MCS 520: Alternate Reality Games

I will answer every email I get, usually within 24 hours (weekday). If you do not hear from me within 2 days, you can assume that I did not get your email. Please make sure that you send email to the correct email address. Be forewarned: email accounts with Yahoo tend to get sent to DePaul’s spam filter, and I tend not to get them. You can also Tweet me @pbooth81.

Course Description:
This course examines how games can make the world a better place. We will discuss games and play as concepts, analyze new types of games, and examine the “gamification” of the world. Students will design a game and learn how to manipulate variables to create a stronger play session. At the end of the course, we will play an Alternate Reality Game, a new form of game that involves multiple mediations and ubiquitous gameplay. We will look at the evolution of games as role-play, from tabletop simulations to MMORPGs and beyond. The concept of “gaming” will be interrogated for both its critical function in today’s society as well as its cultural role in the solution of social problems. Students will create their own ARG and will be encouraged to attend a gaming environment in the process of this class. Collaboration between students, the instructor, and the Chicago community will be encouraged.

Course Rationale:
Games can be a powerful tool to enact social change. They are also, by definition, fun. Studying games as cultural artifacts allows us to focus on new ways of interacting with the world around us. Games have been a part of human society for thousands of years—and the idea of “play” is even older. Some have hypothesized that it is the notion of structured play that makes us human. Throughout human history, playing and games have structured our leisure time and focused our informal learning. From the earliest days of chess and Go to modern day video games and location-based digital gaming, it is hard to imagine a more universal or successful form of play than the game. The contemporary media environment sees multiple modes of mediation structuring our life. We are surrounded by the media, and often experience multiple screens and interactions at the same time. Games, as cultural objects, have always reflected the world around them; and in contemporary times, it is no different. The games that are coming out today mirror this multi-media environment. This class offers a cultural examination of games and the communities that play them. We will focus specifically on Board Games and Alternate Reality Games, both as audience-engineered gameplay and as tools for social change. Given both DePaul’s Vincentian mission as well as its commitment to the city of Chicago, this class will require students to engage with social change in the city through gaming.

Course Goals:
This course has three main goals. The first is to gain a better understanding of key concepts in game and play theories. The second is to gain the ability to analyze the production, distribution, and consumption of game texts in today’s media-rich environment. The third is to artfully play and critique the methods and types of alternate reality games in new media.

Course Objectives:
At the end of this course, students will be able to:
1) Identify the key elements of games, including play, narrative, and economics
2) Critique different styles of gaming in different cultural frameworks
3) Demonstrate an understanding of the theory behind games and play
4) Synthesize readings, lessons, and discussions in a game project
5) Collaborate in groups to create a project

Class Readings
To Buy: (DePaul bookstore, or online)

Additional readings available via D2L. Readings should be done before class on the day they are due.

Recommended reading:

**Grading and Assignments:**
Your grade is based on 800 points.
Short ARG Paper: 50 points
Board Game Analysis: 100 points
ARG Report: 100 points
ARG Project: 250 points
Teamwork: 50 points
ARG Reflection: 50 points
Class Facilitation: 100 points
Participation: 100 points

**Assignments**

**Short ARG Paper:** Due 02 October, 50 points
In 750-1000 words, define what an ARG is in your own words, using our readings as a reference to guide your definition. Furthermore, you should discuss what characteristics of an ARG are present in the film *The Game* or in the film *Midnight Madness*. What are the key characteristics? How are they played? Do some Internet research (DON’T just use the first page of Google search results!) to find an ARG not mentioned in your readings – explain how it matches your definition. Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.

**Board Game Analysis:** Due 09 October, 100 points
You should research and play a hobby board game outside of class. You should not play a “mass market” game like *Monopoly* or *Scrabble* but find a more original, unusual, or complex game. You should not write about a game we are playing in class. On 02 October by the end of class, you should check the name of your game with Prof. Booth. Your paper, using the essay ”Settlers of Catan” by Schreiber as a guide, you should research the history of the game, the designer of the game, the dynamics of the game, and any other relevant aspects of the game. As part of this paper, you should play the game outside of class. This paper should be 1500-2000 words long. Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.

**ARG Report:** Due Date Varies, 100 points
This paper asks you to research and report (in class) on an ARG. For this assignment, you will choose an already existent ARG and research its history, contextual background, and larger structure. You should prepare a presentation to the class that (1) outlines the significance of the ARG text; and (2) offers a meaningful thesis that other students can apply to their own project. Anytime up to one week after your presentation, you should turn in a paper that builds on the research for your presentation. Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.

**ARG Project:** 250 points total
You will work in teams for this project. Your team will design an ARG for an undergraduate class to play. The game you design should last 2 days, intermittently. Your game should integrate at least 4
different technologies, and should include both mediated and non-mediated play. Your game should have a narrative and a central mystery. Your game should also focus on a non-profit in Chicago (you should contact the non-profit to make sure this is OK; if you can integrate the non-profit into your project, all the better!). There are multiple deadlines for this project:

1. 02 October: Get into Groups
2. 02 October: Start Advertising Project
3. 16 October: Come up with a basic narrative structure and non-profit to work with
4. 16 October: Advertising due
5. 30 October: Rough Draft of ARG
6. 07 November: Start ARG
7. 08 November: Complete ARG

Plan on running through your rough draft with your team the week of 01 Nov. If you want, find some friends to test it. You should maintain good, detailed records of the process of putting the game together so that the undergrad class can reflect on playing it. On the last day of class (13 Nov) we will discuss the game, and during Finals we will look at the Undergrad’s re-design. Each game should last 4-5 days. Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.

