Honors 240: The Games We Play

Fall 2016

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Introduction

Games — real and metaphorical, formal and informal — are everywhere where humans are: Games are a metaphor for politics, romance, and much in between. There are children's games, war games, and the Olympic Games. In the world of fiction, there are games of thrones and hunger games. People watch and play football; others play it on their XBox and Playstation consoles. Some games seem to have a gender, while some gamers want to exclude one gender from their world. Language is a game. There's the game of life, and college an important part of it.

This Honors Core course introduces you to the social sciences through the concept of games. In the course we will study

- the problems of social cooperation, conflict, and competition;
- human motivation as well as social action and roles;

- the institutions and rules that affect motivation, action, and roles, both formal institutions such as governments, universities, or sports leagues, and informal ones, such as gender roles, old boys' networks, or the unwritten rules in sports.

In this course, you will learn social science by *doing* social science. You will observe, interpret, and analyze behavior, texts, even your own life and experiences. The course does not presuppose any prior training or inclination in any particular methods of inquiry, but you will be exposed to the various approaches.

The course also satisfies the First-Year Writing requirement.

The Three Principles of Gameful Pedagogy

The Principle of Leveling Up
Everyone begins with zero points. Everything you successfully try earns you points. You cannot "lose" points with any assignment because you haven't earned anything until you tried it. This leads to…

The Principle of Safe Failures
We want you try new challenges, whether you are confident about your abilities or not. Because everything earns you points, even assignment that doesn't go so well will earn you something. And if you totally bomb something, you can try something else. This is because we also have…

The Principle of Multiple Paths and Optionality
Good video games let you play the game in your own way. Here, too. You should try to figure out *what* you want to try and *when* you want to try it. You should *not* try to do everything.

Learning Objectives
This course is not about your acquiring more information; it is about you learning new concepts and skills. The information is not irrelevant, but it is in service of your being exposed to and learning what matters in social scientific inquiry. Because this is a writing class, many of the skills have to do with communication.

Below, you'll see there are three levels of objectives. Exposure is the most basic; practice represents your attempts to start playing with the tools and concepts you have been exposed to; and competence means you can *successfully* use the tools or concepts.

	Exposure	Practice	Competence
Social-scientific Literacy	• Encounter **concepts** as used in specialist and general contexts ("All humans play *games.*")	• **Understand** and **analyze** concepts ("X, Y, and Z are the necessary and sufficient conditions of a game.")	• Successfully **apply** concepts to social phenomena and **use** them to make arguments ("College is a game, but so far it has been a badly designed one.")
College Writing	• Variety of **genres and media** of writing in and around the social sciences • Variety of **rhetorical practices and reasons behind them**	Scaffolding the elements of the different writing processes: • Changing texts from one medium or genre to another ("**remediation**") • Identifying and practicing different **genres and rhetorical choices** • Articulating similar claims in different genres and media, including **visual and electronic media** • Reflecting on one's own communication practices ("**metacognition**") • Revising one's own writing • Engaging with others' writing (peer review)	• The ability to **communicate successfully** a social-scientific argument in at least two different genres or media • The ability to **engage constructively and critically** others' social-scientific work
Social-scientific Research Process	• Variety of **research questions** • **Quantitative**, **qualitative**, and **theoretical methods** • The elements of the **research process**	Scaffolding the elements of the research process: • Identifying research questions and their significance • Identifying and distinguishing between methodological approaches • Practicing the **logic of inquiry** • Identifying types of **data** • Practicing **quantitative**, **qualitative**, and **theoretical methods**	• The ability to formulate a meaningful research question and articulate its significance • Basic ability to **use** at least one social scientific method

Two important observations:

1. We distinguish between the dimensions above, but that is just for clarity's sake. In the messier reality, the two are inseparable, and you shouldn't think of this course as having a writing dimension separate from its substance. For example, you shouldn't think that lectures are about "content" and sections about "writing."
2. Notice that the highest specified learning goal is **competence**, not **mastery**. The students in this courses are unusually bright and talented, but even for them, we don't expect anyone to reach mastery. This is early days in your college career; this is just one of the early steps in your path to greater competence. (That's why it won't be a problem if you are a sophomore and have already taken one First-Year Writing Requirement course — you can't ever have enough!)

Assignment Structure Overview

Here, we describe the overall structure of the course. Detailed and specific prompts for the assignments are available on Canvas and GradeCraft.

