

# IAH 207 -- Video Games, Cultures, Identities

Justin Wigard

1<sup>st</sup>-year Ph.D Student, English Department, MSU

## Introduction:

**Hello Everyone! My name is Justin, and I'll be your instructor throughout this course. I want to welcome you to the course: hey! How are you? Doing good? Great!**

**To make things easier on you, I have worked to make this syllabus as simple to navigate as possible. Check out the table on your right, and let me know if you have any questions!**

## Description:

This online course will explore how video games create, reflect, and challenge cultural and individual identities as a mode of literature. Students will explore how video games portray representations of women, race, and/or disability, and more specifically, how these representations impact cultural and individual identities in this 5 unit model (Introduction, Creation, Reflection, Challenge, and Synthesis).

Though video games have existed since 1958 (yes, nearly 60 years now!), it is only since the mid-1970s with arcades that video games have truly entered into the global consciousness. Now, video games are such an embedded part of society that they have the capacity to shape us on an individual level, as well as to create, and even challenge, entire cultures. We will investigate how video games do this, and study video games critically through play, discussion, and written analysis.

This course involves weekly readings, films, and video games, as well as daily writing assignments. Because this is a 6-week course, we will be moving relatively fast, and you will be expected to participate frequently!

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### **Some quick notes up front:**

**Technology:** All you'll have to do is purchase 1-2 video games, install them (the computers do all the hard stuff there nowadays), and click "play" when you're ready!

**Netflix** is really quick, simple, and affordable, runs off of your phone or your laptop to boot!

**Textbook Cost:** Less than a lot of other classes!

World of Warcraft	Free!
Tomb Raider	\$20
Mass Effect	\$15
Netflix (2 months)	\$15
Ready Player One	\$10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$60</b>

- **5-unit model:** Introduction, Creation, Reflection, Challenge, and Synthesis.
  - In each unit, students will:
    - 1) play one video game related to the theme as it relates to culture and identity
    - 2) watch one film related to the theme on hand
    - 3) read a section out of *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline,
    - 4) Participate in a discussion board or online podcast
    - 5) Develop writing skills through individual and peer reviewed blog posts

## Course Outline:

- **Unit 1 (Introduction)** will focus on foundational primary readings (video games as literature, different approaches to and models of identities and cultures), getting prepared for accessing video games and films, introducing the available options for online modes of criticism, and discussing student's experiences with video games.
- **Units 2 (Create), 3 (Reflect), and 4 (Challenge)**, will examine how video games can create, reflect, and challenge (respectively) identities and cultures. Students will begin each unit by watching one related film, then proceed to play one whole-class video game per unit. During these units, students will read passages of *Ready Player One*. Each week, students will critically engage with and analyze video games through weekly blogging and bi-weekly multimedia reviewing. These elements will be peer-reviewed through ELI Review, giving students an opportunity to analyze writing in context, both in terms of content and rhetoric.
- **Unit 5 (Synthesis)** will be a reflection unit, in which students write a short (500w) synthesis essay connecting their blog's analytical trajectory and evolution, posted to their blog, as well as a longer (7-8pp) critical inquiry essay analyzing a problem, theme, or trend in video games pertaining to an issue of culture or identity.

## Course Materials

### ○ **Texts (Required)**

- *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, ISBN: 0307887448
- Secondary articles to be provided by me, and distributed via D2L.

### ○ **Video games:**

- *World of Warcraft*
- *Tomb Raider*
- *Mass Effect*

## ○ **Films**

- *King of Kong*
- *Warcraft*
- *Second Skin*

## **Assignments:**

- Weekly blog (200-250w): 15%
- Peer review of 2-3 peers' blog entries: 15%
- Participation in discussion boards/chat: 10%
- Mid-Term essay (4pp with 2-3 sources, 1 primary video game): 20%
- Synthesis essay (500w): 15%
- Final Essay (7-8pp with 4-6 sources, 2 primary texts): 25%

## **Activities:**

(lots of important text, so read carefully)

### • **Weekly blog:**

- These blogs will be informal, and are designed to be critical reflections of your time interacting with the texts, not simply 100 words of your personal feelings. As we progress through the course, I will be working with you to finetune your critical observations through direct feedback, as we focus on grammar, content, and overall voice. By the end of the semester, your weekly blog will have a theme, and will be featured in our overall class' blog.

### • **Peer Review:**

- Each week, you will also be responsible for reading through, and responding to, several of your peers' blog posts. This is a powerful method of developing analytical skills in and through writing, as well as remaining apprised of your peers' thoughts and observations interacting with the same texts. Through peer review, you will develop the ability to offer critical insight in an effort to build up your peers' work through mutual support, not tear it down with a red pen.

### **Typical Week of Activities**

Play/Watch/Read Primary Texts

Complete secondary readings

Submit blog entry for peer review by Weds.

Peer review by Friday.

Revise and publish by Sunday.

## • Reading Group:

- As part of this course, you will be participating in small group and class-wide chat sessions based on *Ready Player One*. These chat groups and sessions will be monitored, but you are not required to post a certain number of words, or times. Instead, I will be looking for active participation in the discussion.
- This chat space is an extension of our classroom, and as such, our classroom is **a safe space**. Treat it like a normal, everyday discussion. Want to use emojis? Knock yourself out! 😊 Feel like drawing a picture of a rhinoceros named Seymour doing ballet in a tutu because it's related to the game or movie at hand? Go for it! I may step in to prompt you here and there, or to redirect conversation, but I want you all to feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and opinions in this chat.



- **Note:** Because this chat room, and the rest of my class, is a safe space, harassment of any kind will not be tolerated.

## • Optional Podcast:

- As part of this course, students will create several short podcast episodes or video game streams related to the video game at hand, engaging with video game criticism at all levels. Because many of you may not be familiar with podcasts, we will be spending the first week getting familiar with these forms of analysis and criticism. I will be assisting with your first podcast episode; these will be kept short, no more than 10 minutes each with small groups of 3-4 students. This will be explained further in week one.

## • Mid-Term Essay:

- This is designed to be a critical analysis of one primary video game that we have played as a class thus far in the semester. You will create an essay that analyzes one facet of the video game, and create an analytical essay based around this element, using 2-3 articles or sources from class to support your point. This will require finding specific scenes in the video game as evidence, and using these to support your claims. MLA citations and bibliography, double-spaced. This will be further discussed closer to mid-terms.

## • Final essay:

- For your final essay, you will write an extended argumentative essay about at least one video game and either an additional video game or a film from the course, using 4-6 sources. You will be identifying a problem in the video game, articulating an argument related to the problem, and supporting this argument with evidence from the sources you have chosen. While this will be discussed closer to the end of the course, at least 3 of these sources must be from the course.

# Challenges and accessibility:

## • **Texts:**

- *Ready Player One* is available through Amazon, in audiobook format, and in most major retailers. As such, if a student cannot access this particular text, I can work with the student to find either an alternative text or find other means of obtaining the whole-class novel.
- All other secondary and foundational texts centered around studying video games will be provided by me through D2L. We will be reading topical articles written by gamers, video game journalists, and non-gamer authors throughout the semester.

## • **Video games:**

- These will be available on PC/Mac, as well as other major consoles. Costs per video game should be comparable to a typical literature course per novel, in that students may acquire used/discounted versions of said video games or borrow a friend's copy if necessary, as long as they have access to the game in the required week.
- In addition, I will recommend that if students' computers are not able to play these video games, there are other options such as Rent-A-Centers, which offer rentable video game systems for less than \$30/week, which should be more than enough time to engage with and play through a single video game
  - If these options do not work for a student's computer system, I can work with students to find alternate, light-weight video games or assign "Let's play" walkthrough videos online that provide a simulated video game experience.
- Although these video games are specifically chosen in terms of accessibility through criteria available on [ablegamers.com](http://ablegamers.com) (a non-profit organization dedicated to reviewing video games for disabled players), if a student cannot access a video game in a specific unit, I will work with the student to offer another video game that is more accessible (a text-based, audio-based, vision-based, or kinetic-based game) for that particular student.

## • **Films:**

- A Netflix account is strongly suggested, but not required; a student may sign up for a short free trial, can Interlibrary Loan (ILL) a copy of the movie if necessary, or pursue other means of watching the film.
  - Because we will watch 3 films, these will be announced far in advance. students will have an opportunity to plan out when they sign up for Netflix, or ILL these films from either a local or out-of-state library, or even from a local Redbox/rental store.

## • Recording equipment:

- I will take on the responsibility of recording, editing files, and putting them online.
  - **All you have to do is find a microphone!**
- Nearly all laptops come prebuilt with a microphone included. However, should a student not have a microphone, or be otherwise unable to participate verbally in a podcasting or verbal activity, options are available for students to live-stream/capture a video game play, or create a text-based critique of the video game in real-time.

## Class Diagram

