

Anthro 236: Games, Culture, and Power (4 credits, SBDG, SBS-IIR)

Class meetings:
Tu 4-6:15 pm (class+game lab)
Th 4-5:15pm
Class Location: 608 Goodell

Instructor: Professor Krista Harper
Office Hours: Th 2-3 pm and by appt.
Office: 210 Machmer
Email: harper@umass.edu

Course Description and Objectives: Game designer Eric Zimmerman has proclaimed the 21st century to be the "Ludic Century." Jane McGonigal writes that "reality is broken," and games may be the solution for social problems. In this course, we will use tabletop, card, role-playing, and digital games to explore themes in social, behavioral, and cultural theory such as play, cooperation, social change, symbols, and power. The course presents an introduction to cultural anthropology using games as a focus and medium for learning. We will learn to analyze texts and games anthropologically. As a creative, experiential learning component, we will learn about the basic elements of game design, and as a final culminating project, student teams will develop games based on anthropological concepts which we'll playtest at #AnthropologyConUMass. Previous courses in cultural/linguistic anthropology (such as ANTHRO 100, 104, 105 or 106) are encouraged but not required. Course fulfills the Gen Ed SB DG requirement and partially fulfills the SBS Intercultural (IIR) requirement

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By completing this course successfully, student will:

1. Discuss fundamental questions, ideas, and methods of cultural anthropology in relation to games and play.
2. Articulate and critically analyze diverse social, cultural, and political perspectives reading anthropologists' research on games and culture from around the world, by discussing and writing about games and player communities in different global cultural settings.
3. Apply anthropological methods to the study of games by carrying out an original mini-ethnographic research project and writing a paper based on the results.
4. Integrate critical analysis and creative team problem-solving by working together to design a game that presents anthropological concepts in a culturally and ethically sensitive manner.
5. Demonstrate effective and creative communication in several different ways: writing (10+ pages total), speaking, game design, and multimedia presentations.
6. Demonstrate critical awareness of how individual perspectives and biases influence ways of seeing the world by studying controversies about "who counts" as a gamer and which perspectives are represented by player characters and embedded in game rules.
7. Gain knowledge of structural and cultural forces that shape or have shaped discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, or gender by critically analyzing representations and design decisions in and by studying work by game designers from traditionally underrepresented groups.
8. Practice active listening and respectful communication among people with different perspectives through class discussions, presentations, and a team-based design project in which questions of ethics, power, and representation are explored and addressed in practical terms.
9. Compare and contrast multiple perspectives to develop a complex understanding of the world through readings about games and player communities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and/or Central/South America, as well as the United States.

Assignments and Grading:

1. Homework, quizzes, and prepared participation in class discussions and games, (25%), including
 - attending class regularly
 - completing Perusall posts by 3 pm the day readings are discussed in class.
 - speaking up and listening in discussions and small-group activities;
 - contributing to the learning of your fellow students;
 - occasional in-class games and quizzes based on the readings.
2. Game Analysis Review: A 3 pp. double-spaced game review and 3-minute critical game review video applying course concepts (25%).
3. A 4-5 pp. spaced Game Mini-Ethnography and 2-min. presentation of findings. Game ethnography based on participant observation of people playing a game and at least 1 interview with a player (25%)
4. Team Anthropology Game Project (25%): Your team's grade will be based on an in-class overview of readings, a final presentation and "playtest" demonstration of your team project, as well as a game guide explaining the rules and theoretical "backstory" of the game and group, peer- and self-evaluations to ensure fairness. Teams will be generated based on shared interests and schedules as much as possible, and some time for group work will be scheduled during class.

GRADING SCALE:

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale, with the following letter grades:

A = above 93%	B+ = 87-89%	C+ = 77-79	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-92%	B = 83-86	C = 73-76	D = 64-66
	B- = 80-82	C- = 70-72	F = below 63

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Please arrive on time.** Coming late disrupts other students, breaks the flow of discussion, and disturbs me. Also, you will miss GAMES! Your participation grade is lowered for habitual lateness.
2. **Attendance, Participation, and Readings:** Attendance in this course is required and recorded through participation in in-class activities. In-class activities such as free-writes, team design sessions, and commenting on presentations are part of the homework/participation grade and may not be made up at a later date except under exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances: illness (verified by an official statement from the University Health Center), participation in an institution-sponsored activity (verified by a written statement from a coach or faculty sponsor), emergencies approved by the dean of student affairs, or religious observances. Otherwise, you're either here, or you're not. If you must miss class, please check the Moodle page to get the handouts and assignments you've missed.

