COURSE NUMBER: HSS 206-01

COURSE TITLE: Religion in Digital Games

CREDITS: 3

PREREQUISITES/COREQUISITES: None

FOR WHOM PLANNED: The course is intended for Religious Studies majors and non-majors who are interested in how religious practice is being transformed and challenged by digital technologies. It is an introductory class. Although helpful, no prior religious studies or media studies courses or knowledge is required or expected.

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION: Professor Gregory P. Grieve, 109 Foust Building, 334-5762, gpgrieve@uncg.edu. Office hours by Appointment or by Accident

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: Using a wide range of topics, analytical theories and methods, the course introduces students to religion, digital media, networked society and consumer culture.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon successful completion of this course students will gain the skills of . . . (The courses SLOs correspond to the “UNCG General Education and Goals,” and specifically to GPR – Philosophical, Religious and Ethical Principles” [June 2012] http://undergraduate.uncg.edu/colleagues/forms/General_Education/Gen%20Ed%20LGs%20and%20SLOs.pdf.)

SLO #1 Religious Literacy: Demonstrate recognition of the belief and practices of specific religious traditions, and also of the application of the analytic modes of theological, mythological, ideological and ethical interpretations (LG1, LG3, LG 5, GPR 1 & GPR 3)

SLO #2 Command of Digital Media: Analyze by comparing and contrasting the assumptions, arguments, histories, and modes of thought, as well as demonstrate the command of, two or more digital media practices (LG 1, LG 3, GPR 2 & GPR 3)

SLO #3 Popular Culture Literacy: Analyze by comparing and contrasting the assumptions, arguments, histories, and modes of thought of two or more forms of popular culture (LG 1, LG 3, GPR 2 & GPR 3)

SLO # 4 Play: Examine and interpret through a systematic process the concept of, as well as engage critically, in voluntary, and intrinsically motivated activities normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment. (LG 1, LG 3, GPR 2 & GPR 3)

SL#4 Critical Thinking: Demonstrate the ability to apply abstract ideas to specific cases, by analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating instances of religious digital media. (LG 1, GPR 3 & GPR 4)

SL #6 Critical Imagining: Exhibit the ability to problem-solve, by synthesizing, improvising and innovating. (LG 5)
Proudly walking in John Dewey’s well-worn footsteps, I am a progressive educator who does not limit teaching to the memorization and manipulation of given ideas that can be tested. To achieve the Student Learning Outcomes requires a de-emphasis on textbooks in favor of varied learning sources that look forward to the skills needed for future technological literacy, as well as an emphasis on lifelong learning and social skills that are assessed through each student’s projects and productions.

Basing evaluation solely on exams is ultimately both confused and devious. It is devious because it lulls students into complacency about the circumstances of both their present everyday lives and their future success. It is hubristic to think we know the future for which we are preparing students. Instead, real education cultivates flexible and innovative problem solvers by exposing students to a wide breadth of perspectives and educational experiences designed to equip them with the essential skills and learning necessary to thrive and succeed throughout their lives.

Exam-oriented instruction is confused because it affords the wrong skills. For higher education to succeed as a life-long goal it must start from the students’ own experiences to teach the 21st century skills of critical thinking and imagining. Critical thinking enables the habits of reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath the surface meanings and first impressions and allow students to diagnosis the connections between their individual experiences and the social and cultural context in which they are embedded. Critical imagining gives students the flexible and innovative problem solving which gives them the ability to go from abstract analysis, to actually engaging and taking action in their own lives and communities.

To instill such a progressive pedagogy, while primarily based on a Socratic face-to-face seminar method, as well as the use of introductory lectures and one-on-one conferences when required, the course blends online teaching, and hands-on computer labs to facilitate student achievement of the stated learning outcomes. The students’ primary responsibility will be to read and discuss the course materials. Yet they will also engage in group-work, presentations, game design, and hands on exploration of digital media.

