

**Game On > Game Over > Play Again?:  
Social Change Through Gaming and Game Design  
Honors 3020 (Junior-level), 3 credits  
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**Course description and objectives**

This course is designed to give honors students training and experience in rhetorical theory and in designing highly persuasive interactive texts (i.e. persuasive games). Persuasive games are games that are designed to deliver an explicit, rhetorical message, usually one with a social goal in mind. For example, [The McDonald's Game](#) teaches players about how the McDonald's Corporation's business practices and policies are unsustainable for the environment, for livestock health, and for labor practices.

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- understand processes of acquiring knowledge and understand diversity in value systems and cultures in an interdependent world by situating persuasive games as complex, cultural artifacts motivated by equally complex social agendas
- address problems in a broad context by identifying and critiquing persuasive games based upon genre, narrative structure, gameplay features, internal economies, etc.
- recognize different ways of thinking, creating, expressing, and communicating through a variety of media by demonstrating the ethical, educational, and rhetorical dimensions of persuasive media, including games and their attendant media

In this course, we study persuasive games and theory in order to design our own persuasive games. Our game designs are documented in game design documents that present the game concept as well as the guiding principles and protocol for our game designs. Game design documents guide every aspect of computer game production from artists' renderings of landscapes to background music to video game platform. Although game design documents are found in the computer game industry, the intricacies, politics, and techniques of producing these complex proposals are easily applicable to many technical and professional situations.

**Course texts**

Adams, Ernest and Andrew Rollings. *Game Design and Development*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson. 2007.

Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. MIT Press. 2007.

**Schedule**

**week 1: introduction**

Course introduction. In-class: *September 12th*, introductions, syllabus.

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 1: pp. 2-28. In-class: discuss game elements, design games with random objects. Post game descriptions and rules in discussion forum. Sign up for course blog at <http://www.blogger.com>. Post link to your blog in discussion forum.

**week 2: procedural rhetoric**

Read Bogost, chapter 1, pp. 1-40. In-class: rhetoric, procedural rhetoric. Recommended reading: "Procedurality and *September 12*."

Read Bogost, chapter 1: pp. 40-64. In-class: persuasive games. In your course blog, demonstrate how you know that a game you have been playing is or is not a persuasive game, according to this week's readings.

### **week 3: political games, advergames, and procedural rhetoric**

Read Bogost, chapter 3: pp. 99-120. Recommended reading: "Saving the world, one video game at a time."

Read Bogost, chapter 5: pp. 147-171, and chapter 7: 199-229. In your course blog, describe a procedural frame (a persuasive game) for a political game, an anti-political game, an advergame, or an anti-advergame that you would like to play.

### **week 4: what can games teach, procedurally? part 1**

Read Bogost, chapter 8: pp. 233-260.

Read Bogost, chapter 9: pp. 261-292. In your course blog, describe your experiences with the game from which you learned the most procedurally.

### **week 5: what can games teach, procedurally? part 2**

Read Bogost, chapter 10: pp. 293-317.

Read Bogost, chapter 11: pp. 317-340. In your course blog, post a rough draft of your rhetorical analysis of a persuasive game of your choice.

### **week 6: rhetorical analysis of persuasive games**

Read Foss' "Doing Rhetorical Criticism." In-class: discuss rhetorical analyses, play *Peer Factor!*

Peer review workshop on rhetorical analyses. Submit rhetorical analysis.

### **week 7: game design components and processes**

Re-read Adams and Rollings, chapter 1: pp. 2-28. In-class: *Rock Band*.

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 2: pp. 29-63. In-class: design components and processes. In your course blog, post a response to design practice question 1 on p. 28 of Adams and Rollings.

### **week 8: pre-design work**

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 3: pp. 64-83. In-class: get into design teams, and begin brainstorming game concepts. In class, divide up the design practice questions on p. 83 among your team. In your course blog, post a response to the questions you chose. Everyone should have the same answer to question 1.

