

🎮 History 390-001: The Digital Past¹ 🎮

1:30 PM to 2:45 PM TR
James Buchanan Hall D023

The History of Video Games, Video Games in History



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Dr. Amanda Madden
(she/her/hers)
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👤 **Office hours:** Tues/Thurs. 3:00pm-4:30 pm and by appointment on Monday, 4th Floor Research Hall, RRCHNM. My office is in a key-controlled suite, so let me know if you are going to come by. The space requires masks.

¹This syllabus is indebted to the syllabi of Dr. Mills Kelly, Dr. Abby Mullen, Dr. Lincoln Mullen, Dr. Stephen Robertson, and Dr. Nate Sleeter.

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 **Communication Policy:** There are two ways to get in touch with me: the course Slack channel or email. Note that I don't respond to messages after 8pm on weekdays or on Saturdays; for email, please allow up to 24 hours for me to respond to your message.

N.B. If you have a question regarding assignments, class lectures, need advice right away or help with an assignment, etc. post them in the course slack channel

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course, which satisfies the University's IT requirement, engages with history using digital methods while also teaching the fundamentals of information technology and digital information including storage, retrieval, and ethics. The



skills you learn in this course, including research, analysis, problem-solving and collaboration will be useful, no matter what field you are going into. Our focus this semester will be on the history of video games and history in video games. The fun part: we're going to be playing and discussing video games throughout the semester.

The course meets the following learning outcomes for the Mason Core:

1. Students will understand the principles of information storage, exchange, security, and privacy and be aware of related ethical issues.
2. Students will become critical consumers of digital information; they will be capable of selecting and evaluating appropriate, relevant, and trustworthy sources of information.

3. Students can use appropriate information and computing technologies to organize and analyze information and use it to guide decision-making.
4. Students will be able to choose and apply appropriate algorithmic methods to solve a problem.

We will also learn about history by doing hands-on work. While my goal isn't to make you into a professional historian, my goal is to help you gain some expertise--over the course of the semester, we'll talk about what expertise means.



 Course materials: Since this is an IT course focused on video games, some of the material we'll be covering will require access to a computer. If you think you will have issues with access, please come talk to me as soon as possible so we can figure out a solution.

 Required Purchases/Reading: Most of the readings, games, and tools are free and open source. The following purchase is required:

Assassin's Creed II (PC or console)

Or *Skyrim*

COURSE POLICIES

★ Participation/Attendance: We'll be doing a lot of active learning in this course so attendance and active engagement is one of the cornerstones of your success in this course (in addition to being twenty percent of your grade). There's simply a lot of material you will miss if you don't attend class and participate on the Slack channel. And because the course is so hands-on, students who don't engage, simply don't do as well in the course. If for some reason you won't be able to attend the class and/or are unable to participate, please make arrangements with a classmate to make-up and get info on what you have missed. I want to encourage you to get in contact with me ASAP if you are struggling with any aspect of the course or in general--I'm happy to help you get back on track and I can put you in touch with the appropriate resources as necessary.

 Attendance Policy: As attendance is part of your participation grade, it will be marked accordingly. We have twelve weeks in the semester or 24 days where I will be taking attendance and grading you on participation.

 Use of Electronic Devices: You are encouraged (but not required) to bring your laptops since we will be doing some in-class work but please don't engage in activities unrelated to the class (email, chat, youtube, social media etc). Any disruptions or lack of inattention may affect your participation grade.

 The use of phones is prohibited in this class.

Safe Return to Campus

- All students taking courses with a face-to-face component are required to follow the university's public health and safety precautions and procedures outlined on the university Safe Return to Campus webpage (<https://www2.gmu.edu/safe-return-campus>).
- Students are required to follow Mason's current policy about facemask-wearing. If this policy changes, you will be informed; however, students who prefer to wear masks either temporarily or consistently will always be welcome in the classroom.
- If the campus closes, or if a class meeting needs to be canceled or adjusted due to weather or other concern, students should check Blackboard [or other instruction as appropriate] for updates on how to continue learning and for information about any changes to events or assignments.

 Academic Integrity: Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Please familiarize yourself with this [here](#). We will be discussing this in depth when we cover ethics and research.

Disability Accommodations: Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email:ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474

 Diversity and Inclusion: Diversity and Inclusion is one of George Mason's core values and something I take very, very

seriously in my classroom. I expect us to be respectful and understanding of each other, particularly when discussing issues of race, class, gender, identity, and sexuality. Let's work together to make sure everyone feels included and have productive and useful conversations about sometimes difficult topics.

Mental Health: It's been a difficult couple of years for all of us and this semester is likely to have more uncertainty. Let's be a resource for one another. I've listed my course policies below, but I understand that things may shift for you and for me (including this syllabus). If you feel you are having issues with anything in the course, get in touch with me ASAP. I'm your best resource--both to help you get back on track as well as provide you with further resources.

If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, panic, depression, sadness during the semester, Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services Offices 🙋 (703-993-2380) provides a range of resources to assist and support you. Students can call 📞 (703-993-2831) or walk-in during open hours to schedule an appointment to talk with a healthcare provider. If you or someone you know experiences a mental health crisis or emergency, seek help immediately. Call 911 for local emergency services, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255), or text the Crisis Text Line (741-741) anytime. I am also available to speak with you about stresses related to your work in my course.

