🎮 Video Game Economies 💸

MCC-UE 1008
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication

Fridays @ 11:00AM-1:30PM

Professor: Laine Nooney (they/them)
laine.nooney@nyu.edu
Link to calendar schedule: https://calendar.app.google/q6sgZsyAs23Ezzps8

📓 Catalog Description

This course approaches video games through the lens of political economy. This means examining games foremost *as commodities*, transactional goods through which various modes of economic life occur. This course is designed to introduce students to the structure and economics of the game industry since its emergence in the 1970s, particularly across the United States, China, and Japan. Special attention is brought to the dramatic industry changes catalyzed by digital distribution, mobile gaming, live streaming, and other contemporary developments.

🔗 Quick Links

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MCC Land Acknowledgement

What follows is the formal MCC Land Acknowledgment. For more information about MCC's land acknowledgment, see our dedicated webpage on the subject.

We begin by acknowledging that we are gathered, speaking, and learning on Lenapehoking, the ancestral lands of the Lenape peoples, which settlers call New York City. We do this with humility and gratitude, while recognizing the violence of forced relocation and displacement of the Lenape Peoples with whom this department and university are in an ongoing process of learning. These peoples are known today as the Delaware Nation, in Anadarko, Oklahoma; the Delaware Tribe of Indians, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma; the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, in Bowler, Wisconsin; and the Munsee Delaware Nation, and the Eelūnaapèewii Lahkèewiit, or Delaware Nation at Moraviantown, both in Ontario, Canada.

We acknowledge the need for the recognition of the history of Lenapehoking – a land stolen from, never traded by, the Lenape peoples, who continue to live in New York City and beyond. We acknowledge the systemic and ongoing violence of settler colonialism, and the genocidal violence that resulted in both forced relocation and in physical and psychological trauma perpetrated across generations. We acknowledge in particular that settlers have broken, and continue to break, their treaties with Lenape peoples, beginning with the actions of Henry Hudson and Peter Minuit in first appropriating this land.

We recognize that reparative action requires long-term maintenance and multigenerational efforts to build relationships with the sovereign nations of the Lenape peoples. We commit to upholding an ongoing and living set of commitments with these nations by working directly with Tribal Governments and Authorized Tribal Representatives to ensure our words and actions are in step with our goals.

🎓Learning Outcomes

- Students will compare and contrast how contemporary production, distribution and consumption differ across primary industry platforms: PC, console, and mobile
- Students will categorize and describe historical changes in monetization practices and distribution models
- Students will describe and compare industry trends within specific nations, contextualizing differences and similarities through a nation's geopolitical, cultural and technological history
- Students will evaluate and synthesize journalistic and academic research on game industry practices
- Students will critique the economic and social consequences of emergent industry practices and forms, such as free-to-play, microtransactions, loot boxes, cloud gaming, esports, etc.

📖 Course Materials and Required Texts

Nearly ***everything*** you need for this class can be found in the VGE Student Materials folder (you must be logged in using your NYU NETID to access the folder). This includes readings, lecture slides, assignment sheets, this syllabus, and more. Bookmark the link for easy access.

This course will require approximately 50 pages of reading per week. Every lecture day has its own folder of readings. In that folder, you'll also find a README file — a little word doc that gives you a quick overview of the larger context these readings are a part of, and some guidance on what to read for. The READMEs are your friend -– read them!

💯Assignments

Your grade in this course will be based on the follow breakdown of assignments:

- 5% Exit Tickets
- 15% "What Are You Playing?" Case Study (Class Presentation)
- 15% Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry Phase I: Introduction and Outline
- 20% Midterm
- 25% Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry Phase II: Final Submission
- 20% Final

🎟️ Exit Tickets (5%)

At the end of each lecture-based class (10 classes out of the semester), you will have five minutes to write an exit ticket, registering your attendance in class. An exit ticket is a 3”x5” index card on which you write:

1. Your name

2. One of the following:

    - An issue we did not address that you would like addressed
    - A question you have based on today’s discussion
    - A point you still do not understand that you want clarified
    - A question you wanted to ask but did not

Your Course Assistant will collect these cards at the end of class and, based on your feedback, I will structure the beginning of our next lecture accordingly.

Students must bring their own 3”x5” notecards to class; I reserve the right to refuse exit tickets not written on notecards.

