UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
Department Of English

COURSE OUTLINE

ENGL 426.03 L01: Queer Theory & Video Games
Winter 2023
Tues/Thurs, 3:30-4:45pm, Taylor Institute (TI) 110

Instructor:	Dr. Derritt Mason (they/them)
Email:	**derritt.mason@ucalgary.ca**
Web Page:	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
Student Hours:	SS 1112, Tues 2-3pm or by appointment (Zoom meetings also possible)

* Please allow 48 hours for a reply to emails. I answer emails Mon-Fri during business hours.

Course Description:

As Naomi Clark explains in "What *Is* Queerness in Games, Anyway?": "Games, much like queers, have a long history of being maligned and regarded as frivolous, jejune, or degenerate." Such resonances have enabled a recent explosion of theoretical work at the intersections of queer theory and gaming, as well as projects like the LGBTQ Game Archive and the Queerness and Games Conference (QGCON), which attracts scholars, gamers, and creators from around the world. Moreover, queer game designers continue to provide gamers and queer theorists with fodder for both play and analysis.

This class will explore a range of queer theoretical perspectives on video games, in addition to various manifestations of queerness in games themselves. The class consists of six modules, each of which explores a specific aspect of queerness and games: (1) definitions and core concepts of queer video game studies; (2) indie games and queer game history; (3) HIV/AIDS and the queer art of failure; (4) intersections of queerness and Indigeneity; (5) queer space and time, and (6) the queer future of video games.

Course Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define and describe various critical concepts associated with queer theory and video game studies
2. Describe and discuss the different ways theorists imagine the queerness of video games (e.g. queer representation vs. queer gameplay)

3. Apply queer video game theory to analyses of a range of video games
4. Describe and discuss the influence of queer and Indigenous epistemologies on game design
5. Develop and create a term project (game, "Let's Play" video, or essay) that applies and synthesizes course concepts and theories

Required Texts:

Theory:
- Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters.* Seven Stories Press, 2012.
- Ruberg, Bonnie. *Video Games Have Always Been Queer*. NYU Press, 2019. (also available via the UCalgary library catalogue as an ebook)
- Additional readings available via D2L/library catalogue (see reading schedule for details)

Games:
- *Night in the Woods* (Infinite Fall, 2017)
- *Queers in Love at the End of the World* (Anna Anthropy, 2013)
- *The Tearoom* (Robert Yang, 2017)
- *Caper in the Castro* (C.M. Ralph, 1989)
- *GayBlade* (RJBest Company, 1992)
- *Never Alone* (E-Line Media, 2014)
- *Gone Home* (The Fullbright Company, 2013)

Learning Technology Requirements:

There is a D2L site for the course that contains required readings and other relevant class resources and materials (please see d2l.ucalgary.ca and the reading schedule for more information).

The games I have selected for this course are available on most consoles (PS4/5, Switch, Xbox), **Steam**, and **itch.io** for Windows & Mac—or they can be played in your web browser. Please check compatibility before purchasing. The games range in cost from free to approx. $40 depending on the version you acquire, and they are often on sale. Please see the reading schedule for more details on each game.

I encourage you to share the cost of games however you like, i.e. via shared console/Steam accounts, etc. You can also play each console game (for free) by booking the PS4 at the **TFDL's Lab NEXT**. If you have any concerns about access to technology and/or the cost of course materials, please don't hesitate to speak with me!

Although this is an in-person class, GameLabs and asynchronous discussion will take place on **Discord**. Students should have access (either at home or on campus) to the following:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection.

Most current laptops will have a built-in webcam, speaker, and microphone.

Course Contract and Experience Points (XP):
This class follows the principles of "**ungrading**" (Blum, 2020), a movement that aims to decentre the instructor in goal-setting and assessment, and provide you with transparency and flexibility in how you navigate the course, my expectations, and your own strengths, interests, and goals as a learner. I've designed the contract for this class using a combination of "labour-based" (Inoue, 2019) and "engagement-based" (Carillo, 2021) strategies. For more information on ungrading, please see the embedded link above, or feel free to come chat with me during my office hours!

