupts the classroom environment through their failure to comply with the reasonable directive of an instructor or the University, the instructor has the authority to ask that the student immediately leave the space for the remainder of the class period. Additionally, the instructor is asked to report the incident to the [Office of Student Accountability](https://studentlife.uiowa.edu/policies) for the possibility of additional follow-up. Students who need a temporary alternative learning arrangement related to COVID-19 expectations should contact [Student Disability Services](https://sds.studentlife.uiowa.edu/fall-2020/covid-19-temporary-learning-arrangements/; +1 319 335-1462).

Class Recordings: Privacy and Sharing
Some sessions of a course could be recorded or live-streamed. Such a recording or streaming will only be available to students registered for the course. These recordings are the intellectual property of the faculty, and they may not be shared or reproduced without the explicit written consent of the faculty member. Students may not share these sessions with those not in the class; likewise, students may not upload recordings to any other online environment. Doing so is a breach of the Code of Student Conduct and, in some cases, a violation of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Communication and the Required Use of UI Email
Students are responsible for official correspondences sent to the UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for all communication within UI ([Operations Manual, III.15.2](https://studentlife.uiowa.edu/policies)).

Complaints
Students with a complaint about an academic issue should first visit with the instructor or
course supervisor and then with the Chair of the department or program offering the course; students may next bring the issue to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; see this page for more information: [https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities](https://clas.uiowa.edu/students/handbook/student-rights-responsibilities).

**Final Examination Policies**
The final exam schedule is announced around the fifth week of classes; students are responsible for knowing the date, time, and place of a final exam. Students should not make travel plans until knowing this information. No exams of any kind are allowed the week before finals with a few exceptions made for particular types of courses such as labs or off-cycle courses: [https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies](https://registrar.uiowa.edu/final-examination-scheduling-policies).

**Nondiscrimination in the Classroom**
The University of Iowa is committed to making the classroom a respectful and inclusive space for people of all gender, sexual, racial, religious, and other identities. Toward this goal, students are invited in MyUI to optionally share the names and pronouns they would like their instructors and advisors to use to address them. The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination and harassment against individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, and other identity categories set forth in the University’s Human Rights policy. For more information, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity ([https://diversity.uiowa.edu/eod](https://diversity.uiowa.edu/eod); +1 319 335-0705 or ([diversity.uiowa.edu](https://diversity.uiowa.edu))

**Sexual Harassment**
Sexual harassment subverts the mission of the University and threatens the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All members of the UI community must uphold the UI mission and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. Incidents of sexual harassment must be reported immediately. For assistance, please see [https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/](https://osmrc.uiowa.edu/).