

Gaming in Queer Expression

Winter 2025

Time: Fridays, 11:30 AM - 1:20 PM

Location: Q Center Lounge (Husky Union Building Room 315)

Instructor Information:

Diya Kaul: diyakaul@uw.edu

MJ Powers: mjpower@uw.edu

Valerie R. Schweigert (Reader/Grader): qval@uw.edu

Office hours: By appointment

Office location: Q Center

Course Overview:

In this course, we explore the representation of gender and queer identities in video games and their subsequent communities. Through an interdisciplinary approach drawing from media studies, gender studies, and game studies, we will critically examine how video games construct, negotiate, and challenge notions of gender and sexuality. Students will be asked to critically analyze cultural contexts shaping gender/queer representation in video games. We will delve into the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, and other identities, such as race and cultural background. Each week we will discuss a different topic to analyze both accurate and misinformed representations of gender and queer representations in video games using a holistic approach. (No prior knowledge / outside materials required)

Course Objectives:

1. To analyze representations of gender/queer identities in video games.
2. To understand the cultural contexts shaping gender/queer representation in video games.
3. To study the intersectionality of gender/sexuality and other identities in video game narratives.
4. To examine the impact of player agency on gender/queer representation in video games.
5. To discuss strategies for implementing diverse representations within the gaming industry.

Community Expectations:

1. Maintain open communication with Diya and MJ. Feel free to reach out if you have questions, concerns, or ideas about class content or structure. Questions about grading should be directed to our reader/grader, Valerie.

2. Stay engaged to enhance your and your peer's learning experiences!
3. Self-advocacy and preservation are essential in an open space. Please let us know if you need any accommodations or time to step away from class, as topics can get overwhelming. We want to work with you to make this a positive experience.
4. Accountability: We are entering this quarter dedicated to developing students' personal and professional skills as they engage with the sources and material presented. Just as we will hold you accountable, please hold us accountable. If aspects of our class structure or content keep you from achieving any of our collective or personal goals, please provide us feedback so we can refine our instruction and find ways to best support you.

Participation:

Attendance policies are rooted in ableism and capitalism.

In this space and for the course duration, we will hold you all to a standard of participation in which you are not required to be present in class every week, and there will not be a roll call. **However, if we note a consistent absence and lack of engagement, expect a well-being check-in from us.** Participation can look like contributing to in-class discussions, scheduling/planning out your project, conducting research, writing, sourcing various content to support your work, going to off-campus locations concerning your project, being in the community with which you're working, sharing micro-reflections and process updates, journaling, etc. For more guidance and feedback, please contact us.

Assessment: (The course is Credit/No Credit).

1. Contribution to Discussion:

You are expected to participate in strong discussions that reflect thorough preparation. Your level of engagement in class will be rated using the scale below:

Strong Contributor: Contributions in class reflect thorough preparation. The frequency is high (contribute at least once to each in-person session). Ideas offered are substantive, provide good insights that build on ideas presented by classmates, and offer direction for the discussion. Challenges are well substantiated and persuasively presented respectfully. If the strong contributor was not a class member, the discussion quality would be considerably diminished. The strong contributor showcases a clear progression in the process through effective communication and informs the class of project development.

Adequate Contributor: Contributions in class reflect satisfactory preparation. The frequency is adequate (contribute almost once during each in-person session). Ideas offered are sometimes substantive and generally provide valuable insights but seldom build on others' comments and questions. Displays a need for additional support and processes around their project management.

Less satisfactory Contributor: The student does participate in discussions. However, the frequency is low (occasionally contributing to in-person sessions or out of the space). Even when the student participates, the contributions in class reflect inadequate preparation. The student will be monitored for their progress; more individual attention to the project may be necessary.

Non-Contributor: The participant communicates little or rarely in/outside of class. Hence, there is not an adequate basis for evaluation. If this is where your behavior aligns, I will reach out for an individualized check-in assessment.

2. Pre-Class Assignments: A reading or video will be assigned each week. Students are expected to read or watch the articles/videos before class. Every student will provide a brief summary or micro-reflection every week (around 100 words), due before class begins. We will discuss the readings and videos in class.

3. Exit Surveys: At the end of each class, students will be given the chance to complete an exit survey detailing something they found interesting during class. The exit survey will be due by the end of the day so that students may complete the survey after class on their own time. The exit survey is also a chance for students to provide feedback to the facilitators: what they liked, didn't like, what they would want to see, etc. If absent, you will be given a chance to make up the assignment, so please reach out to us in such cases.

4. Final Project: Students will choose a video game character to analyze the character's role in the gaming community (can be any character). Students will then decide how they would like to put their project together: an analytical paper, a presentation/slideshow, or a creative project with a 1-page summary to go alongside. The final project will be due on the last day of class, with students expected to share a few words about their project. We will talk more about this project throughout the quarter.

Weekly Calendar:

Week 1	Jan 10	Introduction to Gender/Queer Representation in Media
Week 2	Jan 17	Gender Stereotypes in Gaming
Week 3	Jan 24	LGBTQ+ Representation in Gaming
Week 4	Jan 31	Identity Expression/Exploration in Video Games
Week 5	Feb 7	Player Agency
Week 6	Feb 14	Intersectionality in Video Games

Week 7	Feb 21	Queer Gaming Communities and Online Spaces
Week 8	Feb 28	Impact of Queer Representation in Video Games on Queer Movements
Week 9	March 7	What Representation We Would Want to See
Week 10	March 14	Final Project Discussion/Wrap-up

Academic Accommodations:

If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through DRS but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but are not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical, or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924, uwdrs@uw.edu, or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Religious accommodations for student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience or for organized religious activities can be requested with more information at <https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/>. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s), and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

Academic Integrity:

All students are expected to uphold the UW Student Conduct Code and fulfill their responsibility to (1) uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community.

Title IX:

The UW, through numerous policies, prohibits sex- and gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination and expects students, faculty, and staff to act professionally and respectfully in all work, learning, and research environments. For support, resources, and reporting options related to sex- and gender-based violence, harassment, or discrimination, refer to the [UW Title IX's website](#), specifically the Know Your Rights & Resources guide. Should you wish to make the

Office of the Office of the Title IX Coordinator aware of a Title IX concern, visit the Make a Title IX Report webpage.

Please know that if you choose to disclose information to me about sex- or gender-based violence, harassment, or discrimination, I will connect you (or the person who experienced the conduct) with resources and individuals who can best provide support and options.

Course Requirements and Assignments:

Assignments must be uploaded to Canvas by the date/time indicated on the course schedule. If there are issues with accessing/using Canvas, you may also email materials to qval@uw.edu or speak with a teaching team member regarding a different modality of submission. We encourage you to find a pal or create a group from within the class so you may develop peer accountability and work ethic procedures that best align with how you manage projects.