Progressive Education facilitates Student Learning Outcomes by:

1. Emphasizing hands-on projects, exploratory and experiential learning
2. Basing curriculum on thematic units
3. Integrating students’ personal and community experiences into the classroom
4. Emphasizing critical thinking and critical imagining
5. Engaging in group work and other collaborative and cooperative learning projects that develop social skills
6. Forming democratic and social responsibility, that recognizes the larger social and historical context, rather than just rote knowledge
7. Personalizing the curriculum for each student’s goals
8. De-emphasizing textbooks in favor of varied learning sources that look forward to the skills need for future technological literacy
9. Emphasizing lifelong learning and social skills that teach students how to teach themselves
10. Evaluating and assessing based on each student’s projects and productions.
To teach critical thinking and imagining, and thus to achieve the student learning outcomes, the classroom must be a community, and not just an instructional place were information is dispensed. Accordingly, the course assignments assume that students are not passive receptacles, like a clean hard disk, were information can merely be stored and hopefully retrieved later. To make knowledge stick, the assignments treat students as human beings with their own histories, communities and cultural contexts. As such the classroom is not a factory dispensing information, whose reception the assignments assess. Instead, the classroom is treated as an arena of discovery that reflects the moral and ethical dimensions of the student’s own lives and communities. As such, the teacher’s task is not to profess knowledge as an authoritative figure, but to create a safe environment for the free discussion of ideas, attitudes and experiences.

EVALUATION AND GRADING: The course uses gamification—the use of game design elements in non-game contexts—to achieve the desired Student Learning Outcomes. As far back as 1985, gamification has been used to enhance traditional pedagogy. The default environment of school often results in undesirable outcomes such as disengagement, learned helplessness, and dropping out. As a planet, we spend over three billion hours a week playing video games. Game players regularly exhibit persistence, risk-taking, attention to detail, and problem solving, all behaviors that ideally should be demonstrated in school.

Following studies on gamification and education, students’ in-class work and assignments will be evaluated through written assignments known as “QuestLabs.” Each QuestLab is approximately three pages (750 words) in length, and must be typed, use proper formatting, and be submitted in hardcopy. Like levels in a video game, Questlabs become increasing difficult, and also build upon the skills afforded by, and content learned, in earlier assignments. Except for the End Game (see chart below), There are no deadlines for Questlabs, although a recommended schedule is provided in the course outline. QuestLabs: (1) must all be submitted by May 6th (no late assignments); (2) students may not start the next assignment until they have finished the preceding one, and (3) students may only turn in one QuestLab in a 48-hour period.

Questlabs are either pass or fail. If a student fails an assignment, they must repeat it until they successfully complete it so that they can move onto the next assignment. Written and oral comments will be provided for each failed assignment. Per the chart below, students’ final grades will be determined by the number of QuestLabs they complete. As indicated in the far right column, different QuestLabs provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement of one or more the stated Student Learning Outcomes. As indicated above, the Student Learning Outcomes are linked to UNCG’s general education program and learning goals.

