

# Psyc 445: The Psychology of Video Games and Entertainment

## Course Description

The Psychology of Video Games and Entertainment covers many different topics from the psychology of play to the effects that video games have on our day-to-day lives. We talk about what attracts players to games, what keeps them playing and paying, and what transfers from the game space to the real world for good (education) or for bad (violence). This semester, I will be introducing a new perspective, the issue of sustainability and how the virtual worlds of video games can have an impact on our real world. Students will be introduced to the concept of sustainability through a brief lecture presentation and an outside reading. The relationship of video games and sustainability will be explored through three assignments. In addition, the issue of sustainability will be advanced throughout the course in various contexts pertaining to particular games discussed (e.g., Civilization) and game mechanics pertaining to use of scarce resources.

Video games and digital entertainment are becoming more and more consuming, pervasive, and engaging. Virtually every student on campus has a history and attachment to video games and digital media. A course on this topic will help to engage students in many of the elements and theories in psychology in a space that is of particular interest to them. The "Psychology of Video Games and Entertainment" will pull together many of the diverse issues in psychology into one challenging course.

Game playing is an important human activity from childhood to adolescence through adulthood and old age. Early in life, games involve developmental learning, socialization, and play. Digital games differ in many different ways. It is important to characterize them in terms of both their theme and structure and in terms of the options that they provide along a few major dimensions.

Video games provide opportunities to engage in extreme, risky, and aggressive behaviors that would not be possible or socially acceptable in the real world. Some video games, true to the concept of a game, provide representations of reality that allow people to participate vicariously in combat, use of weapons, and different forms of violent and extreme behavior.

To many of us, particularly in education, entertainment for the sole purpose of being entertained is pointless without some positive, lasting outcome. Entertainment that leaves a message, a learning experience, and a positive change in one's life serves two purposes: entertainment and education. While this is inherently the goal of many writers, artists, composers, and performers, edutainment is specifically a form of entertainment that is meant to educate the audience or participant in the process of being entertained. It takes a familiar media of entertainment such as television programs, movies, cartoons, or video games and embeds educational content.

The "Psychology of Video Games and Entertainment" will be taught in one of the University of Maryland Teaching Theaters (PLS 1129) and will involve all of the aspects of teaching with technology from media presentation to online discussions and assignments. Students will contribute to Wikipedia articles on games and psychology and collaborate in team projects. The Teaching Theater screens will be used to demonstrate games to the whole class and to let them participate in the play.

### Textbook and Materials

Materials for the course will come from several published texts, a number of journal articles, websites for games, documentaries, and the video games and entertainment sources themselves. For example, in 1983 Loftus and Loftus published a book, "The Mind at Play: The Psychology of Video Games." Since then,

several edited book have been published and a number of journal articles have been published in "Cyberpsychology & Behavior," "Interacting with Computers," "The International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, Cyberpsychology Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, and The International Journal of Computer Game Research." <http://gamestudies.org/>

## Exams

A midterm and a final will be given. Each exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Both exams will be given online in the Teaching Theater.

## Assignments

A number of assignments will be given (~12) during the semester. These will involve small projects and short writing assignments. One of these will be to keep a journal of your gaming each week (minimum 2 hours). These must be completed online and submitted online. In addition there will be required online discussions (6).

## Team Projects

There will be two team projects. The first will involve teams of four talking about a particular video game. The second will be a research project that will involve designing a study, collecting data (an online survey, experiment, or data mining), analyzing the data, and presenting the results to the class.

## Class Participation

You are expected to attend all classes. If you are or plan to be absent, you are to submit an electronic excuse. You are to log into the system at the beginning of each class period and participate in all online exercises and discussions in class and out of class.

## Course Grade

The course grade will be based on a weighted combination of the midterm (20%), the final (20%), assignments and class discussions (30%), team project (20%), and team game presentation (10% each).

## Instructor

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# Syllabus

<b>PSYC 445: The Psychology of Video Games and Entertainment</b>			
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
9/3/2014	Introduction to the Course and Classroom	Manual	Proj_01: Class Profile
9/5/2014	Introduction to Video Games	Reading 1	Proj_02: Game Choice

9/8/2014	The History of Video Games	Reading 2	Proj_03: Game Journal
9/10/2014	More History		Discussion 1
9/12/2014	Game Play and Discussion (Magfest 8.5)		Proj_04: Game History
9/15/2014	A Taxonomy of Games	Reading 3	
9/17/2014	Types, Genres, Factors, etc.		Proj_05: Game Analysis
9/19/2014	Game Play, and Discussion		Input for Team Projects
9/22/2014	Development of Video Games	Reading 4	Discussion 2
9/24/2014	Theory and Psychology of Games	Reading 5	
9/26/2014	Class Project Meeting		
9/29/2014	Attraction of Video Games	Reading 6	
10/1/2014	Video Game Addiction	Reading 7	Discussion 3
10/3/2014	Team Presentations, Game Play, and Discussion		
10/6/2014	Human Factors of Controllers and Displays	Reading 8	
10/8/2014	More Human Factors Issues		Proj_06: Input Devices
10/10/2014	Teams Presentations, Game Play, and Discussion		
10/13/2014	Virtual Reality Systems	Reading 9	Proj_07: Immersion
10/15/2014	Immersion and Engagement		
10/17/2014	Teams Presentations, Game Play, and Discussion		
10/20/2014	Midterm Exam		
10/22/2014	Cognitive Aspects	Reading 10	Proj_08: Skill Coding
10/24/2014	Class Project Team Meetings		
10/27/2014	Transfer of Training		
10/29/2014	Individual Differences	Reading 11	
10/31/2014	Teams Presentation (Halloween Cosplay)		
11/3/2014	Gender Issues		Discussion 4
11/5/2014	Guild Meetings		
11/7/2014	Teams Presentations, Game Play, and Discussion		
11/10/2014	Social Aspects of Gaming	Reading 12	Proj_9: Violence
11/12/2014	Violence and Moral Choices	Reading 13	Discussion 5
11/14/2014	Class Projects (HTML for surveys)		
11/17/2014	More Violence		
11/19/2014	Serious Video Game for Sustainability	Reading 14	Proj_10: Serious Games

11/21/2014	Class Project Meeting		
11/24/2014	Universal Access	Reading 15	
11/26/2014	No class		
11/28/2014	Thanksgiving Break		
12/1/2014	Therapy and Rehab Games/	Reading 16	
12/3/2014	The Future of Games	Reading 17	Discussion 6
12/5/2014	Class Project Meeting/		
12/8/2014	Team Project Presentations (1 and 2)		
12/10/2014	Team Project Presentations (3 and 4)		Course Feedback
12/12/2014	Team Project Presentation (5 and 6)		
12/18/2014	Final Exam (1:30-3:30)		
	Special Presentations		