Assignment Type	Points per attempt	Number of attempts	Total possible
Survey We'll conduct a survey at the beginning of the semester, in order to get to know you better.	500	1	500
Readings There are readings (or other minimal homework) before each lecture. An online quiz, due before lecture, will encourage you to complete the readings.	300	24	7200
Lectures Attending and participating in the lectures — where we will be doing a lot of stuff, not just listening passively — is important.	300	26	7800
Discussions	800	25	20000

Your discussion sections are where you really learn. Attending them regularly is important.			
Practice Assignments The weekly practice assignments are the backbone of the course. During weeks 2-12, you may complete **one** assignment per week. We expect most students to complete about **five** total. If you complete five, your lowest below-course-average score will be raised to the course average. The "Revision" assignment does not count in the five. (Requirement modified October 12.)	2400	11	15000 Note that this is capped at well below the theoretical maximum.
"Big Theme" Assignment The Big Theme assignment lets you develop a major project around a theme or a question you are interested in. You may do it collaboratively or you may do it on your own. We encourage you to use the practice assignments in your Big Theme Assignment.	9000	1	9000
Peer Review To encourage you to learn from your peers and to get practice in engaging others, you can earn points for peer reviewing one assignment for a fellow student.	1200	1	1200

Learning Goal Tags

The Practice Assignments and the Big Theme Assignments have each various tags that are associated with the course's learning objectives.

The table below lists the tags. Each assignment may have several. Meeting expectations on the learning goal earns you a badge. **You must earn ~~eight~~ five badges to pass the course.** (Requirement modified October 12.)

Analysis	Engage in some mode of analysis used by social scientists.
Remediation	Change the genre of a piece of work.
Revision	Revise a piece of earlier work.
Visual Rhetoric	Focus on the visualization of information.
Metacognition	Demonstrate reflection on your work.
Research Question	Practice the development of a research question.
Peer Review	Constructively review work by a peer in the course.
Theoretical	Engage in work that uses theoretical social-scientific methods.
Qualitative	Engage in work that uses qualitative social-scientific methods.
Quantitative	Engage in work that uses quantitative social-scientific methods.

Earning a Course Grade

This table shows how your final points are converted to a letter grade at the end of the semester:

POINTS	LETTER GRADE
48,000	A
43,000	A-
40,000	B+
35,000	B
30,000	B-
24,000	C+
19,000	C
15,000	C-
12,000	D+
9,000	D

- In addition to straight points, you must have **eight learning goal badges**. If you have fewer than ~~eight~~ five, your highest possible course grade is D+. (Requirement modified October 12.)
- **Note that the total POSSIBLE points is 59,500 — 11,500 points more than you need for an A.** You should not try to do everything. It won't be necessary (or possible).
- Note also that the scale is neither monotonic nor linear. It reflects the principle that it should be easy to advance fast, pass the course, and get a decent grade, but somewhat difficult to get an A.

Is it possible to get an A+? Yes, but not by points alone. Trying to get a maximum number of points will not guarantee an A+, and actively trying to get to A+ just to get to A+ may in fact make it impossible. Asking about an A+ may also hurt your chances of getting it.

GradeCraft

To make it possible for you and us to manage the complicated structure, we are using a specialized tool called [GradeCraft](#) in this course. You will receive a lot of details about it.

Schedule of Readings

The readings in this course represent a variety of genres, from academic writing in multiple social science disciplines to journalism, essays, and fiction.

- **All but one of the readings are in digital format only.** If this poses a *significant* hardship to you, please contact us, and we will see about accommodating you.
- **Complete the reading assigned for a particular date before the lecture and complete the online quiz, accessible on Canvas.**
- **Bring the reading to *both* lecture and the following discussion section.**

Below is a tentative schedule of the readings. The details and the texts are available via GradeCraft. *If there are any changes to the schedule, they will be made on GradeCraft, not here.*

9/7/2016	Introduction: No Reading
9/12/2016	Louis Menand, "Live and Learn: Why We Have College" Lito Tejada-Flores, "Games Climbers Play"
9/14/2016	Johan Huizinga, "Magic Circle," from *Homo Ludens* Claudia Rankine, "The Meaning of Serena Williams"

9/19/2016	Anne Curzan, "Says Who? Teaching and Questioning the Rules of Grammar" John McWhorter, "Missing the Nose on Our Face: Pronouns and the Feminist Revolution"
9/21/2016	Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience"
9/26/2016	Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"
9/28/2016	Edward Tufte, "Visual and Statistical Thinking," in *Visual Explanations*
10/3/2016	Andrew Martin, Kevin Quinn, and Lee Epstein, "The Median Justice on the United States Supreme Court"
10/5/2016	Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (excerpts)
10/10/2016	R. Harrison Wagner, "Uncertainty, rational learning, and bargaining in the Cuban missile crisis"
10/12/2016	Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (excerpt; read if your last name begins with A-Ga) Marge Piercy, *Gone to Soldiers* (excerpts; read if your last name begins with Ge-Mo) Sebastian Junger, *War* (excerpts, read if your last name begins with Mu-Z)
10/17/2016	**Fall break — no class**
10/19/2016	Arthur Lupia and Jamie Druckman, "Preference Change in Competitive Electoral Environments"
10/24/2016	Mika LaVaque-Manty, "The Political Theory of Doping"
10/26/2016	Elinor Ostrom, James Walker, and Roy Gardner, "Covenants With and Without a Sword: Self-Governance is Possible"
10/31/2016	T.L. Taylor, "Where the Women Are," from *Play Between the Worlds*
11/2/2016	Burgess & Matamoros-Fernandez, "Mapping sociocultural controversies across digital media platforms: one week of #gamergate on Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr"
11/7/2016	Canceled
11/9/2016	Cecilia Ridgeway and Shelley Correll, "Unpacking the Gender System"