The Endgame, which consists of QuestLabs 14-16, is a set of interwoven assignments that evaluates the students’ overall achievements in the course. The Endgame Questlabs consist of a three-to-five page research paper, a poster session, and a critically imaginative project in which the student goes beyond the boundaries of the stated rules. In video games, a “Boss” is the final level that a gamer must defeat, and a “Mod” or modification is a user created additional materials. Students can decide for themselves if they want to earn B, B+, A- or A in the course. To achieve a B or B+, they must successfully complete the research paper. To achieve an A-, they must successfully complete both the research paper and the poster session. To achieve an A, they must successfully complete the research paper, the poster session and the Mod. If students do not successfully complete any of the Endgame assignments, their final grade will depend upon the number of QuestLabs that they successfully completed (see the chart below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Grade</th>
<th><strong>QuestLab ®</strong></th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Student Learning Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Quest Lab 1: Imagining Your Symbol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>SLO 1, SLO 3, SLO 5</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Quest Lab 5: Hacking a Game for Education (midterm)</td>
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<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5, SLO 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Quest Lab 6: A Theological interpretation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>Quest Lab 7: A Mythological interpretation</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>D+</td>
<td>Quest Lab 9: The Play of Ethics</td>
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<td>C-</td>
<td>Quest Lab 10: An Open Interpretation</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>SLO 2, SLO 6</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>Quest Lab 12: Analyzing a Religious Practice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>Quest Lab 13: Analyzing a Religious Community</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5, SLO 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>B or B+</td>
<td>Quest Lab 14: Small Research Paper (Final)</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>Quest Lab 15: The Boss: Poster (Final)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5, SLO 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Quest Lab 16: The Mod: Exceptional Project (Final)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>SLO 1, SLO 2, SLO 3, SLO 4, SLO 5, SLO 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bonus Material</td>
<td>+/- one level</td>
<td>Class participation may lower or raise your level by one (see attached rubric).</td>
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REQUIRED TEXTS/READINGS/REFERENCES: There is no textbook. The function of the texts is both to give context and also to generate class discussion. Unless otherwise indicated, all texts —whether written, video and/or audio— are available through Blackboard. Texts marked with (*) can be purchased by students, and are also available at the reserve desk of the Jackson Library. Students should plan for reading and listening to the texts to take approximately 120 minutes outside of class for each class session. Please let the instructor know if you need accommodation for learning differences.

Hardware:

All students need access to a computer (Mac or PC)
If students do not have their own personal laptop, they will need to purchase a Flashdrive*

Readings (PDFs):

Reading # 1: J. Z. Smith, “Imagining Religion.”
Reading # 2: Tillich, “What is Faith?”
Reading #3: Wagner, “The Importance of Playing in Earnest.”
Reading #4: Martin, “Introduction to Seeing the Sacred on the Screen.”
Reading # 6: Hall, “Encoding/Decoding.”
Reading # 7: McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message.”
Reading # 8: Doyle, A Study In Scarlet, (sections 1-3).
Reading # 9: Janet “Affordances of the Digital Media.”
Reading #10: William Gibson, Neuromancer (excerpt)
Reading # 11: Winnicott, “Playing: a Theoretical Statement.”
Reading # 12: Johan Huizinga. Homo Ludens (excerpts)
Reading # 13: Wagner, “Play is the Thing.”
Reading # 14: Costikyan, “I Have No Words & I Must Design.”
Reading # 15: Salen and Zimmerman, Rules of Play (excerpts)
Reading # 16: Martin and Ostwalt, “Theological Criticism.”
Reading # 17: McGrath, “Faith.”
Reading # 18: “John Calvin on the Nature of Faith.”
Reading # 19: LaHaye and Jenkins, Left Behind (excerpts).
Reading # 20: Frykholm, Rapture Culture: Left behind in Evangelical America (excerpts).
Reading # 21: Luft, “Hardcore Christian Gamers.”
Reading # 22: Martin and Ostwalt, “Mythological Criticism.”
Reading # 24: Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (excerpt).
Reading # 25: Bogost, “Persuasive Games: Video Game Zen.”
Reading # 26: King, “Spirituality and the Privatisation of Asian Wisdom Traditions.”
Reading # 27: Martin and Ostwalt, “Ideological Criticism.”
Reading # 28: Pals. “Religion as Alienation, Karl Marx.”
Reading # 29: Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right [excerpts].
Reading # 30: Šisler, “Playing with Representation of Islam in Arab and American Video Games.”
Reading # 30: Hicks, “Ayn Rand.”
Reading # 31: Rand, Atlas Shrugged (excerpts).
Reading # 32: Huemer, “Critique of "The Objectivist Ethics."”
Reading # 33: Sicart, “BioShock in the Cave: Ethical Education in Plato and in Video Games.”
Reading # 34: Gregory, “Citing the Mediaval.”
Reading #35: Cline, Ready Player One. *
Reading # 36: Boellstroff, Coming of Age in Second Life (excerpts).
Reading # 37: Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (excerpts).
Reading #38: Turkle, Life On the Screen (excerpts).
Reading # 39: HoboNoteCards.
Reading # 40: Dibbell, My Tiny Life (excerpts).
Reading # 41: Radde-Antweiler. "Virtual Religion': An Approach to a Religious and Ritual
Topography of Second Life."
Reading # 42: Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power.”
Reading # 43: Shim." 'Til Disconnections Do We Part: The Initiation and Wedding Rite in Second
Life."
Reading # 44: Turner, “Marriage.”
Reading # 45: Boellstroff, Coming of Age in Second Life (excerpts).
Reading # 46: Weckman, “Community.”
Reading #47: Geertz, “Thick Description.”