3. **Names & Gender Pronouns:** Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name—you may change this information by going on SPIRE. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.
4. **Disability Accommodations:** If you qualify for accommodations please submit a letter from Disability Services as soon as possible so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. See <http://www.umass.edu/disability/>
5. **Academic Honesty:** Cheating, fabrication of information or citations, plagiarism, and facilitating academically dishonest work by another student are prohibited at the university. I reserve the right to use "Turnitin" software. UMass Faculty Senate defines plagiarism as:

knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own work in any academic exercise. This includes submitting without citation, in whole or in part, prewritten term papers of another or the research of another, including but not limited to commercial vendors who sell or distribute such materials. (Senate Doc. No. 00-015, Appendix B)
6. **Exam Scheduling:** The professor will announce the dates of exams in class and on MOODLE several weeks ahead of time. According to the UMass Faculty Senate, students have the following responsibilities:

Students are responsible for taking exams at the scheduled times, to know the location of their exams, and to make alternative arrangements in advance if they have a legitimate reason for not being able to take an exam. (Fac Senate, "Course Instructional Guidelines")
7. **Communication:** For general class announcements, there is the MOODLE course website and a class email list. Email me ASAP if you do not get the welcome message after the first day of class. Beginning in the second week, we also have a course blog on MOODLE where students can post interesting homework blog posts, etc. I will try to return *weekday* emails within 24 hours and weekend emails on the following weekday.

CLASS MEETINGS & WORK SCHEDULE

Dates	Class topics/activities	Readings/assignments due
WEEK 1 Tu 3 SEPT	Introduction: Why Games? Mapping the territory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student questionnaire • Play <i>Wits and Wagers: Anthro of Games Edition</i> • Watch/discuss: McGonigal, "Reality is Broken" (TED Talk) • Debrief • Syllabus 	N/A
Th 5 SEPT	What is a Game? Classics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAY: <i>We Didn't Playtest This</i> • Discussion of readings • Perusall Tutorial • Game Analysis assignment 	READ: Callois, "The Definition of Play" & "The Classification of Games" and Huizinga selections
WEEK 2 Tu 10 SEPT	What is a Game? The Ludology vs. Narratology debate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group activity: Defining the term "game" anthropologically • LAB: Play <i>Catan</i> or another board game from selection 	READ: Jesper Juul, "The Game, the Player, The World" WATCH: Errant Signal, "The Debate That Never Took Place"
Th 12 SEPT	Theorizing <i>Diner Dash</i> Discussion: Gender, emotional labor, play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLAY: <i>Something to Drink with That, Sir?</i> (Torner) 	READ: Anable, "Casual Games, Time Management, and the Work of Affect" PLAY: <i>Diner Dash</i> (phone game) OPTIONAL: Taylor, "Counter Culture" podcast and virtual exhibition
WEEK 3 Tu 17 SEPT	Decolonizing <i>Catan</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of <i>Catan</i> analyses and anthropology of colonialism • Play <i>First Nations of Catan</i> • Debrief: What can we learn from hacking an existing game? 	PLAY: <i>Settlers of Catan</i> READ: Said, <i>Orientalism</i> selection; Loring-Albright, "First Nations of Catan" (read rules and come prepared to play!); other articles TBA
Th 19 SEPT	Telling policy stories with game mechanics, Part 1: Minimum wage and Immigration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Borders and Papers Please!</i> 	READ: Saxton, Moreno on <i>Borders</i> by Alvarez, De Leon; other readings TBD PLAY: <i>Spent</i> and <i>Borders</i>
WEEK 4 Tu 24 SEPT	Telling policy stories with game mechanics, part 2: <i>Pandemic</i> and cooperative game mechanics	WATCH: Pandemic tutorial and "Frontline: Outbreak" documentary READ: Pandemic rules
Th 26 SEPT	<i>Pandemic and Medical Anthropology</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pandemic</i> debrief and discussion of reading 	READ: Benton, "Ebola: Keywords"

