According to Entertainment Software Association (ESA) annual report in 2018, 64% of U.S. households own a device on which they play games and 60% of Americans play games on a daily basis. Despite cultural assumptions, most gamers are not men under the age of 18. In fact, the average age of a gamer in the U.S. is 34 and there are almost twice as many adult women playing (33%) as men under the age of 18 (17%). Eric Zimmerman is one of multiple scholars who have predicted that if the moving image was the dominant cultural form of the 20th century, games and information at play will be the dominant form of the 21st. According to him, “the ways that people spend their leisure time and consume art, design, and entertainment will be games—or experiences very much like games.”

Like other media such as film and television, video and analog games are expressive forms capable of conveying ideas and narratives with significant complexity and depth. However, books (literature’s traditional medium) and games are significantly different media – each with its opportunities and challenges. This course will focus on games as a form of literature – the poetic and/or fictional expressions of ideas and narratives. We will study the form of the game examining and analyzing how games alter the production, consumption, and interpretation of narrative and literary expressions. We will also situate our examination of games as a form of literature in the larger field of game studies, which draws on disciplines ranging from computer science to communication.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS:**

*Bring Required Reading to Every Class*


*Firewatch* (Panic, Inc./Campo Santo, 2016) [STEAM]

*Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013) [STEAM]

Additional games will be required as determined by the class. Total additional cost will not exceed $50.

**Required Technology:**

*Computer Access:* Each student will need consistent and regular access to a computer on which they can occasionally install programs.
STEAM Account: We will be spending time on narrative and literary games that can be played through STEAM. STEAM accounts are free. However, there is a cost associated with some of the games we will be studying – see above.

WesternOnline: Additional scholarly essays and book chapters will be provided as PDFs on WesternOnline. We will also be using WesternOnline for the online submission of formal essays. If you need help using WesternOnline, please let me know.

Technical Proficiency: Each student is expected to have (or be able to find someone who has) the technical proficiency required to install and navigate digital programs. Technical difficulties do not excuse the student from reading nor from being responsible for the material.

Recommended Texts
I also strongly recommend students acquire or have ready access to a writing handbook (like Diana Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual) and/or to an MLA style guide (like The MLA Handbook).

**Course Requirements & Assignments**

**Participation (10%):** Discussion in this course relies on strong, nuanced, and consistent participation from each student in the class. Therefore, I expect students to have critically read (or critically played) and reflected on the assignment in advance and to come to class prepared to discuss it. Students are required to participate in discussion regularly by answering questions, posing questions, and making analytical comments. I will generally (but not always) rely on voluntary participation.

Participation will be evaluated using the following general criteria:
- **A:** Student contributes *daily* and *significantly* and always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **B:** Student contributes *regularly* and always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **C:** Student contributes *sporadically* and/or always actively focuses on class discussion.
- **D:** Student contributes *rarely* and/or frequently does not stay actively focused on the discussion.
- **F:** Student does not contribute and does not stay actively focused on the discussion.

I do not expect nor require students to have the “right” answer or to provide ground-breaking analysis but merely to engage in the process of discussing and analyzing the texts. Remember that quality is better than quantity, but quantity is better than no quantity.

**Daily Writing (10%):** There will be daily writing assignments in this course, ranging from reading quizzes and freewrites in class to producing discussion questions, summaries, and other minor writing assignments outside of class. With the exception of reading quizzes, these assignments will be announced in class and may not be made up.

**EGO/STD Keynote Response (5%):** On Friday, October 19th, Dr. Kishonna Gray, author of Race, Gender and Deviance in Xbox Live, will present the keynote lecture for the EGO/STD conference. Her talk is titled: “Hypervisible Blackness. Invisible Narratives: the Digital Stories that Games Tell.” We are very fortunate to have a game studies scholar on campus this semester and this lecture is required. Each student will write a 2-page summary and response/reflection to the lecture.

**Game Analysis Report (15%):** Each student will be responsible for selecting a game outside of class that has literary merit, analyzing the game both ludologically and conceptually and then composing a short
report on the game. The report will include a short summary of the game, an overview of the conceptual significance of the game (i.e. themes), and a short interpretation of the game’s meaning.

**ESSAYS:** Students will complete three critical essays: 2 short interpretive essays and a scholarly essay that contributes to game/literary studies scholarship. Each essay must be typed, double-spaced and conform to MLA guidelines for format and in-text citation. Detailed prompts will be distributed.

**Essay Policies:**

**Pre-writing:** There may be pre-writing assignments (such as topic paragraph, thesis sentence, outline, etc) for each essay. Failure to complete these assignments will result in a penalty to the final paper grade.

**Rough Drafts:** You must bring a complete, typed, draft that meets the minimum length requirements for the assignment. If you fail to do so, the highest grade the final draft can receive is a D.

**Late Work:** Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers will be submitted in print in class and electronically via WesternOnline. Late essays incur a 5% penalty for every calendar day. If you need an extension, send a written request via email stating the specific reason for the extension request. In the event that you submit the print copy outside of class, it is your responsibility to confirm that I received it.

**Specific Essays:**

**Short Interpretive Essay (15% each; 30% total):** In this essay, students will write TWO 4-5 page critical interpretive “readings” of a game. Each essay will feature a specific, contestable, and significant literary argument about the selected game. The argument must be developed, demonstrated, and supported with close reading, visual/textual analysis and scholarly research. Each paper must contextualize their argument or its supporting analysis in scholarship by citing and engaging at least one scholarly source. However, the majority of the essay will be the student’s analysis and interpretation.

