

Games For Change

UHON 302-017 | W | 1:00-3:30 | SHC 12 | 43648

Fulfills A&S Group IV: Social and Behavioral Sciences

Dr. Chris Holden

"Darfur is Dying." An unexpected title for a computer game. In this game you play as a refugee family, trying to live against astounding odds, famine, and bandits. You are in constant danger of starvation, capture, and rape. Not exactly cheerful; the game is meant to inform more than entertain.

There are books and movies on just about any topic you could think of; from the light romance novel to the in-depth documentary. The idea that the printed word or moving pictures can be put to many uses other than entertainment is a no-brainer, but this may seem like an unusual proposition for video games. Yet, people are using games to change the real world, whether it is to change society in general, politics, health, and especially education. *Darfur is Dying*, *Wii Fit*, and even *Oregon Trail* are just the tip of the iceberg if you know where to look. We are just beginning to explore the limits of games and the extent of their usefulness. There is much work to be done.

This course will give you a chance to get your feet wet in the sometimes exciting, sometimes troubling business of applying games to the world around us. To do this, we'll certainly need to play games, and we'll also read emerging scholarship: from theoretical perspectives, industry players and practitioners, and a wide array of criticism and commentary. Our goals will be roughly to explore, evaluate, and create. We want to know what's out there, how games work, and who's trying to change the world with games. We want to establish a perspective to evaluate this kind of work, and train ourselves as knowledgeable critics. And we'll actually get our hands dirty and design (and hopefully make and test) our own game-derived interventions.

Readings

Videogames and Learning: Teaching and Participatory Culture in the Digital Age by Kurt Squire

Reality is Broken by Jane McGonigal

Persuasive Games by Ian Bogost

Electronic Reserves and Online Readings

At least one modern video game

Requirements

Students will come to class prepared to engage in discussion. This primarily means three things: doing the assigned reading and writing, keeping up with your own interest in the subject, and looking to learn. There will also be short writing assignments to prepare you for substantial projects that will achieve our three goals:

Explore - A basic research project examining an area where games are being used or could be used to change the world.

Evaluate - Critical work where you dissect an intervention by appealing to one or more theoretical lenses.

Create - Plan a game for change, and if there is time, make and test your design.

About the Instructor

Chris Holden is a mathematician for the people. He received his Ph.D. in number theory from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Originally from Albuquerque, his current research focuses on place-based mobile game design and implementation. Chris enjoys videogames like *DDR* and *Katamari Damacy*, and he takes a whole lot of photos.

About the Student Teacher

Helen Claire Trost has lived in New Mexico all of her life. She is majoring in Biology, and hopes to attend medical school. She has always enjoyed video games, but math homework not so much. If only there was some way to combine the two...