Videography (available online, or need to be purchased by student)

“Resistance Fall of Man, and the Manchester Cathedral.”
Hall, “Encoding/Decoding.”
Mander, “Arguments for the Elimination of Television.”
“Sherlock: A Study in Pink” (BBC, 2010). *
Left Behind: The Movie (excerpt).
“Ayn Rand - Objectivism vs Altruim.”
The Fountainhead.
“Expensive Second Life Wedding.”

Webography:

The Matrix, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=te6qG4yn-Ps), (pill scene, excerpts)
http://secondlife.com/destinations/romance/wedding

Podcastography:


Gamography — available online, or need to be purchased by student (*)

“Adventure” (Crowthers, 1973) (online).
Generic Board Game such as Monopoly, Chutes and Ladders* 
Left Behind: The Video Game* (for PC).
Deepak Chopra, Leela* (For xbox kinetic, or Wii).
Civilization V * (PC or Mac).
BioShock * (xbox, PC, Mac, PS3).
SkyRim * (xbox, PC, PS3).
TOPICAL OUTLINE/CALENDAR: The schedule is a map and not a contract. Actual readings and topics may change depending on the student’s needs, desires and abilities.

**Week 1: Introduction: Towards a Progressive Model of Learning In the 21st Century—Digital Religion, Popular Culture and Video Games**

**Monday — January, 14: Studying Religion, Popular Culture, Digital Media and Games**

**Wednesday — January, 16: What is religion?**
- Reading # 1: Jonathan Z. Smith, “Imagining Religion”
- Reading # 2: Paul Tillich, “What is Faith?”
- Reading #3: Wagner, “The Importance of Playing in Earnest”
- Watch: Resistance Fall of Man, and the Manchester Cathedral

**Friday — January, 18: Ludus Workshop: Creating the Grid**
- Quest Lab 1: Imagining Your Symbol.

**Week 2 — Interpreting Religion and Popular Culture**

**Monday—No Class Martin Luther King Day**

**Wednesday—January, 23: A Hermeneutics of Religion and Popular Culture**
- Reading #4: Joel Martin, “Introduction to Seeing the Sacred on the Screen”
- Optional Reading # 6: Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,”
- Watch, Mander, “Arguments for the Elimination of Television” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3NBEurnIqY)

**Friday—January, 25: Ludus Workshop: What is religion?**
- Quest Lab 2: Interpreting a Popular Religious Object

**Week 3 — Understanding Digital Media**

**Monday—January, 28: The Digital is the Message**
- Reading # 7: Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message”
- Reading # 8: A Study In Scarlet, Conan Doyle sections 1-3. (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/244/244-h/244-h.htm)
- Watch: “Sherlock: A Study in Pink” (BBC, 2010)

**Wednesday—January, 30: The History of Digital Media, Media Practice and Screen Time**
- Reading # 9: Janet “Affordances of the Digital Media.”
- Reading #10: William Gibson, Neuromancer (Excerpt)

**Friday: Ludus Workshop: The Digital as Message**
- Quest Lab 3: Media Log Assignment
**Week 4 — The Magic Circle**

Monday — February, 4: Pretend
   Reading # 11: “Playing: a Theoretical Statement,” D.W. Winnicott
   Look: Colossal Cave Adventure Page (http://rickadams.org/adventure/)

Wednesday — February, 6: Game (ludology vs. narratology)
   Reading # 12: Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens* (excerpts)
   Reading # 13: Wagner, “Play is the Thing.”