Here are the four primary course challenges and the number of XP you can earn from each:

Course Challenge	3 XP	2 XP	1 XP	0 XP
GameLabs (11 scheduled sessions)	Participate in 9-11 GameLabs, and host OR report on at least one of those sessions	Attend and participate in 7-8 GameLabs	Attend and participate in 5-6 GameLabs	Attend and participate in 4 or fewer GameLabs
Sidequests	Complete three Sidequests	Complete two Sidequests	Complete one Sidequest	Complete no Sidequests
Boss Battle	Rubric score of "exceeds expectations"	Rubric score of "meets expectations"	Rubric score of "below expectations"	Rubric score of "incomplete/ unsatisfactory"
Attendance, Engagement & Participation	Rubric score of "exceeds expectations"	Rubric score of "meets expectations"	Rubric score of "below expectations"	Rubric score of "incomplete/ unsatisfactory"

How XP become final grades:

A: 12 XP   A-: 11 XP   B+: 10 XP   B: 9 XP   B-: 8 XP
C+: 7 XP   C: 6 XP   C-: 5 XP
D+: 4 XP   D: 3 XP   F: 0-2 XP OR Boss Battle earns 0 XP

- A+ (honorific) grades will be given at the instructor's discretion to students who achieve 12 XP *and* demonstrate particularly outstanding performance in *all* course challenges.
- As you can see in the chart, it is possible to arrive at a particular final grade through several different XP pathways.
- In order to receive a passing grade in the class, you must submit the Boss Battle and have it meet basic requirements (i.e. receive 1 XP or more).
- Due to the way I have designed this grading system, I will not be rounding grades up or down.
- Details on the undergraduate grading system are available here: https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-1-1.html
- There is no final exam in this course, and no extra credit assignments will be available.

Overview of Course Design and Challenges:
(For more information, please see the detailed challenge descriptions available on D2L)

This class will be randomly split into two even groups: the *Tuesday Mutant Ninja Turtles* and the *ThursdayCats* (if you'll allow my 80s/90s nostalgia!).
- The Tuesday Mutant Ninja Turtles will meet with me *in-person* at TI 110 for discussion every *Tuesday*; the ThursdayCats will do so every *Thursday*.
- On their alternate day (i.e. Thursdays for the Turtles and Tuesdays for the Cats), your groups will meet *online on Discord* for a GameLab.

GameLabs
- The goals of our course GameLabs are: to foster supportive communities of play, to provide insight into different narrative/ludic elements of a game (by watching another person's gameplay), and to offer some flexibility and relief in your attendance schedule given that we continue to learn together under difficult circumstances.
- One student volunteer will host the GameLab every week and **broadcast their gameplay** to the group. The host is welcome to broadcast from any point in the game they choose!
- At least one other student volunteer will document the session and produce a report for posting on Discord. This report will contain highlights from the session, including: the name of the host and the game being played, notable/surprising gameplay moments, a summary of interesting/compelling points of discussion in the chat, and any other observations worth making.
- All other attendees should participate supportively and enthusiastically in the chat!
- If you have questions or concerns about hosting (don't worry, it's straightforward!), reporting on, or participating in a GameLab, please don't hesitate to speak with me!

Sidequests

Using Microsoft Sway, you will keep a Quest Log in which you'll track your completion of up to three sidequests, which can be selected from multiple options and submitted at any point during the term prior to midnight on **April 11**. These sidequests are an opportunity to pursue your own research interests, and they are intended to help you acquire valuable knowledge (XP!) that will assist with your Boss Battle. In your Quest Log, your focus should be on critical, analytical thinking. Although these log entries are not formal essays, you should not simply raise questions, but rather draw thoughtful connections between sidequest content, your term project topic, and/or any relevant course material.

Boss Battle

You have three options:

1. **CREATE** a game using software of your choice (e.g. Bitsy, Twine). Then write a short, 750-1000 word overview explaining how the course and your own research influenced your game design.
2. **PLAY** a game of your choice. Record and edit your gameplay to create a 10-15 minute "Let's Play"-style video essay in which you draw on course material and your own research to unpack and analyze the game's queerness. Submit your script/notes along with the video.
3. **WRITE** a scholarly essay in which you offer a clear, original argument about some aspect of queer theory and video games, and develop this argument with evidence drawn from your own research and any relevant course material.

