

HSTR 300C A01, CRN 31358

## History in Gaming

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Course Times: Completely Asynchronous

David Dolff's Office Hours in the Summer 2024 Term: By Zoom Tuesday 11:00-12:00, Thursday 10:30-11:30, or by appointment

Welcome to History 300C! Games are something that we all enjoy, and a great many board and video games have historical themes that we can learn from. For some of these, the historical content may be as simple as a setting for the action to take place, and the game is played with little relationship to historical events. Other types of games try in variously concrete or abstract ways to re-create real or imagined historical situations, and often give players the opportunity to try to answer the question 'what if?' What if the Roman Empire had not fallen? What if Nazi Germany had pursued a different strategy in WWII? Some games ask even larger questions, such as 'how do societies develop?' or 'what leads some civilizations to thrive and spread, while others wither away?' Others try to focus on the people involved, usually 'great men' but sometimes more ordinary citizens. Games can be informative as well as fun and help us to come to grips with historical events and processes. However, games can also be deceiving, impairing our understanding of the past by leading us to draw dubious conclusions based on misleading information. Ultimately, every game is won or lost according to the limits and rules of the game, and those rules may bear limited resemblance to the 'real world'. By the same token, most games (especially those made for English-speakers) are made within a fairly narrow cultural framework, that may more overtly or subtly project certain biases and values. For example, how might a game about the Vietnam War made in the United States differ from a game about the same conflict made in Vietnam? The purpose of this course is to help us to critically analyze the games we play more fully, to suggest some things that we might ask ourselves as we play games and otherwise engage with popular media in our lives.

Since this course material will be delivered online, course material can be accessed at your convenience. As per the marking scheme below, there are no midterm or final exams that test lecture material directly. However, lectures are designed to help provide the tools you will need to perform your analysis well, as well as other information that I hope is relevant or interesting. Some lectures discuss in general terms issues we want to keep in mind throughout the course, others are aimed at contextualizing some of the game content to make it more comprehensible. These will be recorded with accompanying Powerpoint slides, which will then be posted on Brightspace, along with a link to the same presentation on Youtube. While I won't have prepared all lectures by the time the course starts, I will upload a few a week, and will do my best to ensure that they are posted early enough to provide sufficient time to be consulted before the due date of any log entries they are connected to.

**Important note: While all students are welcome, this course does not count towards the requirements for history majors. Please consult the history office for details.**

**Required Games:** (All are available from the Steam website, [store.steampowered.com](http://store.steampowered.com) if preferred, and most are on Google Play and/or the Apple App Store )

**1979 Revolution: Black Friday**

**Valiant Hearts: The Great War**

**Twilight Struggle: The Cold War 1945-89** (There is also a board game version of this, which is entirely acceptable to use, but rather more expensive (and time-consuming) than the online version. Please advise me if you intend to use the board version.

**This War of Mine**

**Papers, Please**

**Note:** Some free online games will also be used, availability instructions will be provided. Another log entry will be based on a game that we play in class. You will also be required to make a log entry for one additional history-themed game of your choice.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Introductory Assignment: **Due Monday 10 June, 4:00 pm** 5%  
Game Log: **Various dates, 4:00 pm** 80%  
Take Home Assignment: **Due Friday 21 June 4:00 pm** 15%  
Further details below.

**All grades will be assigned according to the following scale:**

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Marks (Percentage)</u>	<u>Grade Point Value</u>	<u>Description</u>
A+	90 - 100%	9	Exceptional
A	85 - 89%	8	Outstanding
A-	80 - 84%	7	Excellent
B+	77 - 79%	6	Very good
B	73 - 76%	5	Good
B-	70 - 72%	4	Solid
C+	65 - 69%	3	Satisfactory
C	60 - 64%	2	Minimally satisfactory
D	50 - 59%	1	Marginal
F	Below 50%	0	Unsatisfactory
N		0	Did not complete

All assignments are graded numerically. Letter grades will accompany numerical grades for guidance purposes only.

**Lecture Topics** – Please note, the length of these lectures is not standardized, some will be longer or shorter than others.

#1 – Introduction, What is History? Part I

#2 – What is History, Part II

#3 – Uses and Abuses of History

#4 – History of Games, Part I

#5 – History of Games, Part II

#6 - A New Kind of State: Iran 1979 (connected to the game 1979 Revolution: Black Friday)

#7– Games and Contingency

#8 – The Great War as the Great Turning Point (connected to the game Valiant Hearts)

- #9 – The Cold War: What’s it all about? (connected to the game Twilight Struggle)
- #10 – The Cold War: Global Arena (connected to the game Twilight Struggle)
- #11 – The Cold War and Video Games (this is actually a documentary movie, available on Youtube)
- #12 – Whose Story? King Philip’s War
- #13 – Playing a Tragedy (connected to the game This War of Mine)
- #14 - Games and National Identity
- #15 - Do Games Change the World?