Exit Tickets are graded pass/fail. Students are permitted one “skipped” or dropped exit ticket. Exit Tickets cannot be made up, but if you are absent and send one in to your CA over email on the day of class, it’ll count.

👩🏾‍💻 “What Are You Playing?” (Class Presentation) (15%)

Each student will prepare a 10-12 minute presentation on a digital game they are playing, focusing on the game as a commodity. Students should consult the assignment sheet on Brightspace for instructions and guidelines. Students can volunteer to give their presentations to the class, or choose to submit them as a video. Please see the assignment sheet for full details.

Students will be instructed on how to sign up for presentation days. Students should expect to use their own laptops, but should also bring a copy of your presentation on USB, or email it to me the night before, in case there are technical difficulties with your laptop (or if you don’t own a laptop). Presentations happen at the beginning of class; class presenters should arrive early on their assigned day, to test A/V.

📚 Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry, Intro and Outline (15%)

For the course's writing assignment, students will contribute individually-written entries to a collective, on-going "Encyclopedia of the Game Industry" that will serve as a public resource, uploaded and stored on the Internet Archive. Students will compose a 1,200 word essay focused on a specific company (developer, publisher, distributors, or 3rd party service provider), national industry, or term/concept pertinent to the game industry.

Students will begin this assignment by submitting an introduction and the first section, along with an outline for the rest of the entry. The feedback on this portion of the writing assignment is intended to help students strengthen their final submission. Please see the assignment sheet for full details. Due dates on syllabus and assignment sheet.

📝 Midterm (20%)

There will be an in-class midterm; date is located on the syllabus. The midterm will consist of terminology identifications, short answers, and paragraph-long answers, and will cover all material from the first half of the course.

📚 Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry (25%)

On the last day of class, students will submit their completed Encyclopedia entry, both online and printed out. Please see the assignment sheet for full details.

📝 Final (20%)

This class will have a final **during finals week**. It will cover material from the second half of class (i.e. it will not be cumulative). It cannot be made up or taken in advance.

📋 Course Policies

⌚ Absences, Lateness and Life

Please come to class on time. Student presentations open class, and it is highly disruptive to have other students arriving late in the middle of a presentation. If excessive lateness is an issue in class, I reserve the right to have students wait outside until presentations are complete before being given entry to the classroom.

This class has no formal attendance policy. However, my recommendation is that you miss no more than 1-2 classes. Absences are your business. I have no interest in surveilling your behavior or demanding "proof" for absences (i.e. I don't believe in cop shit: you don't need to send me doctors notes, copies of plane tickets, etc). Giving a head's up is beneficial for record-keeping, but that's all we need (**email your CA if you're going to be absent, not me**). The only time absences become an issue is if you miss a presentation day or a test day. Let me know ASAP if you have conflicts, issues with attendance, etc. Exit tickets missed due to absence can be emailed in on the day of, but otherwise typically cannot be made up.

However, it's very hard to do well in this class if you don't attend. While I do share my slides, they are only intended as an outline of the lecture. They do not carry much independent content and are not a replacement for missing numerous classes.

💥 **When "life happens," email me.** 💥 I can help you much more effectively if I am aware of any personal struggles or issues you are having in the moment, rather than days or weeks after. 💥 If you fall behind, email me. 💥 We can work out a strategy to get you back on track. You will not be in trouble for asking for help.

🛐 Religious Accommodations

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Students must notify me in advance of religious holidays or observances that might coincide with exams or assignment due dates to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives. Exit tickets should be sent in advance.

⌛ Late Work Policy

Due dates for all assignments and tests are available on the reading schedule. Generally, late work will be assessed according to the following rules:

- What Are You Playing and Game Industry Encyclopedia Phase 1 and 2: 5% - 10% deduction for each 24 hours late (at the instructors discretion)
- Tests: no extensions granted. Make-up exams will be provided only for serious medical or personal events, which must be confirmed to me through your advisor.
- Exit Tickets: no extensions or make-ups given for exit tickets. Students who are absent on a class day can submit an exit ticket to your CA over email by the end of class.