Attendance, Engagement, and Participation

At the end of term, you will assess your own participation in and engagement with the class. Your self-assessment will be based on five factors: what percentage of the course readings and games you completed according to schedule, the number of in-class discussion sessions you attended, the level of participation and engagement you demonstrated during these sessions, your participation in asynchronous Discord discussion and student hours, and your timely completion of goalsetting and self-assessment exercises.

*   Unless specified otherwise on the assignment sheet, all assignments will be submitted electronically on D2L.
*   You are responsible for setting most of your own deadlines in this course. You are welcome to adjust your Sidequest deadlines by a maximum of one week if you encounter a personal emergency or just need the extra time.
*   Generally, I am happy to provide extensions whenever I am able (this becomes more challenging at the end of term, since I need to submit final grades on a fixed timeline).
*   Please feel welcome to speak with me if you require extra time for an assignment, and remember that—if you encounter particularly challenging circumstances—you always have access to a **deferral of term work**.

For more information, please see the challenge descriptions on D2L.

<u>Conduct:</u>

Students, employees, and academic staff are expected to demonstrate behaviour in class that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment. As members of the University community, students, employees, and academic staff are expected to demonstrate conduct that is consistent with the University of Calgary Calendar, the Code of Conduct and Non-Academic Misconduct policy and procedures, which can be found at **http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html**

<u>Internet and Email Use:</u>

Students are responsible for being aware of the University's Internet and email use policy, which can be found at **https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/electronic-communications-policy.pdf**

Academic Integrity:

This course, like all courses at the University of Calgary, holds students to high standards of honest and responsible scholarship. Please consult the Academic Integrity website for a detailed description of university policies, which will be enforced in this course. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Associate Dean of Arts for a ruling.

Plagiarism is a type of academic misconduct. Plagiarism occurs when a student presents the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of another person as their own. Another equally serious form of plagiarism occurs when a student submits something they have written themselves for credit in two or more courses without first securing written permission from all those course instructors. Consequences for plagiarism include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense.

Deferral of term work and final examinations:
Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an Application of Deferment of Term Work must be completed. It is the student's responsibility to initiate this process with the instructor. The University also has regulations governing the deferral of final examinations.

Grade appeals:
To pursue a Reassessment of Graded Term Work or a Reappraisal of an Academic Assessment, Consult the University Calendar and request advice from the English Department at engl@ucalgary.ca. Please note that mere dissatisfaction with a grade is not sufficient grounds for an appeal.

English Department Website:

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English.

Scribe and Muse Club for English Students:
The Scribe and Muse Reading and Writing Club fosters and champions reading and writing through community service, leadership, and engagement. Our email address is smecuofc@gmail.com.

Writing support:
The Student Success Centre offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students.

Academic regulations and schedules

Student Academic Accommodations:
The Student Accessibility Services website is available here. University accommodation policies can be found at the following links:
https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-1.html
https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6.html
https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-2.html

Program Advising and Student Information Resources is done through the Faculty of Arts Students' Centre. Office location: SS102; phone: 403-220-3580; email: ascarts@ucalgary.ca
Website: http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate

Instructor's Intellectual Property
Course materials created by instructors, including presentations, posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams, remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may not be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
Student information will be collected in accordance with usual classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty and teaching assistants. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

Sexual violence policy:
https://www.ucalgary.ca/legal-services/sites/default/files/teams/1/Policies-Sexual-and-Gender-Based-Violence-Policy.pdf

Other important information:
- [Wellness and Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Student Success](#)
- [Student Ombuds Office](#)
- [Student Union (SU) Information](#)
- [Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Information](#)
- [Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points](#)
- [Safewalk](#)

Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI):

Please participate in USRI Surveys toward the end of the course. The feedback they provide helps us evaluate teaching, enhance student learning, and guide students as they select courses.