WEEK 5 Tu 1 OCT	Wrapping up Game Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshopping your ideas Powtoon tips Lab: Explore games! 	WRITE: 1-paragraph treatment of your game analysis essay idea(s)— DUE Monday 9/30 at 11:59 pm.
Th 3 OCT	ENGAGING ANTHROPOLOGY CONFERENCE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend Lilith Mahmoud lecture at 4 pm, ILC 3rd Floor Communication Hub 	ATTEND: Jason de Leon lecture on Friday, 4:30-6 pm at the Old Chapel (or another plenary or film) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a project for mini-ethnography.
DUE by 9 am Monday, 10/7: Game Analysis Powtoon videos and short essays Please upload essays to the Moodle assignment dropbox and post videos to forum.		
WEEK 6 Tu 8 OCT	NO CLASS TODAY (Yom Kippur)	WATCH: Your classmates' Game Analysis videos
Th 10 OCT	Ethnography of Game Culture: "Deep Play" in Anthropology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini-Ethnography launch 	READ: Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight"
WEEK 7 Tu 15 OCT	MONDAY EXCHANGE DAY (NO CLASS)	
Th 17 OCT	Cultures of role-playing games (RPGs): <i>Projeto Morrinho</i> in Brazil	READ: Angelini, "Ludic Maps and Capitalist Spectacle" and Gonzalez, "Projeto Morrinho" WRITE: 1-paragraph mini-ethnography proposal
WEEK 8 Tu 22 OCT	Ethnography of World of Warcraft LAB: Ethnographic methods workshop	READ: Nardi, <i>My Life as a Night Elf Priest</i> (selections) WRITE: Interview questions
Th 24 OCT	Game culture, player identity and the #Gamergate controversy	READ: Salter and Blodgett, <i>Toxic Geek Masculinity in Media</i> (selections)
WEEK 9 Tu 29 OCT	Worldbuilding, Embodiment, Disability	READ: Boellstorff, "The Ability of Place," other readings on accessibility and game design TBD.
Th 31 OCT	Team game project launch!	READ: Get started on your team's packet
WEEK 10 Tu 5 NOV	Game design workshop: Gamestorming and team ground rules	
Th 7 NOV	<i>Eramat</i>: Understanding climate change through board games (Kenya)	READ: Mayiami, et al. on Eramat; view "Maasai Confront Climate Change" 10-minute video on Moodle
WEEK 11 Tu 12 NOV	Game design workshop: Narrative in games, Twine digital interactive game tutorial by Evan Young	READ/PLAY: Twine game or story posted on Moodle. Bring assigned text to class.

Th 14 NOV	Gamestorming workshop #2: Committing to a concept	READ: your team's packet, start annotated bibliography, AND be ready to communicate the main concepts and information in class.
Game Mini-Ethnography paper, due on Monday, 18 NOV by NOON (Moodle)		
WEEK 12 Tu 19 NOV	Game design workshop: Ethics and representation	READ: iPINCH, "Know Before You Appropriate," Rosewater, "Why Diversity Matters in Game Design," WATCH: Jayanthi lecture
Th 21 NOV	Game design teams meet independently to work on game design; meeting report due at 6 pm today on Moodle (608 Goodell available as meeting space)	
24 NOV - 1 DEC: THANKSGIVING BREAK		
WEEK 13 TU 3 DEC	Game design workshop: Mechanics Planning #AnthropologyConUMass Iterative design workshop and playtesting	READ: Schell, chapters on mechanics and balance.
TH 5 DEC	Game design workshop: Writing rules and educational guides	READ: a selection of well-written game rules and study guides
WEEK 14 Tu 10 DEC	Class wrap-up activities; preparations for #AnthropologyConUMass	READ: Schell, other readings TBD
FINALS WEEK 6-9 pm on Monday 12/16; Room TBA	#AnthropologyConUMass: Final Team Game Project presentations and playtesting!!!	Final Team Game Project written portfolios due on Wednesday 18 DEC at 9 am (MOODLE).