

**COMM 3513**  
**Video Games and the Individual**  
Autumn 2019, 3 credits, Hybrid Course  
Tuesday 9:10 am – 11:00 am, Journalism 360

**Instructor:**

Alex Bonus, Ph.D.  
Pronouns: he/him/his  
3045C Derby Hall  
bonus.1@osu.edu  
jamesalexbonus@gmail.com  
Office hours: Tues 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

**Course Overview**

Stereotypes about video games are widespread in contemporary society. News reports and popular media representations depict gamers as lazy, socially awkward, sexist, obese, and violent. Do these stereotypes align with empirical reality? This class addresses these issues by critically examining scientific research on the uses and effects (both good and bad) of video game play on the individual.

The class begins with an introduction to video game research, particularly the social scientific methods used to test claims about the effects of gameplay. The middle portion of the course investigates various limitations of these research findings, and the final portion of the course previews future research directions. Ongoing class assignments will push students to think about how video games can be designed as a force for positive change in society, and how such claims can be scientifically tested.

At the conclusion of this course, students will:

1. ...understand the sociopolitical context in which video games are produced and studied.
2. ...understand and apply theories used to study video games in the communication discipline.
3. ...understand how video games are experimentally studied in the communication discipline.
4. ...design an experimental study testing claims about video game effects.
5. ...appreciate how video games are woven into the fabric of modern social life.
6. ...develop comfort with playing video games.

**Required Course Materials**

**Book:** Shapiro, J. (2018). *The New Childhood: Raising Kids to Thrive in a Connected World*. New York, NY: Little, Brown Spark. (\$14.99 e-book)

**Film:** *GTFO: Get the F\*\*k Out* (2015), directed by Shannon Sun-Higginson (76 minutes). Available to watch at <https://osu.kanopy.com/video/gtfo-get-fk-out> (free for students)

**Game:** *Papers, Please* (2013), created by Lucas Pope. Available for download at <https://papersplea.se> (\$9.99 to download)

Additional required readings are posted on Carmen (<https://carmen.osu.edu>). Hyperlinks to additional required video clips and video games are listed on specific assignment sheets.

## Grade Distribution

This class has 100 possible points. Points are distributed as follows:

Gameplay Assignments (x5)	20 points
Personal Reflections (x2)	10 points
Quizzes (x3)	30 points
Experiment Proposal Presentation	20 points
Serious Game Analysis	20 points

## Letter Grade Distribution

You must attempt each assignment in order to receive a grade. Your final grade will be determined based on the combined score across assignments. The grading distribution is as follows:

$\geq 92.5$	A	72.5 – 76.4	C
89.5 – 92.4	A-	69.5 – 72.4	C-
86.5 – 89.4	B+	66.5 – 69.4	D+
82.5 – 86.4	B	59.5 – 66.4	D
79.5 – 82.4	B-	$\leq 59.4$	F
76.5 – 79.4	C+		

## Overview of Assignments

Because this is a hybrid course, this class is designed as a combination of lecture and online assignments. Each week, you will be asked to complete a graded online assignment (i.e., gameplay assignment, personal reflection, or practice quiz), as well as a reading for lecture. Online assignments and lecture readings should be completed each week before the start of lecture. Late work will not be accepted, and make-up quizzes will not be provided except under the following circumstances: illness, death in the family, participation in an official University activity, or another documented emergency.

Gameplay Assignments: On five weeks of the semester, you will complete a gameplay assignment (posted to Carmen). These assignments ask you to play a video game related to the course topic of the week, complete a related reading, and answer a series of questions about this experience. Sometimes, you will choose the game that you play (GA1 & GA4), whereas other times I will assign you a specific game to play (GA2, GA3, & GA5). Depending on the assignment, you will play the game for anywhere from 20 minutes to one hour. All games are playable on your computer or mobile phone. These assignments will be graded out of 4 points. The grading rubric for these assignments can be found on the last page of this syllabus.

Personal Reflections: On two weeks of the semester, you will write a brief reflection relating course material to your own life and/or personal experiences. For the first personal reflection assignment, you will watch a film about video games and discuss your understanding of the film in the context of material we have discussed in class. For the second personal reflection assignment, you will watch a series of Ted talks about “gamification” and discuss your own prior experiences with gamification in school, work, or social life. Both of these assignments will be graded out of 5 points.