**Scholarly Essay (30%):** As the culminating assignment of the course, students will write a 7-8 page essay which advances a specific, contestable, and significant literary argument about a game of their choice. This argument must be contextualized within and contribute to current literary/game studies scholarship. The argument must be developed, demonstrated, and supported with textual analysis and close reading as well as at least four scholarly sources. More than unambiguous support, the argument needs to engage these sources and conceptually extend, revise, or reject analysis/argument from the scholarly sources.

**DISTRIBUTION AND GRADING SCALE**

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Writing</td>
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<td>EGO Keynote Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Game Report</td>
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<td>Short Interpretive Essay</td>
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<td>Scholarly Essay</td>
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**Course Policies**
Attendance: Regular attendance is not only mandatory but essential for success in this course. Students are expected to attend class on a regular basis and will be held accountable for any material covered in class, including class discussion, announcements and any changes to the reading schedule and assignments. Students are responsible for getting information and class notes from a fellow classmate. Preparation is a crucial part of attendance. Therefore, students are required to bring the appropriate text to every class meeting.

Each student is allowed four absences for any reason -- ranging from illness to oversleeping. I do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. As such, students are not expected to document these absences, nor does documentation “excuse” the absence. Allowances may be made in unexpected, extreme circumstances that result in several consecutive days absent (i.e. serious prolonged illness). These circumstances will need to be documented, and you must contact me as soon as possible.

Possible Attendance/Preparation Penalties:

- Failure to bring the appropriate text to class will result in a 5% penalty to the participation grade.
- After four, each subsequent absence will result in a 3% penalty to the final grade.
- Students who miss 8 or more total classes will receive an automatic F for the course.

Tardiness: I am not bothered by individuals who are occasionally late for class or must occasionally leave class early—the key word being occasionally. However, if you anticipate that you must consistently arrive late or leave early, you need to replace this course with another.

If you arrive after I take roll, it is your responsibility to speak with me after class to ensure I record your attendance. If you do not speak with me, you may be inadvertently counted absent. If you miss more than half of the class due to tardiness, it will count as an absence.

Scholastic Dishonesty: Scholastic dishonesty of any kind on any assignment undermines the quality of education at WIU and will not be tolerated under any circumstances. This includes cheating, fabrication, falsification, multiple submissions, and plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty of any kind will result in an F in the course and will be reported to CAGAS. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes scholastic dishonesty. I will also be happy to answer any questions you may have. You should also consult the University policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.

Email: Email correspondence is a quick and easy way to communicate during this semester. I will use it frequently to communicate with the class, and I encourage you to use it to contact me to set up an appointment, ask questions, make comments, etc. I do consider email to be formal communication so I expect emails to be properly addressed, to maintain a professional tone, and to be grammatically correct. If your question or request is too large to be handily resolved over email, I will ask you to set an appointment to discuss it in an individual conference.

Office Hours: Students are encouraged to visit during office hours. These are available to use without setting an appointment. Additionally, if I am in my office in Simpkins or the Malpass Writing Center, feel free to drop in to see if I am available to meet. If you are not able to meet during office hours, please email me, and we can set an appointment.
I always enjoy speaking with students about their writing, the readings for the course, or literary and gaming topics large or small! Additionally, if you are working on a paper and have questions or would like feedback, I am happy to work with you on your paper at any stage of the writing process. And, of course, feel free to drop in and challenge me to a quick game of Pylos or Omweso!

**Classroom Behavior:** Students are expected to behave with respect toward the course, their fellow students, and me. We will be reading and playing a variety of pieces which may contain subject matter that may be deemed offensive to some people, such as profanity, trauma, and depictions of sex and violence. Students are required to discuss this material maturely and maintain an appropriate demeanor during class. If you have extenuating circumstances with encountering this material, please set an appointment with me immediately.

Private conversations and other disruptive behaviors interfere with teaching and learning and will not be tolerated. Continued disruptive behavior can result in an assigned classroom seat, penalty to final grade, and/or expulsion from the class for the day or the semester.

**Electronic Devices:** Students are allowed to access material electronically when appropriate using laptops or tablets. If you are using your phone to access readings, please let me know before class. Even with electronic material, these devices can be distracting both to students, their neighbors, and me. I reserve the right to have students put away devices that become a distraction.

Cellphones, which can play a valuable role in the event of an emergency, should be set to vibrate at the beginning of class. If you need to take a call, you are welcome to step outside of class briefly. Texting, emailing, social media, and non-class related activities on your phone, laptop or tablet are strictly prohibited and will negatively affect your grade. After an initial warning, violation of this policy will result in dismissal from the class and a 10% penalty to your participation grade per instance.

**University Writing Center:** The UWC is available to assist you with general and specific questions on any of the writing assignments for this course. Consultants can provide another voice on your writing at any stage in the writing process from brainstorming to polishing the final product. Please call for an appointment (298–2815) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment to your session. A visit to the UWC should be a supplement to rather than a replacement for talking about your paper with me.

**Title IX Announcement:** University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: [http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php](http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php). If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: [http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php](http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php).

**Students’ Rights and Responsibilities:** For information, visit [www.wiu.edu/provost/student/](http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/)