"The mind is a fire to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled."
— Plutarch

MUS 1905 (sec. 002): Freshman Seminar –
What can video games teach us about learning?

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COURSE SYLLABUS

Faculty biography:
On his way to being a university professor, Scott Lipscomb performed in rock bands, co-authored a rock history textbook, and developed interactive multimedia to enhance music learning. Dr. Lipscomb has long been fascinated by multimedia (music, film, animation, etc.) and the impact it has on people. In recent years, he has studied the role of sound and music in video games. While studying the auditory component of gaming, he stumbled upon the fact that the best video games present an exemplar for how engaged learning can take place, unlike what is typically found in our public school classrooms.

Course description:
The purpose of this seminar will be to explore the world of video games, focusing primarily on the way in which the rules of the "system" (i.e., the world of the game) are presented to the gamer and how the essential skills required to succeed are learned initially and then improved as the game becomes more complex. For example, in God of War III, how are you taken from defeating foes by endlessly mashing the "X" button on your PS3 controller to the final battle with Zeus where you must use button press sequences to succeed: Spirit of Hercules ($\square\square\triangle$), Plume of Prometheus ($\triangle\triangle\triangle$), and Tartarus Rage (L1+$\triangle$)?

Incoming competency of students expected by instructor:
Students are expected to arrive with varying levels of gaming experience, musical training, and/or familiarity with the fields of education and learning theory. Therefore, vocabulary and other necessary keys to understanding will be built from the ground up, so all participants are able to communicate intellectually about the subject matter.

<u>Statement of Course Objectives</u>:

Freshman Seminars at UMN provide the first-year student an opportunity to …
- ✓ connect with faculty and with other students to increase a sense of community during their first year at UMN;
- ✓ enhance their ability to take risks in a new setting;
- ✓ develop written and oral communication skills;
- ✓ hone analytical and thinking skills, developing into critical thinkers;
- ✓ become more purposeful decision-makers by encouraging them to define their own educational goals and objectives, increasing their commitment toward these educational goals;
- ✓ experience inquiry-based learning by helping them to become actively involved in the classroom;
- ✓ experience first-hand the challenges of learning in a research university by linking seminars to undergraduate research opportunities (UROP); and
- ✓ realize the benefit of faculty mentoring.

This particular course will provide the student an opportunity to …
- ✓ develop a vocabulary for intellectual discussion about the gaming experience;
- ✓ improve understanding regarding the player's perspective when learning to play a game and honing skills as the game increases in complexity;
- ✓ gain a basic understanding of learning science and how it applies to gaming contexts;
- ✓ develop a systematic method of thinking about gaming, including social, psychological, and other aspects;
- ✓ develop an understanding about research and the scientific method as it applies to our understanding of gaming;
- ✓ identify important contemporary issues, empirical methods, and primary literature in the field;
- ✓ critically evaluate the role of learning in games of interest to each student; and
- ✓ apply this understanding to a specific game of interest, discover relevant related literature, and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process within this specific virtual environment.

Required texts (available at the UMN bookstore or online)**:**
McG: McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. New York: Penguin Press.
Gee: Gee, J.P. (2007). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*, revised and updated edition. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
Additional readings: students will be required to read and comprehend a series of book excerpts and articles on a variety of related topics. These articles will be made available via the course Moodle site; they form an essential part of the course content and are required of every student.

Additional Requirements:
- ✓ All students will be required to utilize Moodle for the submission of assignments. Point your web browser to the MyU portal (https://www.myu.umn.edu), then enter your X500 username & password. Once logged on, you will see a list of Moodle sites for courses in which you are enrolled, including this course. There is a useful orientation video available at: https://umconnect.umn.edu/moodleorientation.
- ✓ Every student enrolled in this class is required to participate as a volunteer in a music cognition research project during the quarter (details will be provided, but the study will require approximately one hour of your time outside of class).

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Schedule of Assignments (subject to change)[1]

9/7: Welcome/Course Requirements
    Background Interest Probe

9/12: What is a Game?
    McG: Intro & Ch. 1
    Grimshaw, Tan, & Lipscomb (under review)

9/14: Fun & Failure
    McG: Ch. 2, 3, & 4

9/19: Social Connectivity
    McG: Ch. 5 & 6

9/21: Benefits of Alternate Realities
    McG: Ch. 7 & 8
    Faculty Office Hours report due

9/26: Fun & Happiness with Strangers
    McG: Ch. 9 & 10

9/28: The Engagement Economy
    McG: Ch. 11 & 12

10/3: Reality is Better
    McG: Ch. 13 & 14 and Conclusion

10/5: NO CLASS (play video games!)