11/14/2016	Moira Weigel, "Fitted"
11/16/2016	Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy* (excerpt)
11/21/2016	Kathryn Edin and Luke Schaefer, *$2 a Day* (excerpt)
11/23/2016	**Thanksgiving**
11/28/2016	Gary Becker, "A Theory of Marriage: Part I" (read if your last name begins with A-Ga) Gary Becker, "A Theory of Marriage: Part II" (read if your last name begins with Ge-Mo) Justin Wolfers, "Did Unilateral Divorce Laws Raise Divorce Rates?" (read if your last name begins with Mu-Z)
11/30/2016	Claude Steele, "A threat in the air: how stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance"
12/5/2016	Rebecca Zwick, "College Admissions in Twenty-First Century America"
12/7/2016	Bound et al., "Playing the Admissions Game"
12/12/2016	No reading

General Policies

Religious, Disability, and Other Accommodations

Because of the way the course is structured, everyone can miss some lectures and discussions without jeopardizing his or her course grade. If you anticipate missing more than a few for reasons of religious observance, disability, or representing the University of Michigan, **please contact as early as possible and no later than the drop/add deadline** (September 26) to discuss accommodations needed.

If you have disability that requires an accommodation, we will need a form from the [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) specifying the needed accommodations. We encourage you to discuss your needs with your GSI or the professor. Because this is an unusual course, the most common accommodation needs may be moot — such as extra time on exams — but you may need something else. We are more than happy to work with you.

In general, because of the course structure, we encourage you to **plan your semester early**, deciding which challenges you want to try, and when. That way, in most cases, you can simply navigate around most of the scheduling conflicts you already know about.

Of course, some conflicts arise as emergencies, and you can't plan everything. In making accommodations in general, we follow the policy of the Office of the Provost: we will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with legitimate reasons to miss classes or assignments. However, all students are expected to complete the work required to achieve the grade they hope for. LSA policy prevents us from adjusting the grading scale as an accommodation for any individual student.

Late Work Policy

Because you have so many choices in this course, if you know you will not have time to complete an assignment, we recommend you give up and do something else. However, our policy is as follows:

- Any work submitted late will have its points reduced **by ten percent of the original points for every six hours of lateness**.
- No work that is submitted more than forty-eight hours after the due date will be accepted.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing

University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** at (734) 764-8312 and https://caps.umich.edu/ during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at (734) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.

For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: http://umich.edu/~mhealth/.

Technology Policy

As you probably have noticed already, this course uses a lot of technology. You are not required to use any, but you are welcome. Portable technology is welcome in both lecture and discussion.

With this freedom comes the responsibility to behave in a professional way with your technology. Communication unrelated to class is disruptive, distracting — to you, your peers, and your instructors — and, in short, assholish. Please don't be an asshole.

Office Hours

Please take advantage of the instructors' office hours. We get paid, whether you show up or not, but we enjoy getting to know you personally, and they help you, both on your particular challenges and down the line. Your GSI will specify his or her office hour practices on your section syllabus.

Academic Integrity

Engaging in academic work is a tricky business. On the one hand, it is important that individuals do the work that is assigned to them, even if it means reinventing the wheel. On the other hand, all scholars stand on the shoulders of others — in other words, all meaningful academic work is collaborative in one way or another — so it is sometimes hard to draw the line.

There is another reason why citations are so prevalent in academic writing. For all their bloviating, academics are a modest bunch, and when they "Joe Schmoe says this," they think it's possible they've gotten Joe's idea all wrong. So they want to give their readers a chance to get it out for themselves.

Putting this simply, the idea of citations in academic work is to

1. give credit where credit is due, and
2. allow the reader to check things out and pursue things further.

That's why us academics take the practices of proper citation extremely seriously. We are sure you will have lots of questions about the specifics of citation, and you may even get things wrong sometimes. We all do. But if it's determined you have engaged in any form of academic misconduct, you will fail this course. As the LSA Academic Judiciary Manual of Procedures specifies, a student may be expelled from the university for academic misconduct. So that we're clear on this, for the purposes of this class, plagiarism will mean

> submitting a piece of work which in part or in whole is not entirely the student's own work without attributing those same portions to their correct source.

In this course, we want you to use the citation style of the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition.

Meeting the learning objectives in this course requires that you apply your current knowledge and skills to the questions and exercises and, through them, improve that knowledge and those skills. Shortcuts won't get you there, however appealing they might seem. Because of this, the use of commercial study guides such as Cliff Notes, Sparknotes.com, and other similar resources outside this course counts as academic misconduct. (They also won't do you any good in this course.)