📧 Email Policy

Email your Course Assistant about:

- Class logistics
- Exit Tickets
- Absences
- Checking in on grades
- Discussion of course readings
- Assistance finding something on Brightspace
- Clarification of an assignment or submission procedures
- Discussion of the grade on your midterm test

Email your Professor about:

- Discussion of Moses accommodations
- You're falling behind in a big way or are experiencing significant life issues
- Questions related to the encyclopedia entry
- If you want to chat about your interests in the game industry or games education at NYU (make a meeting, see next section)
- If you are having problems getting resolution on an issue from the Course Assistant.

We'll typically respond very quickly to email but can't always promise to get back to you right away. Please give both me and your course assistant 48 hours to respond to an email (so please note: "night before" emails may not get answered in time).

📅 Scheduling Student Meetings

While your course assistant is your first stop for questions related to class logistics, I encourage all students to take advantage of the opportunity to set up a meeting with me. You can do this to discuss what's been interesting to you in class, talk about your interest in games as a career, or get advice about a game-related career path.

The easiest, fastest, most effective way to set up an appointment is to pick a 20-minute slot via my Google calendar. I have slots open every week, and this prevents us from sending emails back and forth searching for availability. Important: I prefer if you simply book a time with me, and don't send email; when you book the time, just write the purpose of the meeting in the description (and whether you want to meet on Zoom or in person). Please don't book a meeting on less than 24 hours' notice.

I prefer to meet students in person, in my office at 239 Greene St, 7th Floor, Office #716. Zoom meetings are available on request at: https://nyu.zoom.us/j/6416830954

💬 Name and Pronoun Policy

You can go by whatever name and pronouns you want in this class—no questions asked. Set that up by updating your chosen/preferred name in NYU's systems. To set your pronouns or add an audio clip of name pronunciation, follow NYU's instructions here. And if you don't want to universally change your name/pronouns across all NYU services, but would like me to use a specific name or pronoun for you, just let me know 🙂

You are always encouraged to correct me when/if I ever call you by the wrong name, mispronounce your name, or misgender you—you can let me know immediately when I make the mistake, after class, in a 1-on-1 meeting, or over email.

💻 Laptop/Tablet Courtesy

This course is a laptop free zone. This means all note-taking should be done by hand or on tablets. Additionally, 📱 smartphones or other electronic devices should be stowed during class.

If you require a laptop as part of special accommodations with the Moses Center, please arrange to have that documentation sent along to me. If you have specific concerns about this policy, please speak with me after class or over email.

©Intellectual Property Statement

All course materials provided to enrolled students, including the syllabus, assignment sheets, grade sheets, and any other materials distributed as part of this course, are Sole Property of the Instructor. Distribution online (to sites like CourseHero), through social media apps, or to non-enrolled students, without permission of the Instructor, is not permitted.

No portion of class lecture or discussion may be photographed or recorded/transcribed on a phone or laptop, except by students with accessibility permissions.

🤖 Factual Integrity Mandate (aka “The AI Policy”)

In this course, your learning is rooted in reading, researching, thinking, and writing. Every activity and assignment—whether it’s the encyclopedia entry, your presentation, doing course reading, or memorizing terms for a test—is designed to help you build and flex skills in critical thinking, synthesis, and analysis.

As such I **do not recommend the use of generative AI [genAI] tools** (like ChatGPT, Grammerly, Claude, Gemini, or others) to complete or assist with your coursework. That includes using genAI to summarize readings, structure arguments, search for sources, or generate drafts. **When it comes to writing your encyclopedia entry and composing your presentation, I consider any use of generative AI tools, at any development stage, a violation of academic integrity.**

However, I also recognize it’s nearly impossible for me to *prove* an assignment was produced using genAI. Instead, what I will focus on and evaluate is your **factual integrity**.

That means:

- Are the facts in your work true?
- Do the citations actually state what you claim?
- Are those sources real? Are those quotes accurate?
- Would someone else be able to verify what you’ve written?

Work that fails to meet these standards—regardless of whether AI was used—**will be treated as a serious academic issue**. Whether due to negligence, carelessness, or AI use, a failure of factual integrity undermines the entire point of doing college-level work.

There is of course a gray area in terms of evaluating sources and using them appropriately. Students often make errors of judgment in this skill area, simply because they are not expert researchers. That is normal, and I am not here to trap students who may have a source or two of questionable provenance. This policy focuses on egregious failures of factual integrity—sources that are not real, quotes that do not exist, sources that have no relevance to the work they are cited to support.

