

**FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL**  
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or any other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>	<b>FSEM 100</b>		
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	<b>A VIDEOGAME CANON: THE MOST IMPORTANT VIDEOGAMES EVER MADE</b>		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Zach Whalen	<b>DATE:</b>	1/23/2009
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			

*NOTE: Click on the link for "first year seminar" at [www.jtmorello.org/gened](http://www.jtmorello.org/gened) to see the criteria used to evaluate courses proposed to meet the first year seminar requirement. See the report entitled "General Education Curriculum as Approved by the Faculty Senate" for additional details.*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one to two sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner, and will also be used in other publications about the first year seminar program (such as the "Eagle Essentials" booklet).

**This seminar will study 10 videogames included in a proposed canon of "The Most Important Videogames Ever" as an introduction to videogame and media studies within a humanities context. Through argumentative papers, group work, and at least one presentation, students will perform close "readings" of these games, study the cultural and economic implications of the broader question of canon formation, and ultimately propose a new list of games to be added to the original group.**

**RATIONALE.** Using only the space provided in the box below, **briefly** state why this course should be approved as a first year seminar course.

What are the most important videogames of all time? In 2007, a committee of videogame scholars and designers submitted a proposal to the Library of Congress asserting that videogames are cultural artifacts worthy of preservation. Included in this report is a list of what this committee considered to be the 10 most important videogames of all time -- effectively endorsing a videogame canon. This seminar will focus a study of videogames around this core group of videogame texts while at the same time interrogating the notion of canonicity as it applies to other cultural genres, including literature and film. By analyzing the specific videogames in this set, this seminar will introduce the field of videogame studies while also asking students to think critically about the political, social, economic, and technical dimensions of media texts. Students will be required to play, study, and write about these games through blogging and class discussion. Major assignments will include an analytical paper, a presentation to the class, and a longer seminar paper or project. In addition, the class will collectively determine (and create a proposal for) an additional list of games to be added to the current canon. No prior knowledge of or experience with videogames is required to participate in this seminar.

**SYLLABUS.** Attach a course syllabus.

**SUBMIT** this form and attached syllabus **electronically as one document** to Warren Rochelle ([wrochell@umw.edu](mailto:wrochell@umw.edu)) or Maya Mathur ([mmathur@umw.edu](mailto:mmathur@umw.edu)). All submissions **must** be in electronic form.

# A Videogame Canon:

## The most important games ever made

### Course Description

What are the most important videogames of all time? In 2007, a committee of videogame scholars and designers submitted a proposal to the Library of Congress asserting that videogames, just like books, films, and audio recordings, are significant cultural artifacts worthy of archival and preservation. Included in this report is a list of what this committee considered to be the 10 most important videogames of all time -- effectively enshrining an official videogame canon. This seminar will focus a study of videogames around this core group of game texts while at the same time interrogating the notion of canonicity as it applies to any cultural genre, including literature and film. By analyzing the specific videogames in this set, this seminar will introduce the field of videogame studies while also asking students to think critically about the political, social, economic, and technical dimensions of canonizing digital texts. Students will be required to play, study, and write about these games through blogging and class discussion. Major assignments will include an analytical paper, a presentation to the class, and a longer seminar paper or project. In addition, the class will collectively determine (and create a proposal for) an additional list of 5 videogames to be added to the current canon. No prior knowledge of or experience with videogames is required to participate in this seminar.

### The List (in no particular order)

<i>Spacewar!</i>	<i>Super Mario Bros. 3</i>
<i>Star Raiders</i>	<i>Civilization I/II</i>
<i>Zork</i>	<i>Doom</i>
<i>Tetris</i>	<i>Warcraft series</i>
<i>SimCity</i>	<i>Sensible World of Soccer</i>

### Objectives

The successful student will gain experience in college-level writing and speaking and will learn to critically analyze media texts for their cultural, historical and aesthetic value.

### Required Texts

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Jonas Heide Smith, and Susana Pajares Tosca. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Students will also be required to acquire and play each of the games on the canon list. Many of these can be acquired free of charge or at very low cost. Additional secondary readings will consist of material freely available online.

## Assignments

### ***Blogging (10 entries throughout semester) 20%***

Students will maintain a blog published through the course website. This will help you share your ideas with each other and put your research into the public sphere.

### ***Analysis paper (~3 pages) 15%***

This will be a short analytical paper consisting of a close reading of a videogame. The

### ***Presentation (5 - 10 minutes) 10%***

Each student will select a videogame and present an argument for including that game in the canon. This argument will be considered by the rest of the class for the proposal.

### ***Proposal (collaborative) 15%***

Of the games presented in the previous assignment, the class will collectively determine a shorter list of five games to propose for inclusion in any future additions to the videogame canon.

### ***Final paper (~10 pages) 20%***

At the conclusion of the semester, students will submit a paper on a topic of their choosing. This topic must relate to the class (i.e. videogames) and it must be approved by the professor no later than 1 month prior to its due date.

### ***Participation 20%***

Students should expect to take part in active class discussions, both in person and through the electronic means. Failure to do so will negatively impact the student's final grade.

## Tentative Weekly Schedule

Week	Agenda	Reading	Games	Assignments
1	How can a videogame be historically cultural or important? What is a canon?	Selections from <i>Trigger Happy</i> Selections by Arnold	<i>Passage</i>	
2	Approaches to videogame studies	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 1 – 3 Selections <i>First Person</i> )		
3	Videogame History / Video Games In History	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 4 Selections from <i>Trigger Happy</i> and <i>Playing the Past</i>	<i>Spacewar!</i> <i>Star Raiders</i>	Videogame Analysis Due

<b>Week</b>	<b>Agenda</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Games</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
4	The Videogame as Text	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> Ch. 5, 8 Selections from <i>Mechanisms</i>	Zork Super Mario Bros. 3	
5	Canons	Selections by Hirsch, Bloom		
6	Game genre Presenting an Argument	Selections from <i>Medium of the Videogame.</i>	Tetris SimCity Sensible world of Soccer	
7	Videogames and the Avant Garde Presentations	Selections from <i>Videogames and Art</i>	Randy Balma <i>Psychosomniium</i>	Presentations Start
8	Player culture Arguing in collaboration	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> , Ch. 7 Selections from <i>Trigger Happy</i>	<i>Between</i>	
9	Videogames and ideology	Selected articles	Warcraft Civilization	
10	Serious Games	<i>Understanding Video Games</i> , Ch 9 Selections from <i>Persuasive Games</i>	September 12 McVideogame	
11	Alternate Reality Games	Selections by Alexandar, McGonigal, Szulborsky		Collaborative Proposal Due
12	Emerging Genres			
13	Research Presentations			
14	Research presentations			Final Papers due