Quizzes: On three weeks of the semester, you will complete a multiple-choice quiz that reviews the material covered up to that point in the semester. Each quiz has two components: an online practice portion (worth 25% of your quiz grade) and an in-class portion (worth 75% of your quiz grade). The

practice portion is meant to serve as your study guide and review for the in-class portion. Accordingly, each practice portion consists of 10 questions, and you will have two attempts to complete it. It is recommended that you complete the first attempt without referencing your notes. After submitting the quiz, you will be able to see which questions you answered incorrectly. You should then use your notes to figure out why you got those questions wrong, correct your answers, and resubmit. Only your highest score on the practice portion will be counted. The in-class portion consists of 5 similar questions, and you will have only one attempt to complete it. Your final quiz grade is out of 10 points (2.5 pts for the practice portion, and 7.5 points for the in-class portion).

Experiment Proposal Presentation: On the fourth week of class, you will be divided up into groups of three and randomly assigned to a presentation week (Week 8, 12, or 16). On your assigned week, your group will be responsible for preparing a 10-minute presentation based on the portion of *The New Childhood* that is assigned for that week. Specifically, your group will select one major claim about video game effects offered in the text, and you will devise an experiment to test that claim. Your presentation will outline your experimental hypothesis, your plan to manipulate the independent variable, and your plan to measure the dependent variable. You will also discuss issues related to the internal and external validity of your design. The purpose of this assignment is to practice applying information that we've covered in lecture about experimental design to a real-world problem, which we will then use to guide our in-class discussion of the text. Your presentation will be graded out of 20 points, and a detailed rubric is provided on the assignment sheet posted to Carmen.

Serious Game Analysis: On the 15<sup>th</sup> week of class, you will turn in a four-paragraph critique of an existing serious video game. This short paper will require you to apply material discussed throughout the semester (e.g., relevant theoretical frameworks and concepts) in order to critically evaluate the design of an existing game. In doing so, you will propose modifications to the game that are meant to enhance its effectiveness. You will write this paper as if you were addressing the designer/creator of the game. This assignment is meant to clarify how the material we've discussed in class relates to real-world issues in game design. Your paper will be graded out of 20 points, and a detailed rubric is provided on the assignment sheet posted to Carmen.

Attendance: Although attendance is not a formal component of your course grade, I will periodically ask non-graded multiple-choice questions in lecture using TopHat. Accordingly, you should create an account on TopHat and sign in to our course using the following join code: 108488. I will track attendance using these questions. If lecture attendance at the end of the semester averages over 75%, I will drop everyone's lowest quiz score. For assistance using Tophat, visit the following link: <https://resourcecenter.odee.osu.edu/top-hat/using-top-hat-students>

### **Extra Credit**

Participate in a research study! Conducting scientific research is crucial to the mission and purpose of the School of Communication at The Ohio State University. You can earn 1 point of extra credit for each 0.5 hours of research participation (up to 3 hours, or 3 points total) that you complete in School of Communication research studies. Be sure to read the detailed instructions on the SONA site. Importantly, missing your research appointment or quickly clicking through surveys and giving researchers fake data will not earn participation credit. You must sign up for studies at: <https://osucomm.sona-systems.com>

### **Mental Health: Please Take Care of Yourself!**

As a student you might experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. The Ohio State University offers services to assist you with addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing.

If you are or someone you know is suffering from any of the aforementioned conditions, you can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Office of Student Life's Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) by visiting [ccs.osu.edu](http://ccs.osu.edu) or calling 614--292--5766. CCS is located on the 4th Floor of the Younkin Success Center and 10th Floor of Lincoln Tower. You can reach an on-call counselor when CCS is closed at 614-292-5766.

If you are thinking of harming yourself or need a safe, non-judgmental place to talk, or if you are worried about someone else and need advice about what to do, 24 hour emergency help is also available through the Suicide Prevention Hotline (Columbus: 614-221-5445 / National: 800-273-8255); or text (4hope to 741741); or at [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **Title IX**

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories (e.g., race). If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you may find the appropriate resources at <http://titleix.osu.edu> or by contacting the Ohio State Title IX Coordinator, Kellie Brennan, at [titleix@osu.edu](mailto:titleix@osu.edu)

### **Diversity**

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences, and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our School, the faculty, students, and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise diverse cultures.