If your work demonstrates such a failure of factual integrity, I reserve the right to apply any of the following outcomes:

- Failure of the assignment (minimum consequence)
- Loss of any dropped assignment options (if applicable)

- Failure of the course
- Referral to the University for an academic integrity violation

If you're ever unsure about what counts as acceptable help or collaboration, or whether a source is reliable—you are welcome to reach out to me or your CA.

📅 Grade Ranges

I use the grade ranges listed below. Grades are not curved. As a courtesy, I round up any grades that are .5% or above. For example, an 86.7 will round up to an 87, turning from a B to a B+. However, a 79.2 rounds down to a 79, staying a C+. I do not make exceptions to this policy.

A = 94-100	A- = 90-93	B+ = 87-89	B = 84-86
B- = 80-83	C+ = 77-79	C = 74-76	C- = 70-73
D+ = 65-69	D = 60-64	F = 0-59	

✋ Grade Appeals

All students have the right to contest a grade. Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on the assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the score and either augment your grade or refine the explanation for your score.

🔍 Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic work at NYU is built on trust, respect, and responsibility. Just as the **Factual Integrity Mandate** emphasizes truthfulness in your sources, academic integrity is about honesty in the creation of your work.

All students are responsible for understanding and complying with Steinhardt's policy on Academic Integrity. Academic integrity is the guiding principle for all that you do, from taking exams, making oral presentations, to writing term papers. It

requires that you recognize and acknowledge information derived from others, and take credit only for ideas and work that are yours. Please see the full policy on Academic Integrity for examples, guidance, and the disciplinary process for violations.

🏫 Student Resources

Student Accessibility at The Moses Center

New York University is committed to providing equal educational opportunity and participation for all students, and academic accommodations are available for qualified students who disclose their disability to the Moses Center. Students requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center for Accessibility and Inclusive Culture as early as possible in the semester for assistance (telephone: 212-998-4980 / website: www.nyu.edu/csa / email: mosescsa@nyu.edu).

NYU Writing Center

The NYU Writing Center welcomes all student writers from across the NYU community, for support on any writing project, at any stage of development. The Center provides a variety of workshops, writing groups, and individualized writing conferences with faculty consultants, graduate student consultants, and undergraduate peer tutors. Students can schedule an appointment on the Washington Square or Tandon Brooklyn campuses. Reservations available on the Writing Center website: https://cas.nyu.edu/ewp/writing-center.html

Mental Health & Wellness

If you are experiencing undue personal and/or academic stress during the semester that may be interfering with your ability to perform academically, The NYU Wellness Exchange (212-443-9999) offers a range of services to assist and support you, including drop-in services on campus on a regular basis.

🗓️ Course Lecture Schedule

👋 Sept 5: Introduction to the Course

📡 Sept 12: Labor, Creation, and Simulation in Pre-Commercial Game History

- Introduction to Game Industry Encyclopedia
- Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter. (2003) *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*. Montreal: MQUP. Chapter 4, "Origins of an Industry: Cold Warriors, Hackers, and Suits," pp. 84-90.
- Tristan Donovan, *Replay: The History of Video Games*. Chapter 1, pgs 1-13.

👾 Sept 19: Regulation and Competition in 20th Century Arcade Economies

- Daniel Reynolds. (2010) "The Pinball Problem." *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media.*
- Carly Kocurek. (2015) *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 2, "Gaming's Gold Medalists: Twin Galaxies and the Rush to Competitive Gaming," pp 37-65.

🛍️ Sept 26: Brick & Mortar Economics and the "Core" US Gaming Market

- Dmitri Williams. (2002) "Structure and Competition in the US Home Video Game Industry." *International Journal on Media Management* 4.1: 41-54. **Note:** This piece is quite dated, and much of it isn't entirely accurate to the current organization of the game industry. For our purposes, the important section is pages 46–49, where the author outlines the five vertical stages of the industry. Focus closely on that part; you can skim or skip the rest.
- Joost van Dreunen. (2020) "Chapter 2: Game Industry Basics," *One Up: Creativity, Competition, and the Global Business of Video Games*. Columbia Business School Publishing. Pgs 26-52.