Teamwork: Due 13 November, 50 points
Evaluate yourself and people within your group. My own and your classmate’s evaluations of the group presentation will be added to the grades you generate. You will turn in both a numerical group evaluation form and you will write a 1-2 page narrative statement about your group dynamics.

ARG Reflection: Due 20 November, 50 points
This essay asks you to reflect on the Alternate Reality Game run in class. Please note that you will be expected to run an Alternate Reality Game during the weekend of Nov 07-08. While you will not be needed the entire time, you will be expected to participate at least some of the time. Please speak to Prof. Booth if this will be a problem. In 1000-1200 words, you should analyze the experience of creating and running the game. How does it match what McGonigal writes about? What is different from what McGonigal writes about? What was unexpected? What was difficult and what was easy? Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.

Class Facilitation: 100 points
Each student will sign up for a class topic that is of interest to them. You will be required to lead the class for 30-45 minutes in a lesson and activity. Note that this is not (necessarily) a presentation of an article, but rather your chance to teach the class something that is of interest to you, or something that you are an expert on. YOU SHOULD NOT BE LECTURING IN THIS CLASS, but using this time to lead the class in an active and powerful learning activity. By 7 pm three days before the class you help facilitate, you should turn in a 1200-1500 word lesson plan (this includes weekends). Your plan should detail everything you’re planning on doing in class, your rationale for why you’re doing it (please use resources/citations to support this rationale), any materials you may need in this facilitation, and any activities you plan to lead the class in. I will review this lesson plan and send feedback to you; you will be expected to revise your plan taking into account my feedback. At 7 pm two days after your facilitation, you will write a 1000 word reflection paper on what you think worked, what you think didn’t work, and how you would improve your teaching the next time (this includes weekends). Each person will turn in one reflection paper. Please see the D2L assignment tab for more specific guidelines and a grading rubric.
## UNIT 1: GAMES

### Class 01
**THURSDAY 11 SEPT**  
Topic: Introduction; Definitions  
Readings due today: McGonigal: Introduction, Appendix 2  
Recommended: Szulborski Ch 1

### Class 02
**THURSDAY 18 SEPT**  
Topic: Characteristics of Games; History of Games  
Readings due today: McGonigal: Ch 1  
*Pervasive Games*: Ch 3  
Salen and Zimmerman: Ch 3 and Ch 10

### Class 03
**THURSDAY 25 SEPT**  
Topic: No Class, Instructor Out of the Country  
Readings due today: McGonigal: Ch 7-10  
Gosney: Ch 1  
Recommended: Szulborski Ch 2-5  
Assignment due today: Watch *The Game* OR *Midnight Madness* on D2L

## UNIT 2: ALTERNATE REALITY GAMES

### Class 04
**THURSDAY 02 OCT**  
Topic: ARGs  
Readings due today: McGonigal: Ch 4-6  
Schreiber: “Settlers of Catan”  
Kim, Lee, Thomas, and Dombrowski: “Storytelling in New Media”  
Mangold and Faulds: “Social Media”  
Recommended: Szulborski Ch 6  
Assignment due today: Short ARG Paper  
Guest Speaker: Dr. Yeuseung Kim

### Class 05
**THURSDAY 09 OCT**  
Topic: ARGs: Play and Narrative  
Readings due today: Caillois: “The Definition of Play”  
Costikyan: “I have No Words and I Must Design”  
Phillips: Ch 5-10  
Salen and Zimmerman: Ch 9  
Assignment due today: Board Game Analysis

### Class 06
**THURSDAY 16 OCT**  
Topic: Games for Social Change: Games as Actions  
Readings due today: *Pervasive Games*: Ch 6  
McGonigal: Ch 11-14
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<tr>
<th>Recommended Readings</th>
<th>Gosney: Ch 3-4</th>
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<td>Assignment due today</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
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**Class 07**  
**THURSDAY 23 OCT**  
**Topic: Pervasive Gaming: Games and Characters**

| Readings due today | Kaufeld: “Randomness, Player Choice, and Player Experience”  
Pervasive Games: Ch 1, Ch 7 |
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<tr>
<td>Game To Play</td>
<td>Class Designed Pervasive Game</td>
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<td>Assignment Due Today</td>
<td>ARG OUTLINE</td>
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**UNIT 3: CREATING THE GAME**

| Class 08  | THURSDAY 30 OCT  
**Topic: Roleplaying** |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Readings due today | Lancaster: “Welcome Aboard, Commander: Creating a Surrogate Performance”  
Hite: “Multicampaign Setting Design for Role-Playing Games”  
Pervasive Games ch 6 |
| Assignment Due Today | ARG ROUGH DRAFT |

| Class 09  | THURSDAY 06 NOV  
**Topic: Paratextual Games** |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Readings due today | Booth: Introduction (pre-pub)  
Condis: “Adaptation and Space”  
Pervasive Games ch 13 |
| Recommended | Szulborski Ch 16-19 (skim) |
| Assignment Due 07 Nov | ARG Project |

Run ARG 07 - 08 Nov

| Class 10  | THURSDAY 13 NOV  
**Topic: Fans, Players, and Design** |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Readings due today | McGonigal: Conclusion  
Booth: “Quest of the Magi”  
Graham: “Eight Nerds”  
Summers: “Cards Against Humanity.” |
| Assignment Due | Teamwork |
| Guest Speaker | Max Temkin from Cards Against Humanity |

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<th>THURSDAY 20 NOV</th>
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<td>Readings due today</td>
<td>None: We aren’t meeting for finals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Due Today</td>
<td>ARG Reflection</td>
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