### **Policy on Children in Class**

The university does not have a formal policy on children in the classroom. The policy described here is just a reflection of my own beliefs and commitments to student, staff, and faculty parents. I understand that unforeseen disruptions in childcare sometimes put parents in the position of having to miss class to stay at home with a child. While this is not meant to be a long-term childcare solution, occasionally bringing a child to class in order to cover gaps in childcare is perfectly acceptable. I ask that students work with me to create a welcoming environment that is respectful of all forms of diversity, including diversity in parenting status. In all cases where children come to class, I ask that parents sit close to the door so that if their child needs special attention and/or is disrupting the learning of other students, the parent can easily step outside with their child until the child's needs have been met. More generally, while I maintain the same high expectations for all students in my classes regardless of parenting status, I am happy to problem-solve with you in a way that makes you feel supported as you strive for school-parenting balance.

### **Requesting Accommodations**

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know via email immediately so that we can privately discuss options. You can also register with Student Life Disability Services to establish reasonable accommodations. After registration, you should make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

### **Academic Integrity**

All work must be the original work of the student and not turned in to any other course prior to this one. Cheating is unacceptable and will result in a formal report to the School of Communication and the Committee on Academic Misconduct. It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct: <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>

### **Student Academic Services**

Arts and Sciences Advising and Academic Services’ website provides support for student academic success. Information on advising issues such as tutoring, transfer credits, academic standing, and contact information for Arts and Sciences advisors can be obtained through this website. The site is: <http://advising.osu.edu/welcome.shtml>

### **Student Services**

The Student Service Center assists with financial aid matters, tuition and fee payments. Please see their site at: <http://ssc.osu.edu>

### **Copyright Disclaimer**

The materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection and are only for the use of students officially enrolled in the course for the educational purposes associated with the course. Copyright law must be considered before copying, retaining, or disseminating materials outside of the course.

### **Additional Disclaimer**

This syllabus represents a contract “in the works.” Events that transpire over the semester may require modifications to the course. In the event of a change, I will announce the change in class and update the syllabus on Carmen. Ultimately it is your responsibility to keep up with any such modifications and to be aware of current policies, deadlines, etc. I reserve the right to modify course policies throughout the semester.

## BASICS OF VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 1 – Week 4)

### WEEK 1 (Aug 20)

#### Theoretical Perspectives on Video Game Effects

##### Read for Lecture:

- None! Come prepared to learn!

### WEEK 2 (Aug 27)

#### Methodological Approaches to Studying Video Game Effects

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete GA1: Understanding “Serious Video Games”

##### Read for Lecture:

- Blumberg, F. C., Almonte, D. E., Anthony, J. S., & Hashimoto, N. (2013). Serious games: What are they and what do they do? Why should we play them?

### WEEK 3 (Sept 3)

#### Experimenting with Video Games: *Bad News* as an Example

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete GA2: Understanding a “Serious Video Game” Study

##### Read for Lecture:

- Roozenbeek, J. & van der Linden, S. (2019). Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation. *Palgrave Communications* 5(65), 1-10.

### WEEK 4 (Sept 10)

#### The New Childhood, Part One: SELF

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Quiz 1 Practice

##### Read for Lecture:

- *The New Childhood* Part I (Chapters 1-3) p. 17-58

## LIMITATIONS OF VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 5 – Week 10)

### WEEK 5 (Sept 17)

#### What Caused the Effect? Manipulation Validity in Video Game Experiments

##### Online Assignments:

- None!

##### Read for Lecture:

- Hasan, Y., Begue, L., Scharnow, M., & Bushman, B. J., (2013). The more you play, the more aggressive you become: A long-term experimental study of cumulative violent video game effects on hostile expectations and aggressive behavior. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49, 224-227.

### WEEK 6 (Sept 24)

#### Would it Happen in the Real World? Measurement Validity in Video Game Experiments

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete GA3: Can Brain Games Make You Smarter?

##### Read for Lecture:

- Ballesteros et al. (2014). Brain training with non-action video games enhances aspects of cognition in older adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, 6, 1-14.

### WEEK 7 (Oct 1)

#### Should I Really Care? Sociopolitical Influences that Shape Video Game Experiments

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Quiz 2 Practice

##### Read for Lecture:

- Markey, P. M., & Ferguson, C. J. (2017). Teaching us to fear: The violent video game moral panic and the politics of game research. *American Journal of Play*, 10(1), 99-115.