10/10: Learning Video Games
    Gee: Ch. 1

10/12: Semiotic Domains
    Gee: Ch. 2

10/17: Learning & Identity
    Gee: Ch. 3

10/19: Situated Meaning & Learning
    Gee: Ch. 4

10/24: Telling & Doing
    Gee: Ch. 5

10/26: Cultural Models
    Gee: Ch. 6

10/31: The Social Mind & The 36 Learning Principles
    Gee: Ch. 7, Conclusion, & Appendix

11/2 & 11/7: "Midterm" Project Reports

11/9: Writing Workshop

11/14 to 11/21: Gaming Workshop/Exploration
    --bring your own games and creative ideas with you to class

11/23 & 11/28: NO CLASS (play video games!)

11/30 to 12/7: Individual Student Meetings

12/12 & 12/14: Oral Presentations

12/14: Final Projects due

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[1] Any changes related to due dates for assignments will be communicated to students via the email address provided in UMN's system. If you would like to use a different email address, contact the IT Help Desk for instructions: (612) 301-4357 (or 1-HELP from on campus).

<u>**Grading**</u>:

- 50% - reading reflections posted to Moodle forums
  - five replies to peer postings required (see instructions below under "Readings")
- 10% - mini-lecture assignments (to be completed in pairs)
- 10% - other graded work, as assigned
- 5% - Midterm Project check (leading to Final Project)
  - determination of specific game and a critical evaluation of the learning process
  - substantial progress toward completed Literature Review
- 25% - Final Project
  - oral presentation (20%) + written paper (80%); see Final Project Instructions posted to Moodle for a detailed breakdown of grade calculation of the written component

  - Course grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

>= 93.33 = A	>= 76.67 AND <80 = C+
>= 90 AND < 93.33 = A-	>= 73.33 AND < 76.67 = C
>= 86.67 AND < 90 = B+	>= 70 AND < 73.33 = C-
>= 83.33 AND <88 = B	>= 66.67 AND < 70 = D+
>= 80 AND <83.33 = B-	>= 60 AND <66.67 = D
	< 60 = F

University of Minnesota Grading Policy: The Meaning of a Letter Grade

A   Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.

B   Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.

C   Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.

D   Represents achievement that is worthy of credit, even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.

F   Represents failure and signifies that the work was either 1) completed, but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or 2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor & student that the student would be awarded an "I."[2]

Course Policies

Assignments are designed as part of a sequential learning process, so I expect work to be submitted on time. All written assignments must be completed by the beginning of class time on the date assigned, but I will provide a 24-hour grace period for unexpected problems, e.g., a technical problem with a computer system or some personal issue that prevents timely submission. Outside of the grace period, written work can be turned in up to one full week late, but the grade will be *lowered by at least one letter grade*, regardless of its quality. Assignments submitted more than a week late will not be accepted.

All written work submitted to the instructor in hardcopy form must be in word processed format, double-spaced, using a 10- or 12-point font (common serif or nonserif) and with 1" to 1.25" margins. Where required, assignments must be submitted electronically via Moodle per the instructions provided previously; for these assignments, formatting is not an issue, since they are posted directly to an online forum. [Though I *strongly* recommend that you type them into a text editor like Text Edit (Mac) or Wordpad (Win) and save a copy to your computer, allowing you to retain a copy for your own records.

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[2] The grade of "I" (incomplete) is *only* for the purpose of extreme, extenuating circumstances beyond a student's control and will *never* be awarded solely in the case where the student failed to accomplish the work in a timely manner during the semester.

Readings: For every reading assignment, each student is required to write a 2-paragraph "reflection" (250 word minimum) to be posted to an appropriate forum of the Moodle site *prior to* the class meeting for that the date referenced in the Schedule of Assignments section above. The posting must clearly communicate two things: (a) a basic understanding of the content of the reading (first paragraph) and (b) the student's individual response to – or thoughts about – that topic, relating to past personal experience and/or other topically related resources (second paragraph). Evidence of the latter may come, at times, in the form of a question posed to the rest of the class. The two sections should be relatively balanced in length. Students will be expected to "reply" to a minimum of *five* of these questions – or some aspect of another student's post – during the course of the semester. At least *two* of these resposes must be completed by the midpoint of the class (i.e., you will not receive full credit for a flurry of postings at the end of the semester, as this is intended to be an ongoing process throughout the semester). This virtual discussion is a graded component of the course total. Grading for the reflection postings is slightly different from that for other written assignments. All postings that are submitted complete and on time will receive a grade of 100%. Any posting submitted after the due date will automatically receive a maximum grade of 75%, depending on content and completeness. Incomplete submissions will receive a grade of 50% or less, depending on the amount completed. [No submission will receive credit if posted more than one week following the due date.]

Mini-Lecture (to be completed in pairs): Twice during the semester, each student will be required to take responsibility for teaching a designated topic (10- to 15-minute lesson), based on the reading assignment for that day. Students are required not only to enumerate the most significant points of the reading, but to use their own past experience to make connections to their own lives and how what was learned can be applied (both within a gaming context and beyond). Students are encouraged to engage other members of the class in discussion and in sharing their own experiences, but the primary focus should remain on their absorption of the materials and the potential impact they perceive.

