Overview: From its development in the 1970s through today, the video game industry has exhibited extraordinary growth. The industry grosses billions of dollars a year and recent reports indicate that over 70% of the US population plays video games at least occasionally. The MMORPG World of Warcraft alone has over 11 million monthly subscribers. As the comic below points out with its humorous reference to early Nintendo games, it is impossible to deny that the presence and popularity of video games has had extensive effects on our society and culture. This course attempts to explore a number of these effects briefly and provide students with the opportunity to explore their particular interests in greater depth with their final projects. Each week’s readings and discussion will cover a different topic, ranging from social issues like gender roles and interpretations of race to the ways in which video games either combat or reinforce broader cultural power structures like education and religion.

Grading:
Participation/Attendance- 10%
Comment Papers- 40%
Paper Presentations- 10%
Final Paper- 40%

Comment papers—Students will be responsible for completing five 1-2 page papers discussing their responses to the reading. These papers will be graded on a credit/no credit basis and a student will only receive credit if their writing demonstrates that they have done the required reading and if five papers are completed by the end of the semester. However, students are free to choose any five weeks in which to write their responses.

Paper Presentations—The last two classes of the term will be devoted to 5-10 minute presentations from each student regarding the subject of their final paper. Students will be expected to explain their thesis and supporting evidence, as well as indicate how their
exploration goes beyond earlier class discussions

Final Paper—This assignment will allow students to explore their particular areas of interest in greater depth. They will be expect to research beyond the required reading of the class in order to complete a 5-6 page paper on a topic of their choosing. The paper must demonstrate an academic basis and present a well-supported and well-founded argument.

Note-- INST courses are taught only on the CR/NC basis and a student may count no more than 3.0 credits of INST course work among the 120 credits offered for the B.A. and B.S. in the College.

Texts

Schedule
Jan. 20- Intro to class and topics- Why do you think video games are significant to society as a whole?
Jan. 27 and Feb. 3- Community-building or isolating?
    Readings: The Wired Homestead Ch. 17-“Virtuality and its Discontents” by Sherry Turkle
    “Computer Games Drive Social Ties”- BBC News
    http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7619372.stm
    “Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?” By Alexandra Alter-
    http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118670164592393622.html?mod=pj_main_hs_coll
    “Problems with the Concept of Video Game Addiction” by Richard T. A. Wood
Feb. 10- Race within games
    Readings: SIMILE: Studies In Media & Information Literacy Education article
    “Live in Your World, Play in Ours” by David Leonard
    “Walk Like an Orc, Talk Like an Orc” by Chris Ritter
    “Jade is Black? Racial Ambiguity in Games” by Chris Kohler-
    http://www.wired.com/gamelife/2007/02/jades_black_rac/
Feb. 17- Globalization and colonial behavior
Feb. 24- Sexism- Females as Characters
Readings: From Barbie to Mortal Kombat pg. 59-60 “Characters”
“Our Princess is in Another Castle: Feminist Media Theory and Female Video Game Characters” by Amanda Cote
Mass Communication and Society article “Still a Man’s Game: Gender Representation in Online Reviews of Video Games” by James D. Ivory

Mar. 3- Sexism- Females as Gamers
Readings: From Barbie to Mortal Kombat Chapter 1 “Chess for Girls” (pg. 2-36) and Chapter 14 “Voices from the Combat Zone” (pg. 328-341)

Mar. 10- Spring Break- NO CLASS

Mar. 17- Video Games and Violence

Mar. 24- Video Games in Education

Mar. 31 and Apr. 7- Religion and Video Games
Winter-een-mas- http://www.wintereenmas.com/ and
http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Winter-een-mas/id/1981951
“God in the Console” by Tom Loftus- http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3078392/
“Halo 3 Used to Recruit Christians” by Joe Williams- http://www.bit-
Apr. 14- Reality vs. Virtual Reality
Readings:
I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life by Mark Stephen Meadows pg. 69-88

Apr. 21 and Apr. 28- Presentations of final projects