

MIT CMS 300, CMS 841 FA09  
Introduction to Videogame Theory

Mon. & Wed. lecture 3:30-5:00 pm  
Wed. lab: 7-10 pm  
@ NE25-373

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## Introduction to Videogame Theory

### Class requirements

Please note that the requirements for grad students and undergrads are slightly different.

The grade of the course will be determined by participation and in-class preparedness (20%), videogame analysis presentation (20%), short paper (20%), final paper (40%).

Late submissions will be graded one grade lower than normally. Extensions are granted only if you come and talk to us at least a week in advance.

Regular attendance is required – we may not consider grading your exercises if you miss a 10% of sessions without justifications.

### Important Dates:

First week of the course: decide on the game(s) you want to analyze for the rest of the semester. For details about the videogame analysis assignment, see *Videogame Analysis Assignment Doc*.

Wed, Sept. 16<sup>th</sup>: during Wednesday's lab session, briefly talk about the game(s) you have chosen for analysis for the course. Provide a short explanation why the game(s) you chose is (are) interesting in regard to game analysis. What is the game's contribution, what makes it special?

October 7<sup>th</sup>: student videogame analysis presentations begin!

Wednesday, Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>: submit your short paper, containing your first game analysis (see videogame analysis assignment for details).

Wednesday, Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>: drop date: last date to cancel subjects from registration.

Monday, Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup>: submit long paper, containing your significant elaboration on your game analysis (see videogame analysis assignment for details).

## Videogame Analysis Assignment

Each week on Wednesday, starting October 7<sup>th</sup>, three students will present analyses of their games to the rest of the class. These presentations should meet and often exceed the expectations laid out below. *Undergraduate students will be expected to complete this assignment once throughout the semester; graduate students will present twice.*

### ***Goals, Expectations, Procedures***

This analysis assignment is meant to give you practice and experience with presenting your theories, analyses, and ideas to a friendly audience. It is our hope that as you read and consider the materials we discuss during the week, you will begin to connect those ideas to your experiences with your game(s). If there are particularly interesting moments, ideas, concepts, happenings, etc. in your game that you think are relevant to class discussions, readings, and course materials, you are encouraged to explore those ideas more deeply in this presentation. You will then bring your game(s) (or recorded moment in the game(s)) to class and connect your analysis to the topics discussed in class.

Within the first two weeks of the course, you get to choose one big game for your analysis or a series of meaningfully connected smaller games. You are expected to play the game(s) you chose for at least 30hrs throughout the semester. More important than the actual time you spend playing is that you know your game(s) really well. Play it / them more than once if necessary / possible; make sure you have discovered the game(s)'s hidden secrets; if you can make different choices in the game, try out how different choices influence the course of the game. Also pay attention to the game's reviews, history of the game / development process. Familiarizing yourself with the scholarly discourse around the game is a plus.

Analyses can be either a close reading of a particular moment in a game or else a broader (but focused) discussion of a particular game rule, narrative structure, character model, social phenomenon, etc. that you consider relevant and meaningful. Interesting aspects of a particular game might become especially apparent in comparison with another game. In these cases, collaboration with a fellow student becomes an option. (For details about the collaboration process please see the next section.) For example, you may wish to present how *Assassin's Creed* tries to enhance the game's verisimilitude, or the way that *Riddick's* tutorial level allows the player to explore the game's design grammar in a safe way. Or if you want to compare two games, you might e.g. investigate how two different games translate similar complex interactions with the gameworld (e.g. cooking, lock picking, conversing with NPCs) into interface metaphors and how that shapes the playing experience. Or perhaps you want to show *Star Wars – Knights of the Old Republic's* innovations with game ethics.

**Whatever your choice, you are strongly encouraged to discuss it with us first so that we can help you focus the presentation.** Game walkthroughs are only acceptable when you get severely stuck. You must directly connect your game to the readings and discussions from class.

### ***Logistics and Parameters***

- You are responsible for recording and / or preparing save games of the moment(s) in your game(s) that you are analyzing. For help, ask friends, colleagues, others in class.
- You are required to provide a paper to go along with your presentation. The paper must be between 1000-1300 words long and in it you present your analysis in an organized way and clearly formulate your ideas and arguments (see stellar website for writing guidelines). In the case of a collaborative presentation (where two games are compared), the paper needs to be 2000-2600 words long and to include an individual part, in which both collaborators explain

the phenomenon they focus on in their own game as well as a collaborative part in which they explain what additional insights can be won by the comparative analysis. To get the highest grade, your ideas must be meaningfully connected to the class readings. If you can't find any readings that apply to your questions / ideas / observations come talk to us.

- You are also required to significantly expand on your game analysis in a final paper (4000 words for grad students, 2000 words for undergrads). The focus of this paper should derive from the discussions following your presentation. Please do not just add a couple of paragraphs to the short paper, even if it got an A. And again: please come talk to us first!
- All papers should be submitted to the instructors as e-mail attachments (pdf or doc) on the day they are due (no later than midnight, if you don't want to get a lower grade).
- Presentations are conducted individually, or, in the case of a comparative analysis, together with your collaborator. In case of collaboration, it is important that *both* parties present their ideas.
- Individual presentations should take about 25 minutes. Collaborative presentations should take 50 minutes. If you go over, we will cut the presentation off and you might not get to say all the clever things you had in mind. So please, be concise.
- Presentations (not just the papers) should reference and connect to readings in the course.
- Presentations are not necessarily arguments for your particular approach to your game; instead, they should take the form of analyses, connecting theory to the text or experience you're examining. Tell us what you notice, what you observe, what's interesting to you and for what reasons. Neither your presentation nor your paper should sound like a sales pitch for the game. If something is "awesome", we want to know why and you have to provide arguments for it you find within the game.

### **Statement on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism- use of another's intellectual work without acknowledgement- is a serious offense. It is the policy of the CMS Faculty that students who plagiarize will receive an F in the subject, and that the instructor will forward the case to the Committee on Discipline. Full acknowledgement for all information obtained from sources outside the classroom must be clearly stated in all written work submitted. All ideas, arguments, and direct phrasings taken from someone else's work must be identified and properly footnoted. Quotations from other sources must be clearly marked as distinct from the student's own work. For further guidance on the proper forms of attribution, consult the style guides available in the Writing and Communication Center (12-132) and the MIT Website on Plagiarism located at: <http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc/plagiarism>.

For additional help with your writing assignments, please contact the **Writing and Communication Center**: <http://humanistic.mit.edu/wcc>