Final Project: At the end of the semester, each student will be required to complete an individual project. A detailed description of the project requirements will be made available via the course Moodle site. In order to receive an "A" on the project, students must integrate knowledge gained from the readings, class & virtual discussions, multimedia demonstrations presented in class, instructor presentations, and mini-lectures, applying this understanding to a related topic of interest relevant to this course.

Attendance: You are expected to attend each day of class. I understand that there may be times when you cannot come to class for good reason, however. You will be responsible for the information discussed and presented in class, of course, by getting notes from other students, and I will be available to assist you with makeup work. Failure to attend and play an active role in the in-class discussions will result in very poor results for written work and an unacceptably low level of understanding. Unexcused absences in excess of **2** will lower your final grade by 3.33 points for each additional absence.

Technology: A variety of technologies offer possibilities to enhance the research and learning process. For example, such technologies make systematic analysis, complex investigation, and logical presentation of findings available within a timeframe and level of professionalism that was rare in earlier decades. If appropriate to your project, both audio and video recording of field observations and interviews facilitate review and reflection, allowing the development of purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed thinking about research and learning.

Diversity: A fundamental assumption of this class is that all communication and dialogue is based on the right of every individual to participate fully and contribute to our understanding of specific course content and diverse approaches to the subject matter in general. Diversity relates to, but is not limited to, the following: age, creed, disability, ethnicity, gender, global perspectives, international background, language background, learning differences, marital status, multicultural perspectives, national origin, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status. The presence of diversity within our classroom greatly strengthens our potential for learning and for building a safe and welcoming classroom environment.

Scholastic Dishonesty: The University expects every student to maintain a high standard of individual integrity for work done. Scholastic dishonesty is a serious offence that includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test or other class work, plagiarism (the appropriation of another's work and the unauthorized incorporation of that work in one's own work), and collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing college work offered for credit). In cases of scholastic dishonesty, Dr.

Lipscomb will initiate disciplinary proceedings against the student. Any student caught plagiarizing a written document or not appropriately crediting sources used in project work will receive a grade of "0" *and* disciplinary proceedings will be initiated. It's not worth the risk—don't do it! For a set of definitions and information about plagiarism, visit: http://writing.umn.edu/tww/preventing/definitions.html.

Seeking assistance: Your success in this class – and, in fact, throughout your entire academic career – will be determined to a significant degree by your willingness to seek assistance, when needed, and your knowledge of the resources available to you for such guidance and help. This assistance can often come from fellow students or family members. However, there are times when it is *essential* for you to meet with and discuss such issues with one of your instructors or another faculty member. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated; in fact, I hope that your experience in this class and my "open door" policy to students will facilitate your realization that taking advantage of the expertise available to you across this campus can have benefits far beyond the specific issue(s) you seek to resolve. Come see me whenever you need help and take the initiative to do the same in every class in which you enroll during your current degree program (and all future ones that you may decide to undertake). By the way, this same advice holds true in the professional world; after all, you all have commonly shared goals and objectives, each contributing all that you can toward their accomplishment.

In addition to discussing such issues with individual students and faculty, you will find the following resources useful …

University Policies

See http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html for a set of policies related to student responsibility in the teaching and learning process.

Statement on accommodations

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. You can find a policy statement at: http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/administrative/DisabilityServices.html. You can contact the office of disability services directly at: http://ds.umn.edu/.

Statements on classroom conduct

http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/academic/Student_Conduct_Code.html

Statement on academic misconduct

http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/humanresources/Academic_Misconduct.html

Scholastic misconduct is broadly defined as "any act that violates the rights of another student in academic work or that involves misrepresentation of your own work." Scholastic dishonesty includes, (but is not necessarily limited to): cheating on assignments or examinations; plagiarizing, which means misrepresenting as you own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper, or substantially similar papers, to meet the requirements of more than one course without the approval and consent of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; or interfering with another student's work.

Statement regarding sexual harassment

(http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/humanresources/SexHarassment.html)

"Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or academic advancement in any University activity or program; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis of employment or academic decisions affecting this individual in any University activity or program; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment in any University activity or program. University policy prohibits sexual harassment. Complaints about sexual harassment should be reported to the University Office of Equal Opportunity, 419 Morrill Hall.

Support Services

Go to http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/syllabus/specialserv.html to see some possible support services for students.

Coda
I look forward with great anticipation to this course. Rest assured that I am eager to talk to or communicate with you about any concerns you may have. You can communicate by telephone, e-mail, or in person. Don't hesitate to make an appointment to see me when needed.

**Pagers & cell phones are disruptive to this class.
ALWAYS turn them <u>off</u> when entering the classroom.**