## **REQUIREMENTS IN DETAIL**

### **Assignment Submission Policies**

All assignments for this course should be submitted to Brightspace by the deadlines listed above as either a PDF, or an MS Word (or MS Word compatible – several free ones are available) document so that it can be read by Brightspace. Please note, that at this time, Brightspace is unable to read PAGES documents, so submissions in the format will receive a grade of zero. All assignments should be double-spaced, and spelling and grammar will be taken into account. Assignments submitted late without an extension or documented acceptable reason will lose 10% from their mark for the first day and 5% for each additional school day, to a maximum of 35%.

### **Introductory Assignment: Due Monday 10 June, 4:00 pm**

Introduce yourself to me, in about 150-250 words. Please include your name as it appears on the official record, and if there’s something different you’d like to be called, and/or and a preferred pronoun please let me know. Also be sure to include an email address for me to use should I need to reach during this course. Beyond that, please tell me your areas of interest, including your year/program, and your experience with games in general and historical games in particular (it’s okay if you have none). Do you prefer board or video games? Is there one or more particular games that you really enjoy, or feel that you learned a lot from? Is there a particular issue related to games you’re interested in learning more about?

### **Game Log: Eight Log Entries due, various dates as below, 4:00 pm**

This is the most important aspect of the course, and accounts for 80% of your grade. The primary aim of this course is to try to experience first-hand the advantages and the pitfalls of learning history from games, rather than books, journal articles, primary sources, etc. Therefore, the main task for this course will be to engage with (in other words, play!) various games and while thinking critically about how they represent the past. For most games, multiple playthroughs will be needed in order to fully engage with the relevant issues. The Game Log consists of a series of questions designed to prompt you to think about these issues from a variety of perspectives. Questions for each log entry will be provided with the accompanying assignment on Brightspace, and your task will be to answer them based on your experience playing the games. Some questions are general, assigned for every game, while others will be specific to that particular game. Some of the questions will be factual, to ensure familiarity with the game and its historical content, but most will be more conceptual. Log entries answering all of the questions should be typed in full, grammatical sentences, double-spaced, with a separate answer for each question. Log entries must be submitted to Brightspace by 4:00 pm at dates staggered throughout the term, starting with simpler games and moving on to the more complex.

Early submission is permitted as well, although feedback from previous log entries can be useful in future ones. Therefore, in addition to the lectures listed above, I will similarly upload ‘feedback sessions’ to Brightspace discussing people’s responses in general terms, to talk about what made some responses better than others (of course, I don’t identify anyone by name). This is intended to allow for refinement of later log entries, as critical thinking, like most skills, can be improved by practice and feedback. Also, please see marking rubric below for more information as to expectations. If you’re struggling to ‘get the hang of it’ I’m happy to have a chat during office hours or by appointment to discuss your answers specifically to help you to see what could be improved. If you look at the schedule, you’ll notice that the games, as above, generally become more complex and thus take longer to play as we get closer to the end of the course. Pushing the due dates for games that require more playing time towards the end of the course is intended to allow you time to progress in your critical thinking about the games as you play and therefore write more thoughtful log entries. However, since most games will require multiple play-throughs to explore effectively, I strongly recommend that you don’t wait until just before the due date to start playing each game. I’ll add here that sometimes students ask if they need to be ‘good’ at the games we play. There is no bonus mark for ‘beating’ a game or intended penalty for failing to do so. However, games need to be explored fairly thoroughly to write effective log entries, which can be tough to do if you keep ‘dying’ quickly, so you’ll need to at least be able to last long enough to learn a reasonable amount about what the game can teach you.

As with all assignments, log entries should be submitted to Brightspace by 4:00 pm on the deadlines listed, as either a PDF, or an MS Word (or MS Word compatible – several free ones are available) document. All game log entries should be double-spaced, and will be evaluated according to the rubric posted on Brightspace and provided below. Email submissions outside of Brightspace will not be accepted except in exceptional circumstances as per prior arrangement with me. Writing style, grammar, and spelling are also important, and will be reflected in your mark. Each log entry will receive a grade out of 100%, based the overall quality of all the answers, not as a sum of specific valued questions. The total of these log entries is worth 80% of your final mark. Expectations will rise as the term progresses as critical thinking skills should be further developed – in other words, it will be harder to get an ‘A’ on the last long entry than on the first, as I’ll expect you to have learned how to write better log entries over the duration of the course.

