

Syllabus for Philosophy of Games

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Fall 2025

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Office Hours:

Office: West Duke 201A

Class Room:

Class Hours:

Course Description

In recent years, video games have shifted from being a niche interest to becoming more and more central to popular culture. New game reviews and profiles of designers now frequently appear in major publications like the New York Times, with game sales being reported alongside those of books, music, and movies. While video games are increasingly used for purposes beyond entertainment, discussions about them tend to split into two camps: criticism over violence and social isolation or praise for their potential as serious cultural, aesthetic, and ethical contributions.

In this course, we will explore various philosophical dimensions of gaming. We'll delve into the neuroethical implications of gaming, exploring how gaming affects the brain, behavior, and community norms. We will discuss how these values influence both players and society. More importantly, as we navigate the complex landscape of games, I hope to help you reflect on what games tell us about ourselves and the world. Through readings, discussions, and interactive experiences, we will challenge conventional views on play and consider how gaming can contribute positively to personal growth and well-being.

No prior experience with philosophy is required—only a willingness to play along.

Required Materials

- All required readings will be uploaded to Sakai/Canvas. No need to purchase anything.

Course Structure

Grading Scale

A: 93-100% A-: 90-92%

B+: 87-89% B: 83-86% B-: 80-82%

C+: 77-79% C: 73-76% C-: 70-72%

D+: 67-69% D: 63-66% D-: 60-63%

F: below 60%

Assessments

- 30% of your grade will be determined by weekly reading response. I will drop your two lowest grade.
- 20% of your grade will be determined by your attendance and class participation.
- 20% of your grade will be determined by your presentation.
- 30% of your grade will be determined by the final essay.

Special policies

- Attendance is expected in all lecture. You're allowed to miss two classes, no excuses needed. However, starting from the third absence, I will need you to send me valid excuses for absence before class. In extenuating circumstances, valid excuses with proof will be accepted after class. Each violations will lead to a 1% deduction in attendance grade.
- You're allowed to be late to class two times (within 30 minutes), no excuse needed. I'll also need you to send me valid excuses with proof starting for the third one. Each violation will lead to a 0.5 % deduction in attendance grade.
- All homework should be submitted at the beginning of the first class of the week.

Final Essay and Class Project

Submit a proposal

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Policies on Incomplete Grades and Late Assignments

The instructor follows university policy on incomplete grades. Two late assignments (excluding the final paper) can be accepted within 48 hours with no excuse required. Once you've had your two late assignments, each late assignment will receive half a letter grade deduction every 24 hours until it reaches a D (unless you have instructor's approval).

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students are required to comply with the university policy on academic integrity found in the Code of Student Conduct found at <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01>. Don't cheat. See <http://policies.ncsu.edu/policy/pol-11-35-01> for a detailed explanation of academic honesty.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. Duke affirms its commitment to maintain a work environment for all employees and an academic environment for all students that is free from all forms of discrimination. Go to the Student Disability Access Office (SDAO) for academic accommodations.

Discrimination based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation is a violation of state and federal law and/or Duke University policy and will not be tolerated. Harassment of any person based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation also is a violation of state and federal law and/or Duke University policy and will not be tolerated.

Class schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change.

Week 01, 08/26 - 08/30: Introduction to Philosophy of Games

- Wednesday: Jesper Juul, *The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness*
- Friday: Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Introduction and Chapter 1)

Week 02, 09/02 - 09/06: What is a Game?

- Wednesday: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Excerpt on language games)
- Friday: Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Chapter 2) (Note: Add-drop ends at 11:59 pm)

Week 03, 09/09 - 09/13: Games and Agency

- Wednesday: C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (Introduction and Chapter 1)
- Friday: C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (Chapter 2)

Week 04, 09/16 - 09/20: Games and Agency (2)

- Wednesday: C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (Chapter 3)
- Friday: C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (Chapter 4)

Week 05, 09/23 - 09/27: Neuroethics of Gaming Community

- Wednesday: Dong, "Neuroethical Considerations of Gaming Community"
- Friday: C. Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (chapter 5)

Week 06, 09/30 - 10/04: Metaphysics of Games

- Wednesday: Jesper Juul, *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Chapter 3)
- Friday: David Myers, "What Videogames Are, and How They Change Us"

Week 07, 10/07 - 10/11: Aesthetics of Games

- Wednesday: Grant Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames* (Chapter 4)
- Friday: Fall break. No class!

Week 08, 10/14 - 10/18: Aesthetics of Games (2)

- Wednesday: Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (Chapters on 'Ludus' and 'Paidia')
- Friday: Stephanie Patridge, "The Aesthetic and Ethical Implications of In-Game Actions"

Week 09, 10/21 - 10/25: Morality in Games

- Wednesday: Miguel Sicart, *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay* (chapter 1)
- Friday: Morgan Luck, "The Gamer's Dilemma: An Analysis of the Arguments for and Against the Morality of Violent Video Games"

Week 10, 10/28 - 11/01: Morality in Games (2)

- Wednesday: Christopher Bartel, "Virtual Wrongdoing and the Ethics of Videogames"
- Friday: Johann Schafer, *Playing the Good Guy: The Moral Experience of Video Games*

Week 11, 11/04 - 11/08: Sports, Esports and Competitive games

- Wednesday: Paul Gaffney, "The Ethics of Competition in Sports"
- Friday: C. Thi Nguyen, "Competition as Cooperation"

Week 12, 11/11 - 11/15: Sports, Esports and Competitive games (2)

- Wednesday: João Medeiros and José Eduardo Franco, "The Esport Dilemma: Conceptual and Ethical Challenges in the Digital Age"
- Christopher Haney, "Is Esport a 'Real' Sport?": Counter-Strike as a Case Study

Week 13, 11/18 - 11/22: Student Presentation Week 1

- Wednesday:
- Friday:

Week 14, 11/25 - 11/29: Thanksgiving Week

- Wednesday: No Class (optional homework for extra credit)
- Friday: No Class

Week 15, 12/02 - 12/06: Student Presentation Week 2 (Final Week)

- Wednesday:
- Friday: