Course Description
This course teaches critical perspectives on games and game culture. The video game industry is massively popular, selling millions of copies annually and outperforming film and television in terms of revenue. Given this immense influence on popular culture, it becomes imperative to investigate video games, games, and game culture critically, and the main objective of this course will be to discuss how games address matters of cultural significance. What are the major approaches towards studying games? This course will address these issues and others, while also push students to develop traditional English-based skills regarding critical analysis and essay composition.

Learning Objectives
By the end of the course, students will have been introduced and be expected to successfully demonstrate some of the following skills:
☑ To critically investigate and discuss major themes of games and game studies
☑ To appreciate and apply some critical and theoretical approaches to games and their surrounding culture
☑ To understand and communicate some of the history behind the design practices and industry that creates games
☑ To recognize how game culture intersects with, perpetuates and embodies notions of race, gender, queerness
☑ To propose and carry out a critical investigation of a well-ordered argument concerning a given research topic regarding games

Required Games
With the exception of Sorcery! And Sorcery! 2, all games are free; the Sorcery! series games are $6.99 and available on Steam, iOS, or Android. Life is Strange Episode 1 is available for free on Steam (Mac, Linux, and Windows), PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, and Xbox One. All other games are browser-based, or available from Internet Archive.

Students are permitted to use whatever platform or version of these games that they may find.

Evaluation
Game Analysis 25% Jun 22 5-7 pages, due in class
Readings & Lectures
With a few exceptions, most classes will be a mix of lecture and readings, wherein we discuss the assigned readings for that day, as well as (especially for the Thursday class) the weekly assigned game. As such, students are expected to come class prepared for discussion, and having read or played whatever has been assigned. Usually, there will be an academic paper and one less formal piece of game criticism. This pairing is not incidental. We live in an age where meaningful, high quality pop culture criticism exists outside of the academy, and game criticism in particular is a deep, rich resource to drawn on. If you find any supplementary criticism that speaks to some topic we’ve discussed or will discuss in class, I encourage you to send it my way; I could add it to the course web page, or even replace one of our set readings.

The purpose of these readings and the subsequent discussions is to develop critical analytical skills. Students are not only to respond to the content of the readings, but also to their structure, and how that structure supports (or fails to support) the larger piece. The readings will cover a wide variety of topics, sometimes controversial; if you feel uncomfortable discussing a particular topic in a classroom setting, please let me know, and we’ll come up with an alternative. Further, let’s try to keep the discussion in the classroom; some of these authors and creators have received real-life harassment for their works, and I’m sure no one here wants to add to that burden. Similarly, while contentious opinions are permitted and to an extent encouraged, students are instructed to remain civil, and to be aware that no hateful or abusive language will be tolerated.

Game Analysis. This essay will ask students to analyze a single game or game series. Notably, this assignment is meant to be argumentative, not descriptive—the student will make claims about the game, and provide evidence to support those claims. The game analysis is not a game review; you are not arguing whether it is good or bad, or right or wrong, but kind of structures unfold as you and others play the game, and what those structures may mean in light of the readings and discussions we’ve had thus far. Any of the games we are playing in the course are acceptable for the purpose of this analysis; you may also choose another game, but only after consulting with me. I will provide a more detailed description later in the term.

Weekly Responses. For each week, students must turn in a brief response (400 word minimum) on LEARN. Prior to each Thursday’s class (specifically, 11:30 am on the day in question) students are to submit a brief response to the work to the LEARN dropbox, in the appropriate folder. The emphasis will be on the Thursday readings and if you write on the Tuesday readings, I’ll expect you to incorporate the class discussion into your response. The goal of the response is to describe your personal thoughts on the assigned readings or games, and submit one discussion question that you would like to see the room as a whole discuss. I'll then use your questions in the Thursday lecture to lead the discussion for that work. (Hence the reason you submit them at 11:30 am, or earlier—I need time to go through them!) Remember to include at least one question, and remember that these are RESPONSES—I want your thoughts on the works, not a description of the works.

Final Essay. This essay is the student’s chance to demonstrate what has been learned over the course of the class. A list of possible essay topics will be distributed beforehand, though students will be permitted to pursue other topics if the instructor approves. Students also have the option of instead
creating a games-related project, which then be presented on the last day of classes (or week, depending on the number of projects). Those who choose the project option will write a four page description of the their project and how it critically addresses some aspect of game studies; projects may be done in groups of two or three, but students will still have to write the accompanying paper individually. Potential projects include critical Let’s Plays, designing your own game, or other game-like engagements. Students will receive a detailed description of this assignment along with possible essay topics well in advance of the due date.

**Final Exam.** Questions will be designed to test your knowledge of the readings, and concepts discussed in class. The test will consist of four parts: explaining key concepts, contextualizing quotations, answering short answer questions, and writing an essay-length response to one of a set of questions.

**Course Outline**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Read/Watch</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Watch someone play</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Ebert. “Games Can Never Be Art.” Shaw. “What is Video Game Culture?”</td>
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<td>Games and the Media</td>
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<td>May 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Caillous. “The Definition of Play” and “The Classification of Games.”</td>
<td>Monopoly</td>
<td>What are Games?</td>
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<td>May 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Flanagan Nissenbaum Lantz. “Game Elements: The Language of Values”</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No class</td>
<td>Alter Ego</td>
<td>No Class</td>
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<td>June 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Screening: gaming doc TBD</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Speakers</td>
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<td>June 13th</td>
<td>Leonard. “Young, Black (&amp; Brown) and Don’t Give a Fuck.” Gibbons. “Autis(i)m and Representation.”</td>
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<td><em>Lim + Passage</em></td>
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<td>June 27th</td>
<td>Game Design Workshop</td>
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<td><em>Twine Games</em></td>
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<td>July 18th</td>
<td>Phillips. “Shooting to Kill.” Coberly. “Guns vs Real Life.”</td>
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<td><em>Oregon Trail</em></td>
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<td>July 20th</td>
<td>Wrap-Up Part 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 25th</td>
<td>Wrap-Up Part 2</td>
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List of Readings (readings and/or links available on LEARN)


Roger Caillois. “The Definition of Play” and “the Classification of Games.” *Man, Play, and Games*. (33 pages)


Edmond Chang. “Cards Against Humanity Is _____________: Playing Up and Playing Difference in Games.” *First Person Scholar*.


Sarah Gibbons. “Autis(i)m & Representation: Auti-Sim, Disability Simulation Games, & Neurodiversity.” *First Person Scholar*. May 1, 2013.


**List of Games**

*Cookie Clicker*.
*Passage*. Jason Rohrer. 2007. PC, Mac.
Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm.

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm.

Academic Integrity website (Arts): http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (UW): http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:
Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.