The Geography of Video Games
A UNST 199 Chiron Studies course

Instructor: Zuriel Rasmussen
Email: zuriel@pdx.edu
Office hours: By appointment

Faculty Mentor: Hunter Shobe

Credits: 4
Meeting time: W 17:30-21:10

Course Description:
In this course, we will explore how geographical concepts and methodologies can help us understand the virtual worlds of video games. Drawing on texts from geography and related disciplines, we will analyze specific video games as case studies of broader geographical concepts. We will explore the geography of video games inside and outside of the classroom. Students should expect to engage with video games on a variety of levels; this will include reading about video games, analyzing video games, and, of course, playing video games.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes:
Students will learn how to apply concepts from geography to video games and virtual worlds. Through in-class discussion, assigned readings, and video game examples, students will become proficient at analyzing the spatiality, cartography, and sense of place in particular video games. Students will develop their ability to critically assess readings and concepts discussed in class as they relate to video games. By the end of the term, students will be comfortable combining concepts from geography and from video game design to write and present an analysis of a particular video game of their choosing.

Pedagogical Philosophy:
As the instructor, I see my role in the classroom as one of a facilitator, presenter, and participant. I will provide a solid foundation in each lecture; however, I want our learning experience to be interactive, taking into account the personal experiences and knowledge of each student. The topic of video games will take us outside of the traditional reading/lecturing/writing structure. In order to enrich our learning experience, we will use a variety of online resources to actively engage with the video games we discuss.

Community Connection: We will explore the geography of video games outside of the classroom in the following ways:

- A field trip to a popular arcade, Ground Kontrol, to experiment with arcade-style video games
- A guest lecture from a local gaming community organizer
- A guest lecture from an indie game designer
- A demo of the Oculus Rift, a virtual reality headset
A class meeting held entirely online in *World of Warcraft*, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG)

An exercise where we connect with the virtual distances covered in games by measuring those distances on the park blocks

A guest lecture on “sense of place” from Professor Hunter Shobe (Geography Department at Portland State University).

Additionally, students will be asked to reach out into the wider gaming community each week by discovering (and playing!) games from multiple genres that connect to the themes we cover in the readings and lecture.

**Assignments:**

Participation: 20%
Midterm Project: 40%
Final Project: 40%

**Participation:** This course will include a significant amount of in-class discussion. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Additionally, there will be assignments throughout the term that ask students to explore examples of video games that relate to weekly topics. Students will be expected to discuss the examples in class. I encourage students to play the games they choose as examples; however, reading articles or watching video walkthroughs is sufficient to complete the assignments.

**Tips on finding games:** In this class, we are interested in any and all video games. Please consider online games, downloadable games (free demos are available through platforms such as Steam), game apps, arcade games, and console games. We will discuss how to find games during our first class meeting. Please come and talk to me if you are having trouble finding games for your participation assignments.

**Midterm Project:** As we move through the course, each of us will build a small collection of video games that exemplify different geographic themes. For your midterm project, you will compile three of these examples in a 3-5 page report. Each example should include the main geographic theme the game exemplifies, a short reflection (about 250-500 words) that includes a description of the game and how it connects to course content. You will also include a relevant screenshot from each game.

**Final Project:** The final project has three parts. (1) The project proposal (due: TBD): a one-page outline/summary of a video game; you will later analyze this video game in a detailed case study. (2) A written report (due: TBD): 3-5 pages that examine the particular video game in relation to concepts covered in the course (please reference at least 5 of the readings). (3) A 5-minute presentation of your case study (due: TBD). During the last day of class you will present your project to the class. You will create a powerpoint representing the video game you chose.
Note: If you would like to come up with an alternative to the final project (for example, designing your own game), please schedule a meeting with me. I encourage you to be creative!

Required and Supplemental Texts and Resources:

*Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline

Selected Articles available on D2L (see course calendar)

Student Conduct:
Academic honesty is very important. Please familiarize yourself with the university’s policy regarding academic dishonesty: [http://www.pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct#AcademicDishonesty](http://www.pdx.edu/dos/codeofconduct#AcademicDishonesty)
Misrepresenting the work of others as your own could lead to the failure of assignment(s).

Disability Access Information:
If you require accommodations (e.g. special seating, interpreter, note-taker, etc.), please inform your instructor immediately. Students with disabilities should register with the PSU Disability Resource Center (503-725-4150, TTY or Relay 503-725-4178, SMSU 116, www.drc.pdx.edu) to document their needs for accommodations and obtain support services. I will work with you to arrange the supports you need in this class.
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Variety and Experience: Exploring Types of Video Games Through Case Studies</td>
<td>Shaw, I. G. R. &amp; Warf, B. 2009. Worlds of affect: virtual geographies of videogames. <em>Environment and planning A</em>. 41: 1332-1343. (Available on D2L under &quot;readings&quot;)&lt;br&gt;Valiaho, P. 2014. Video Games and Cerebral Subject: On playing Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. Body &amp; Society. 20: 113-139. (Available on D2L under &quot;readings&quot;)</td>
<td>In the second half of this class, we will measure and demarcate significant checkpoints in the first level of Super Mario Bros. on the SW Park Blocks.</td>
<td>Email a map to <a href="mailto:zuriel@pdx.edu">zuriel@pdx.edu</a> from a video game for in-class discussion.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Orienteering: Where am I going? How do I get there?</td>
<td>“Level One” <em>Ready Player One</em> (through page 166)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Video Games Through Time: The Historical Development of Virtual Worlds</td>
<td>Continue <em>Ready Player One</em></td>
<td>Field Trip to Ground Kontrol</td>
<td>Midterm Project Due</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Virtual Reality: Discussion of <em>Ready Player One</em></td>
<td>Finish <em>Ready Player One</em></td>
<td>Indie game designer guest lecture</td>
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<td>Case Study Presentations</td>
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<td>Case Study Presentations and Papers Due</td>
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