💴🧧 Oct 3: Gaming As Global Enterprise: Historical Industry Dynamics of China and Japan

- Lin Zhang. (2013) “Productive vs. Pathological: The Contested Space of Video Games in Post-Reform China (1980s-2012).” *International Journal of Communication*. Vol. 7: 2391-4211.
- Martin Picard. (2013) “The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese Video Games.” *Game Studies*. Vol. 13.2.
- Carlos K.F. Cheung and Anthony Fung. (2016) “Globalizing the Chinese Online Game Industry: From Incubation and Hybridization to Structural Expansion in the Past Two Decades.” *Global Game Industries and Cultural Policy*. Palgrave. 71-90.

✔️ Oct 6 @ 12PM: Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry, Intro and Outline Due

- Submission instructions on the assignment sheet.

✍️ Oct 10: Classes Canceled for Student Meetings

😴 Oct 17: The Game Development Grind

- Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter. (2006) “‘EA Spouse’ and the Crisis of Video Game Labour: Enjoyment, Exclusion, Exploitation, Exodus.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*. Vol. 31: 599-617.

- Scott DeJong and Michael Iantorno, (2024) “Game Design for a Fiverr: Precarity, Regionality, and Platform-Mediation in the Gig Economy,” *Media Industries* 11(1): 1-2.

📝 Oct 24 : MIDTERM

🖥️ Oct 31: Power to the Platform: The Rise of Digital Distribution

- Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*. Chapter 1: “The Long Tail: How Technology is Turning Mass Markets into Millions of Niches.” pp 15-26.

- Simon Carless. (2019) “The Three Eras of Game Discoverability: Which One Are You Stuck In?” *Game Discoverability Weekly*, July 31.
- Tim Colwill. (2017) “Valve is not your friend, and Steam is not healthy for gaming.” *Polygon*. May 16.

📱 Nov 7: Mobile Gaming and the Rise of Microtransactions

- Rebecca Giblin and Cory Doctorow. “Chapter 10: Why Fortnite Sued Apple.” Chokepoint Capitalism: How Big Tech and Big Content Captured Creative Labor Markets and How We’ll Win Them Back. 112-123.

- Neil M. Coe, and Chun Yang (2021). “Mobile Gaming Production Networks, Platform Business Groups, and the Market Power of China’s Tencent.” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 112(2), 307–330. **Note:** This article spends its first ~8–10 pages setting up theory and surveying prior research in a way that’s especially jargon-y. You don’t need to get bogged down in that section — it’s fine to skim for a sense of how the authors are framing things. The real case study and argument about Tencent’s dominance in mobile gaming starts on pg 316 (PDF pg. 10), with the section “Exploring the Transformation of China’s Games Industry: Salient Market and Regulatory Factors.” Focus your attention starting there, where you’ll find the concrete evidence and examples we’ll discuss in class.

📺 Nov 14: Game Live Streaming and the Rise of Networked Broadcast

- TL Taylor. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Chapter 2, “Networked Broadcasting.” pp 23-65.
- William Clyde Partin. "Bit by (Twitch) Bit: “Platform Capture” and the Evolution of Digital Platforms." *Social Media + Society* 6.3 (2020)

🏅 Nov 21: Esports Economies

- Roshan Patel. “Esports, Player Positions, and the Benefits of Unionization” *Duke Law and Technology Review*. Vol 18. No. 1, 2020.
- TL Taylor. *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. Chapter 4, “Esports Broadcasting: Ditching the TV Dream.” Pp 136-145; 157-175. **Note:** The full chapter is *very* long (76 pages!), so I’ve created a PDF that’s just the sections I want you to focus on.

- Noah Smith, "Inside 'Contract Hell': Esports Players Say Predatory Contracts Run 'Rampant'" *The Washington Post*. March 4, 2022.
- Jonathan Lee, "Esports Stars Have Shorter Careers than NFL players. Here's Why." *The Washington Post*. April 19, 2022.

🍂 Nov 28: Fall Break

📈 Dec 5: Trajectories in Market Hype

- Game Industry Encyclopedia Entry Due
- Leslie Jamison, "The Digital Ruins of a Forgotten Future," *The Atlantic*, December 2017
- David Karpf, "Virtual Reality is the Rich White Kid of Technology," *Wired*, July 27, 2021
- Simon Parkin, "The Trouble with Roblox, the Video Game Empire Built on Child Labor," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2022.

📝 CLASS FINAL: TBD