### WEEK 8 (Oct 8)

#### The New Childhood, Part Two: HOME

##### Online Assignments:

- Groups 1-7 complete Experiment Proposal Presentation

##### Read for Lecture:

- *The New Childhood* Part Two (Chapters 4-6) p. 61-141

### WEEK 9 (Oct 15)

#### Is it More Than Just Content? Context of Play Changes the Game

##### Online Assignments:

- Gameplay Assignment 4: Cooperative Gameplay

##### Read for Lecture:

- Ewoldson, D. R., Eno, C. A., Okdie, B. M., Velez, J. A., Guadagno, R. E., & DeCoster, J. (2012). Effect of playing violent video games cooperatively or competitively on subsequent cooperative behavior. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15, 277-279.

### WEEK 10 (Oct 22)

#### Are Researchers Missing the Point? Issues with “Gamer” Culture

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Personal Reflection 1

##### Read for Lecture:

- Malone, N. (2017). Zoë and the Trolls: Video-game designer Zoë Quinn survived Gamergate, an act of web harassment with world-altering implications. *Intelligencer*. Retrieved from <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/07/zoe-quinn-surviving-gamergate.html>
- Watch the documentary film *GTFO: Get the F\*\*k Out* (2015) by Shannon Sun-Higginson (76 minutes). Access it for free via OSU Kanopy: <https://osu.kanopy.com/video/gtfo-get-fk-out>

## THE FUTURE OF VIDEO GAME RESEARCH (Week 11 – Week 16)

### WEEK 11 (Oct 29)

#### Virtual/Augmented Reality Video Games

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Quiz 3 Practice

##### Read for Lecture:

- Rosenberg, R. S., Baughman, S. L., & Bailenson, J. N. (2013). Virtual superheroes: Using superpowers in virtual reality to encourage prosocial behavior. *PLOS One*, 8(1), p. 1-9.

### WEEK 12 (Nov 5)

#### The New Childhood, Part Three: SCHOOL

##### Online Assignments:

- Groups 8-14 complete Experiment Proposal Presentation

##### Read for Lecture:

- *The New Childhood* Part Three (Chapters 7-9) p. 145-234'

### WEEK 13 (Nov 12)

#### The Gamification of Everyday Life

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Personal Reflection 2

##### Read for Lecture:

- Bogost, I. (2011). The end of gamers. In I. Bogost (Ed.) *How to do things with videogames* (pp. 147-154). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Watch Ted talk by McGonigal J. (2010): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dE1DuBesGYM>
- Watch Ted talk by Kumar, J. (2015): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wk4dkY-rV0>

### WEEK 14 (Nov 19)

#### Designing Better Serious Games

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete GA5: *Papers, Please*
- Download the game (\$9.99): <https://papersplea.se>

##### Read for Lecture:

- None!

### WEEK 15 (Nov 26)

#### **THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO LECTURE**

##### Online Assignments:

- Complete Serious Game Analysis (due 11:59 pm 12/1)

##### Read for Lecture:

- **NO LECTURE! Have a relaxing break!**



**WEEK 16 (Dec 3)****The New Childhood, Part Four: SOCIETY****Online Assignments:**

- [Groups 15-21 complete Experiment Proposal Presentation](#)

**Read for Lecture:**

- *The New Childhood* Part Four (Chapters 10-12) p. 237-290

**Grading Scale for Gameplay Activities**

The primary aim of gameplay assignments is to get you thinking about the lecture topics for the week and to prepare to you arrive at lecture ready to discuss these topics. As such, it is not important that your answers are accurate — indeed, many questions on these assignments won't have right or wrong answers. However, it is important that you demonstrate that you are thoughtfully engaging with the material. Consistent with this aim, all gameplay assignments are worth 4 points, and they will be graded according to completion (i.e., whether all the questions were answered) and overall effort (i.e., how much thought went in to answering the questions).

**4 points:** All questions are answered entirely. Answers are thoughtful, on-topic, and demonstrate deep engagement with the material.

**3 points:** All questions are answered entirely. Although all answers are on-topic, some lack deep consideration of the material, or they miss the overall intent of the questions.

**2 points:** All questions were answered, but they might not have been addressed entirely. Responses that were provided were off topic, tangential, or lacked engagement with the material.

**1 point:** Some questions left unanswered, or it is clear that the student did not attempt to engage with the material in a thoughtful manner.

**0 points:** Assignment was incomplete or late.