### **week 9: pitching your game concept**

Read team members' blogs. In-class: workshop game concept and prepare to pitch your game concept as a group.

Game design presentations 1: Pitch your game concept to the class for feedback and approval! In your course blog, reflect on your pitch meeting. What feedback did you receive? What will you change in your game design based upon that feedback?

### **week 10: game worlds and expressive play**

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 4: pp. 84-14. In-class: discuss your game worlds; begin to address design practice questions for game worlds.

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 5: pp. 115-126. In-class: discuss possibilities for creative and expressive play; begin to address design practice questions for creative and expressive play. In your course blog, address the design practice questions that your team was not able to address in class.

### **week 11: character development and storytelling**

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 6: pp. 127-154. In-class: discuss the character development in your games; begin to address design practice questions for character development.

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 7: pp. 155-199. In-class: discuss narrative; begin to address design practice questions for narrative. In your course blog, address the design practice questions that your team was not able to address in class.

### **week 12: user interface and gameplay**

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 8: pp. 200-250. In-class: discuss your user interface; begin to address design practice questions for user interface design.

Read Adams and Rollings, chapter 9: pp. 251-285. In-class: discuss your gameplay; begin to address design practice questions for gameplay. In your course blog, address the design practice questions that your team was not able to address in class.

### **week 13: workshop high concepts**

Game design presentations 2: High Concepts

### **week 14: core mechanics and game balancing**

Read Adams and Rollings, Chapter 10: pp. 286-323. In-class: discuss your game's core mechanics; begin to address design practice questions for core mechanics.

Read Adams and Rollings, Chapter 11: pp. 324-358. In-class: discuss your game's balance; begin to address design practice questions for game balancing. In your course blog, address the design practice questions that your team was not able to address in class.

### **week 15**

Game design presentations 3: Final Game Designs. Turn in Design Document.

## **Ludography**

What follows is a bibliographic list of games referred to and played in class.

Harmonix & Backbone Entertainment. (2010). *Rock Band 3*. MTV Games & Mad Catz.

Moeller, R.M. (2008). *Peer Factor*. Bedford/St. Martin's Press.

Molleindustria. (2006). *McDonald's Videogame*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.mcvideogame.com/index-eng.html>

NOW Production. (2004). *Katamari Damacy*. Namco.

Persuasive Games. Retrieved from <http://www.persuasivegames.com/games/>

Powerful Robot Games. (n.d.). *Global Warming*. Newsgaming.com. Retrieved from  
<http://www.powerfulrobot.com/games-repository/globalwarming/>

Powerful Robot Games. (2003). *September 12th, A Toy World*. Newsgaming.com. Retrieved from: <http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm>

Rare. (2010). *Kinect Sports*. Microsoft Game Studios.

The Republican Party. (2004). *John Kerry Tax Invaders*. Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20040517093809/http://www.gop.com/taxinvaders/>

### **Assignments**

**blog posts:** 300 points.

Each week, you will be responsible for updating your course blog according to the prompt provided in the syllabus and discussed in class. Full points will be awarded to posts that fully and engagingly address the prompt in at least 300 words.

**rhetorical analysis of a persuasive game:** 150 points.

In this assignment, I invite you to investigate and interrogate the claims made by a persuasive game of your choice.

**game design presentations:** 150 points (50 points each).

You will present your game design to the class for feedback at three different points in the semester. You will be assessed on your ability to clearly present your game concepts to the class and on your ability to generate and apply constructive criticism to your designs.

**design document:** 300 points.

This is the capstone assignment of the course. You will describe your team's detailed design for a persuasive game. Elements of the design document include the high concept document, story, characters, gameworld (including interface design), gameplay, art, music, and game controls.

**project postmortem:** 100 points.

The purpose of the project postmortem is to reflect on what you accomplished by designing your game. In a 1-2 page memo (single-spaced) to me, you will document your accomplishments in this class.

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