Additional research beyond gameplay is expected to be minor and fairly general (i.e. you may need to google some names, terms, etc.). In most cases, some supplementary information gathering will be necessary, but extensive research will not (this is the kind of thing where wikipedia can help a lot!). Any statistics, opinions, unique facts, direct quotations and paraphrases gathered from sources other than the game being played for the log entry will require citations in the form of footnotes or endnotes. Footnotes or endnotes are to be in Chicago style, or as per the History department style guide, available for purchase in the bookstore for a nominal fee, or free online at <https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/history/current-students/undergraduate/style-guide/index.php> APA format or other bracketed citations are NOT acceptable.

Every log entry you submit must be your own original creation, written in your own words. Do not plagiarize as those found guilty of plagiarism will, at a minimum, receive a grade of zero for the offending piece and will not be permitted to redo it, and significantly more severe penalties are possible. For a definition of plagiarism, see the University Calendar. (Also see

below regarding plagiarism). Anti-plagiarism software may be used at the instructor's discretion – if so, procedures will be explained further in class.

**Assignments submitted late without an extension or documented acceptable reason will lose 10% from their mark for the first day and 5% for each additional school day, to a maximum of 35%.** If in doubt, please e-mail me to make sure that your log entry has arrived in my mailbox, and always keep an electronic copy of your work. Requests for extensions will be granted only in advance and for a good reason—e.g., extended illness (in which case a medical certificate must be submitted) or compelling personal circumstances (in most cases, a letter from Counseling Services must be submitted).

**Please Note: Game Log Entry #8 will be on a game of your choice.** There are no parameters on what game you can choose, or format (i.e. computer, console, board game etc). However, a key question (that is, one that will play a **very** significant role in your overall mark) is why and how it effectively communicates historical information. A 'shallow' game, such as a first-person shooter, will likely provide little of analytical value, regardless of the setting, and thus is likely to earn a correspondingly low mark. Look for a game that tells you more than 'battles were fought in these places and here are some of the weapons used'.

### **Take Home Assignment – Design Your Own History-Themed Game**

**Due Friday 21 June 4:00 pm, worth 15% of your total mark**

**Instructions:** Using roughly 750-1500 words, describe a history-themed game that does not at present exist, but that you would like to see. The goal should be a game that is both fun and interesting to play, and teaches the player something of value about history. This could be an entirely original idea, or it could be a significant 'twist' on an existing game (if the latter, be sure to explain the existing game, assume that the reader is not familiar with the game). While you (obviously!) won't be required to actually build/code the game, or describe every possible detail of gameplay, you will need to provide a fairly thorough description of what you have in mind (see assignment length, as above). In your description, be sure to give close consideration to the issues raised by the standard questions from our Game Log:

1. What time/place/event does this game attempt to portray? What particular aspects of that setting are the main focus and from what perspective are things portrayed?
2. In what ways does the game try to communicate information about the time/place/event it is portraying? Does it help you to understand the time/place/event? What might the game communicate about that time/place/event that may be questionable or unintended?
3. As the player, what challenges do you face? Can you think of challenges from that time and place that people might have faced that you, as the player, don't? By the same token, does the game impose challenges that you think might be 'unrealistic' for that setting?
4. What character(s) can you choose to play as? Are there other possible character types who could fit well into the game setting who are omitted? Who's story is being told, and who's is not?
5. What do you feel as though you have learned from playing this game? What was the highest score you earned? What role, if any, does learning more about that time/place/event improve your ability to play the game, and if so, how?

**Do your best to be creative, and try to have fun with it!**

All general submission policies as above apply to this assignment.

## **HSTR 300C A01 Game Log Due Dates Summer 2024**

**Please Note: All log entries are due at 4:00 pm on the date stated below.**

### **Friday 7 June: Log Entry #1 Oregon Trail (10% of Final Mark)**

Can be played at: [https://archive.org/details/msdos\\_Oregon\\_Trail\\_The\\_1990](https://archive.org/details/msdos_Oregon_Trail_The_1990). Note: There are other versions available, the log entry questions are based on this one, so that should make answering them easiest.

### **Monday 10 June: Introductory Assignment**

Not part of your game log, just a reminder as to the due date.

### **Tuesday 11 June: Log Entry #2 Third World Farmer (10% of Final Mark)**

Can be played at: <https://3rdworldfarmer.org/>

### **Thursday 13 June: Log Entry #3 1979 Revolution: Black Friday (10% of Final Mark)**

Required game for the class.