Privacy: Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

📖 ASSIGNMENTS 📖

Game Blog	15%/150 pts
Digital History Tools (3)	15%/150 pts
Map (50pts)	
Zotero bibliography (50pts)	
Timeline (50pts)	
Participation/Discussion board	15%/150
Quizzes	10%/100
Game Review	15%/150
Group Project	20%/200

100 Course grading

This course is graded on a A-F scale. Rubrics will be provided with explanations of grading for each assignment in advance of the assignment.

Feedback You will receive regular feedback on your assignments based on the demonstration of analytical skills, application of course material, and evidence of reflection and consideration. I do not provide line by line feedback nor do I check grammar and edit writing. For more help with your writing, visit the Writing Center.

<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>

Late policy: I give two, no-questions asked extensions of one week for all assignments except for the game review and group project.

* unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due on the Sunday of the week they are listed at midnight. All readings are due on the day they are listed on the syllabus. Quizzes will be given every Tuesday unless otherwise noted.

**This schedule is subject to change

Week One (8/22-28) Introduction to Class



Tuesday, 8/23 Syllabus discussion

Thursday, 8/25

[A Brief History of Video Games](#)

[Pong](#)

👉 Task: Sign up for [Slack Channel](#)

Week Two (8/30-9/4) Introduction to the Digital Past

Tuesday, 8/30 CERN, [A Short History of the Web](#)
(10 minutes)

Thursday, 9/1 [Roy Rosenzweig and Dan Cohen, *Digital History: A Guide to Exploring and Preserving the Past* " Introduction"](#)

👉 Task: Set up Game Blog

Week Three (9/5-9/11) Videogames and the Humanities

*Instead of in-person class we will be playing The SIMs

Tuesday, 9/6

Coltrain, James, and Stephen Ramsay. "Can Video Games Be Humanities Scholarship?." *Debates in the Digital Humanities* 2019 (2019): 36-45.

Thursday, 9/8

👉 Task: Start Game Journal

Week Four(9/12-9/19): The History of History in Video games

Tuesday, 9/14 Andy Kelly, ["Revisiting the Renaissance with Assassin's Creed II"](#)

Thursday, 9/16 Bauer Jr, William J., Margaret Huettl, and Katrina M. Phillips. "Retracing The Oregon Trail." *California History* 99, no. 3 (2022): 53-63.

🎮 Play: Oregon Trail

🎮 Play: Assassin's Creed II

Week Five (9/10-9/26): Digital Citizenship and Community

Tuesday, 9/20 Chen, Mark G. "Communication, Coordination, and

Camaraderie in World of Warcraft." *Games and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2009): 47-73.

Thursday, 9/22 GPB Education, ["What Does it Mean to be A Digital Citizen?"](#)

 World of Warcraft

Week Six (9/26-10/2): Digital Ethics

Tuesday 9/27 Todd, Cherie. "Commentary: GamerGate and Resistance to the Diversification of Gaming culture." *Women's Studies Journal* 29, no. 1 (2015): 64.

Thursday, 9/29 Ethics and Video Games ["What the Research Says about Video Games + Violence, Addiction and Sexism"](#)

 Assassin's Creed II

 Skyrim

Week Seven: (10/3-10/0) Data and Metadata

Tuesday, 10/4 ["How Does Data Power Modern Videogames"](#)

Thursday, 10/6, Metadata

British Library, [Metadata and Standards](#)

 Stupid Robot

<https://tiltfactor.org/game/stupid-robot/>

Week Eight (10/10-10/16) Code

Tuesday, 10/11 Paul Ford, ["What is Code?"](#)

Thursday, 10/13

 Code Combat

<https://codecombat.com/play>

Week Nine (10/17-10/23) Timelines

Tuesday, 10/18 [Timelines](#)

Thursday, 10/20

Daniel Rosenberg, "'[The Trouble With Timelines](#),"

 Assassin's Creed II

 Civilization

<https://playclassic.games/games/4x-dos-games-online/play-sid-meiers-civilization-online/>

Week Ten (10/24-10/30) Depicting the Past in Video Games: The Medieval and the Renaissance

Tuesday, 10/25 Skyrim

Tuesday, 10/27 Assassin's Creed II

Timeline Due

Week Eleven (10/31-11/6) Maps

Tuesday, 11/1 "[Game Maps and Skyrim](#)"

Thursday, 11/3, Rowland, Thomas. "We Will Travel by Map: Maps as Narrative Spaces in Video Games and Medieval Texts." In *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*, pp. 203-215. Routledge, 2013.

 StoryMap exercise due

 Skyrim

Week Twelve (11/7-11/13) Algorithms

Tuesday, 11/8: [“The Ethics of Algorithms: Mapping the Debate”](#)

Thursday, 11/10: [“Video Gaming Artificial Intelligence is Evolving”](#)

 AI Dungeon

<https://play.aidungeon.io/main/home>

Week Thirteen (11/14-11/20) Doing Effective Research

Tuesday, 11/15 Google, [“How Search Works”](#)

Thursday, 11/17: [“How Video Games Became Fake News”](#)

 Harmony Square <https://harmonysquare.game/en>

 Game Journal Due

Week Fourteen (11/21-11/27) Reviewing and Evaluating

Tuesday, 11/22 [“The Best Games of 2022 \(So far\)”](#)

Zotero Bibliography Due

Week Fifteen (11/28-12/4)

Tuesday, 11/29 "[How to Write A Video Game](#)"

Thursday, 12/1 "Workshopping"

 Game Review Due 12/5

 Final Group Project Due Thursday, 12/17



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