

Comm. 597C — Video Game Effects

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Course overview: This class explores research into a variety of gaming effects, including influences on aggression, enjoyment, learning, computer skills, cognitive ability, and social connectedness. In addition, it considers the role of potential moderating variables, including gender, experience, and player motivations. Students assess existing theories from communications, psychology, and related disciplines as well as evaluating a variety of research techniques employed in the study of video games.

Objectives: Students who successfully complete assigned coursework should develop the following skills:

- Familiarity with key theories of video game effects
- Ability to connect video game research to broader theories of mass communication
- Increased understanding of research methodology, specifically in the context of games

Policies: You're grad students. Act like it. Do the reading, attend class, participate, respect your peers, and let me know if anything is keeping you from doing the above.

Note to students with disabilities: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS), located in 116 Boucke Building, at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their Web site at <http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/>. Please notify me as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

Academic integrity: Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at:

<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/cyberplagstudent.html>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: <http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20>, and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

Grades: Course grades are based on several elements. Each element is graded and converted to a percentage scale; for elements with multiple assignments, each portion will be averaged (more important elements will be weighted as necessary):

Participation & discussion questions	25%
Outside article summaries.....	10%
Response papers.....	30%
Final paper	35%

Grading scale: Final grades are assigned based on percentage scores using this scale:

93-100+	A
90-92.9	A-
87-89.9	B+
83-86.9	B
80-82.9	B-
77-79.9	C+
70-76.9	C
60-69.9	D
0-59.9	F

I may employ a more lenient scale as course grade distributions warrant. That is, you might receive a higher grade than your numerical score would merit. You will never receive a lower score than your final numerical score would receive based on this scale.

Participation/discussion questions: As graduate students, I expect you to play an active role in the class, and will assess both the quantity and quality of your in-class contributions. I recognize that your individual ability to contribute will vary, but I expect to see a consistent good-faith effort to be a part of a thoughtful, intellectual discussion of the readings and underlying course concepts.

In addition to your in-class efforts, a significant portion of your grade is based upon your submission of weekly discussion questions that will then aid in directing our in-class conversation. You are required to submit one discussion question *for each assigned reading*. Questions are due by 6 p.m. on the Sunday prior to the date the reading is assigned and should be submitted via e-mail. Good questions are meant to promote discussion, and I will select from your questions in helping develop the day's lesson. Thus, questions might reflect elements of the reading you felt were confusing or flawed and that warrant further scrutiny, or elements of the reading you found fascinating and worth further exploration, including possible applications and comparisons between the reading and other scholarship. You are free to submit questions on matters that genuinely puzzle you or that propose topics you feel well-equipped to discuss.

You will be allowed to skip a total of three discussion questions (representing three readings) without penalty. Questions submitted late can also count against this total, but will not have as great an effect on your final grade as missing questions, so in general I would encourage you to submit late rather than not at all unless you are sure you won't exceed your "skip quota." Additional missed questions will adversely affect your participation score unless you communicate with me regarding valid circumstances for the omission.

Outside article summaries: On the last day of the class, we will read articles selected by members of the class based on your individual research interests. (Needless to say, we won't necessarily be able to read an article chosen by each student.) To help with this process and further your review of the literature, you will provide PDF copies of two outside articles along with a roughly one-page summary of each. One of these articles may come from the list of supplemental readings included along with the required reading list posted on ANGEL, but at least one article must be one you located on your own. Articles should present empirical research into the effects of video games. Details are posted in a separate document on ANGEL.

Response papers: During the semester, you will complete two response papers of approximately 5-7 pages, reflecting on a specific course topic and integrating a small amount of outside material. (Some of this outside research can subsequently be used to fulfill your outside article summary requirement and for your final term paper.) Starting in week 4, I will post options for response paper topics along with assignment details; papers are due roughly two weeks after completing material connected to the topic, and options generally address the material from one or two classes. Posted topics will include due dates and submission guidelines. You are free to select topics that best fit your interest and schedule, and you may propose an alternative topic on a given week's material but must receive instructor approval before you write the paper and you cannot write on a topic that excessively duplicates your final paper. The absolute latest due date will be the last week of class, and you cannot submit more than one paper for a single due date, so it is in your best interest to complete papers early in the semester. Students will have the option of revising papers meeting certain criteria.

Final paper: The key "capstone" for this course is a research proposal, in which you will present a complete literature review (as if written for a scholarly journal article) and provide the necessary IRB paperwork to thoroughly describe a proposed study to test the ideas laid out in that review. Full details of this paper and its preliminary stages are provided in a separate document. The key initial stages are briefly listed below:

- Proposal & annotated bibliography. The initial step of the paper process is to lay out your proposed area of study, identifying the central research questions you would want to answer, giving a rough explanation of how you might tackle these, and explaining why such a project would be important and relevant for media effects. In addition, you will begin the process of developing your final literature review by providing a list of potentially relevant articles and giving a short summary of each.
- Presentation. Each student will present their basic study proposal and research objectives in a relatively brief (approximately 10-minute) presentation toward the end of the semester. (We are not doing presentations on the very last day because the goal is to give you time to integrate and respond to peer feedback and suggestions.) Your focus should be on your thoughts regarding study design and measurement, more than on matters of theory and literature. In addition to the actual presentation time, students should solicit feedback from peers, using appropriate "discussion-prompting" techniques as necessary, so that the total time allotted to each student will be roughly 20 minutes.
- Final paper. Each student will present a complete literature review that outlines the media effects topic they propose to explore, integrating the literature and presenting a clear set of research questions and/or hypotheses that would be tested using their proposed methodology. In addition, you will complete the necessary IRB forms with sufficient detail to show exactly how you would go about testing these questions/hypotheses. You

should not actually submit the paperwork to the IRB, but the goal of this format is to position you to be able to move forward with your proposed study in a timely fashion based on feedback and personal interest.

Course schedule: The following lists topics by day. A complete bibliography by day, along with supplemental readings, is posted separately. All assigned readings (and some supplemental readings) can be found on ANGEL. This schedule is subject to change as circumstances might warrant – I will always notify the class via ANGEL of any changes.

Week 1 (Jan. 10) — Introductions

Note that there is no class on Jan. 17 because of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Week 2 (Jan. 24) — Player characteristics

Week 3 (Jan. 31) — Player motivations & gratifications

Week 4 (Feb. 7) — Aggression I

Week 5 (Feb. 14) — Aggression II

Week 6 (Feb. 21) — Addiction

Week 7 (Feb. 28) — Social interaction — *final paper topic proposal/bibliography due*

Note that there is no class on March 7 because of Spring Break

Week 8 (March 14) — Enjoyment I

Week 9 (March 21) — Enjoyment II

Week 10 (March 28) — Cognitive skills

Week 11 (April 4) — Education

Week 12 (April 11) — Advertising — *outside article summaries due*

Week 13 (April 18) — Presentations

Week 14 (April 25) — Student-selected readings

Final paper due during finals week, date TBD.