### **Monday 17 June: Log Entry #4 Valiant Hearts: The Great War (10% of Final Mark)**

Required game for the class.

### **Thursday 20 June: Log Entry #5 Twilight Struggle (10% of Final Mark)**

Required game for the class, electronic or board version. Please let me know if you're using the latter, as it may require adjustment to one or more log questions.

### **Friday 21 June: Design your own game assignment due (15% of Final Mark)**

Not part of your game log, just a reminder as to the due date.

### **Monday 24 June: Log Entry #6 Papers, Please (10% of Final Mark)**

Required game for the class.

### **Wednesday 26 June: Log Entry #7 This War of Mine (10% of Final Mark)**

Required game for the class.

### **Friday 28 June: Log Entry #8 One additional history-themed game of your choice (10% of Final Mark)**

You may choose a board, console, or computer game of your preference. The only requirement is that it be useful for learning history. Be prepared in the log questions to justify your selection and discuss its utility for exploring the past. If you're unsure of your selection, please consult with me prior to the due date.

## Marking Rubric – HSTR 300C Game Log

These may be modified or added to throughout the term as warranted. The proportional value of each dimension may vary between log entries.

### Dimension of Analysis

Descriptor of Work, worst to best (0-100%)

#### Understanding of Historical Context (i.e. relationship to other interpretations of history/events)

Insufficient      Basic      Solid      Thorough      Exceptional

#### Analysis of Internal Game Factors (i.e. gameplay, assessment of effective strategy, etc.)

Insufficient      Rudimentary      Perceptive      Insightful      Exceptional

#### Analysis of Game Structure (i.e. assumptions, exclusions, character constructions, etc.)

Insufficient      Rudimentary      Perceptive      Insightful      Exceptional

#### Clarity of Communication (i.e. writing style, grammar, coherence, etc.)

Unsatisfactory      Problematic      Coherent      Fluid      Engaging

### Territorial Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect the ɫəkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

### Course Experience Survey (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. When it is time for you to complete the survey you will receive an email inviting you to do so. Please ensure that your current email address is listed in MyPage (<http://uvic.ca/mypage>) . If you do not receive an email invitation, you can go directly to <http://ces.uvic.ca> . You will need to use your UVic netlink ID to access the survey, which can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will try to remind you and provide you with more detailed information nearer the time but please be thinking about this important activity during the course.

### Academic Integrity

Students are required to abide by all academic regulations as set out in the University calendar, including standards of academic integrity. These can be found in the Tri-Faculty Code of Professional Behaviour for Students, which can be found at:

<https://www.uvic.ca/services/advising/assets/docs/tri-fac-student-code-of-conduct.pdf>

Violations of academic integrity (e.g. cheating and plagiarism) are considered serious and may result in significant penalties. All exams and assignments must be done individually and not with a friend, classmate, or group.

## **Diversity and Free Speech**

While the University of Victoria is committed to respecting diversity and human rights, the university also upholds the principle that wide-ranging debate incorporating a diversity of perspectives is the best way to learn. Be prepared to be challenged in this course and be ready to exchange constructively with people who fundamentally disagree with your point of view. Strive to remain curious and open to new ideas.

I ask that you remain civil and respectful at all times. Deliberate and repeated hate speech and/or speech that promotes violence can be considered harassment.

Please see the University Policy on Harassment:

[https://www.uvic.ca/universitysecretary/assets/docs/policies/GV0205\\_1150\\_.pdf](https://www.uvic.ca/universitysecretary/assets/docs/policies/GV0205_1150_.pdf). If you feel you may be experiencing harassment, please consult with the History Department's Undergraduate Adviser, your teaching assistant, the University Ombudsperson (<https://uvicombudsperson.ca/>), or the Office of Equity and Human Rights (<https://www.uvic.ca/equity/>).

## **Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response at UVic**

UVic takes sexualized violence seriously, and has raised the bar for what is considered acceptable behaviour. We encourage students to learn more about how the university defines sexualized violence and its overall approach by visiting [www.uvic.ca/svp](http://www.uvic.ca/svp). If you or someone you know has been impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support please contact the sexualized violence resource office in Equity and Human Rights (EQHR). Whether or not you have been directly impacted, if you want to take part in the important prevention work taking place on campus, you can also reach out: Where: Sexualized violence resource office in EQHR, Sedgewick C119 Phone: 250.721.8021 Email: [svpcoordinator@uvic.ca](mailto:svpcoordinator@uvic.ca) Web: [www.uvic.ca/svp](http://www.uvic.ca/svp)