HUMN 13: VIDEO GAMES & POPULAR CULTURE

Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2022
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture, 1 laboratory per week (60 total per quarter)
Advisory:	Not open to students with credit in MDIA 13 or MUS 11F.
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area I: Humanities
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable
Cross-Listed:	MDIA 1

Description

The impact of game design and game technology on popular culture. Topics will include early history including the early hardware and software designers that emerged after World War II, the rise of the video game entrepreneurs and the resulting multi-billion dollar arcade industry, eight generations of home video game console inventors from the Magnavox Odyssey through the present day, the impact of the home computer on video games, the evolution of the handheld game console from early LCD games through the smart phone, online gaming from the first text-based games built by hobbyists through the current massively multi-player online role-playing games, and the validation of video games as an art form as evidenced by their addition to the collections of prominent institutions such as the Smithsonian and MoMA. For each historical era, the influence of video games on popular culture will be demonstrated through film, television, print, and music.

Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Describe and discuss the history of video game design from its origins to the present.
2. Analyze video game technology and how it affected game content and aesthetics.
3. Identify the major periods of video game development from the first experiments with mainframe computers through modern arcade, computer, and console-based games.
4. Write comprehensive analyses of the impact of video games on popular culture.

Course Content

1. Early history
    a. The end of World War II results in the first video games
    b. Early attempts to create artificial intelligence with simple computers
    c. Mainstream society initially fears and rejects games
    d. The first hobbyist game designers and the emergence of collective play
    e. Important figures might include:
        i. Thomas Goldsmith
        ii. Alan Turing
        iii. William Higinbotham
2. Video arcade games
    a. College students secretly use campus computer resources to develop the first computer-based video games
    b. The first video game companies attempt to perfect the user experience
    c. The initial success of the industry spawns copycats and results in numerous lawsuits
    d. Attempts to legitimize video arcades by creating a family-friendly atmosphere
    e. The rapid growth and sudden crash of the industry
    f. Important figures might include:
        i. Steve Russell
        ii. Nolan Bushnell
3. Home video game consoles
    a. The struggle to achieve commercial acceptance of the first home game consoles
    b. The first video game entrepreneurs and the building of a multi-billion dollar industry
    c. Media conglomerates attempt to control game distribution using the same model as music and film distribution
    d. The creation of new control interfaces to attract underrepresented gamer demographics like women, children, and the elderly
    e. Important figures might include:
        i. Ralph Baer
        ii. Steve Ross
        iii. Howard Marks
4. Home computer games
    a. A grassroots movement results in the text game genre
    b. The rise of third-party developers and the promotion of game designers as stars
    c. The first person shooter brings players closer to living in a virtual reality
    d. Important figures might include:
        i. Will Crowther
        ii. Jack Tramiel
        iii. Trip Hawkins
        iv. Rand and Robyn Miller
        v. Jon Romero
5. Handheld video games
    a. Advances in miniaturization enable game designers to create engaging handheld games
    b. The convergence of children's film and television entertainment with video games
    c. The rise of the smart phone and the democratization of game creation and consumption
    d. Important figures might include:
        i. Michael Katz
        ii. Gunpei Yojoi
        iii. Steve Jobs

6. Online video games
    a. Widespread availability of computer modems allows users to interact online
    b. The massively multiplayer game leads to game addicts living their entire lives virtually
    c. Online gaming propels the game industry past films to the top of the entertainment industry
    d. The rise of casual gaming and the science of user experience
    e. Important figures might include:
        i. Steve Case
        ii. Brad McQuaid
        iii. Harold Ryan
7. Controversy
    a. Violence in gaming becomes one of the nation's hottest political issues
    b. Warner Brothers discards millions of game cartridges in the New Mexico desert
    c. The introduction of the sandbox game and concerns about virtual representations of drugs and prostitution
    d. Important figures might include:
        i. Jack Thompson
        ii. Steven Spielberg
        iii. Davis Jones
8. Gaming around the world
    a. A culture of gaming perfection in Japan
    b. Game development behind the Iron Curtain
    c. Important figures might include:
        i. Tomohiro Nishikado and Space Invaders
        ii. Toru Iwatani and Pac-Man
        iii. Shigeru Miyamoto: From Donkey Kong to Mario
        iv. Alexy Pajtinov and Tetris
9. Games in film, television, music and print
    a. Films about games, artificial intelligence, and fear of technology
    b. Books about games, virtual reality, and their impact on popular culture
    c. Music inspired by games and game characters
    d. Important topics might include:
        i. Kubrick's 2001 and computer paranoia
        ii. Pac-Man fever: integrated marketing pays off
        iii. Tron: the first film about games
        iv. William Gibson's cyberpunk revolution
        v. '80s gaming blockbusters: WarGames, The Last Starfighter, and Cloak & Dagger
        vi. Genre innovation: Ender's Game and Snow Crash
        vii. Why are movies about games so bad?
        viii. Coming full circle: Ernest Cline and Ready Player One

Lab Content

1. Laboratory activities are provided for students to gain a theoretical knowledge regarding video game characteristics (story, graphics, sound), genre, and style. The lab content includes:
    a. In-depth, guided study of video game examples
    b. Additional opportunities are provided through critical analysis of music, films, books, and documentaries
    c. Learning is assessed in module quizzes and essays

Special Facilities and/or Equipment

1. When taught on campus: classroom sound equipment for compact discs, audiotape and records, screen, overhead projector, digital projector, VCR and DVD.
2. When taught via Foothill Global Access: on-going access to computer with email software and capabilities; email address; JavaScript-enabled internet browsing software.

Method(s) of Evaluation

Module quizzes on each of the topic areas
Essays in response to prompts that ask for critical exploration of a topic related to the parts of the course or game reviews
Final examination or comprehensive project: in-depth analysis of video games including technological and artistic influences, comparison of video game structural characteristics, cultural impact of video games, interpretation of game dialog, etc.

Method(s) of Instruction

Lecture presentations and classroom discussion of the impact of video games on popular culture
In-class viewing of historically significant video games followed by instructor-guided interpretation and analysis
Group presentations of major projects followed by in-class discussion and evaluation

Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Bissell, Tom. Why Video Games Matter. 2011.

Goldberg, Harold. All Your Base Are Belong to Us: How Fifty Years of Videogames Conquered Pop Culture. 2011.

Kent, Steven. The Ultimate History of Video Games. 2010.

Although these texts are older than the suggested "5 years or newer" standard, they remain seminal texts in this area of study.

Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Reading assignments: Reading of modules for each of the module topics plus online summary.
2. Writing assignments: Essays responding to a prompt.

Discipline(s)

Music or Humanities