Friday — February, 8: *Ludus Workshop*
   Quest Lab 4: Religion and Play

**Week 5 — Midterm Review: re-Designing Games For Education**

Monday — February, 11: Brainstorm
   Read # 14: Costikyan, “I Have No Words & I Must Design”

Wednesday — February, 13: Incubate
   Read # 15: Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play* (excerpts)

Friday — February, 15: *Ludus Workshop — Play*
   Quest Lab 5: Hacking a Game for Education

**Week 6 — Left Behind, a Theological Interpretation**

Monday — February, 18:
   Read # 16: Martin and Ostwalt, “Theological Criticism”
   Read # 17: McGrath, “Faith”
   Read # 18: “John Calvin on the Nature of Faith.”

Wednesday — February, 20:
   Read # 19: LaHaye and Jenkins, “Left Behind” (excerpts)
   Read # 20: Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left behind in Evangelical America* (excerpts)
   Read # 21: Luft, “Hardcore Christian Gamers”
   Watch: *Left Behind: The Movie* (excerpt)
   (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXRrVrkFYlo)

Friday — February, 22:
   Play: *Left Behind: The Video Game*
   Quest Lab 6: A Theological Interpretation
Week 7 — Deepak Chopra's *Leela*, a Mythological interpretation

Monday — February, 25
- Read # 22: Martin and Ostwalt, “Mythological Criticism”
- Read # 23: Pals. “The Reality of The Sacred, Mircea Eliade”
- Read # 24: Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (excerpt)

Wednesday — February, 27:
- Look at: http://www.deepakchopraleela.com/
- Read # 25: Bogost, “Persuasive Games: Video Game Zen.”
- Read # 26: King, “Spirituality and the Privatisation of Asian Wisdom Traditions.”

Friday — March, 1:
- Play: Deepak Chopra's *Leela*
- Quest Lab 7: A Mythological interpretation

Week 8 — Sid Meier's *Civilization V*, an Ideological interpretation

Monday — March, 4:
- Read # 27: Martin and Ostwalt, “Ideological Criticism”
- Read # 28: Pals. “Religion as Alienation, Karl Marx”
- Read: Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* [excerpts]

Wednesday — March, 6
- Read # 29: Šisler. “Playing with Representation of Islam in Arab and American Video Games”

Friday — March, 8
- Play: *Sid Meier's Civilization V*
- Quest Lab 8: An Ideological Interpretation

SPRING BREAK

Week 9 — BioShock, an Ethical Interpretation

Monday — March, 18: Ayn Rand and Objectivism
- Read # 30: Hicks, “Ayn Rand” (http://www.iep.utm.edu/rand/)
- Read # 31: *Rand, Atlas Shrugged* (excerpts)
- Read # 32: Huemer, “Critique of "The Objectivist Ethics" (http://home.sprynet.com/~owl1/rand5.htm)
- Watch: “Ayn Rand - Objectivism vs. Altruism,” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viGkAZR-x8s)
- Watch: The Fountainhead, (ttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFRR0a0ONLI)
(Week 9 continued)

Wednesday—March, 20: BioShock
   Read #32: Newgren, “BioShock to the System: Smart Choices in Video Games”
   Read #33: Sicart, “BioShock in the Cave: Ethical Education in Plato and in Video Games”

Friday—March, 22
   Play: BioShock
   Quest Lab 9: The Play of Ethics

Week 10 — Skyrim: Open Interpretation and Free Play

Monday, March, 25:
   Read #34: Gregory, “Citing the Medieval”

Wednesday—March, 28: Actual, Virtual and Ultimate Realities
   Watch: The Matrix, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=te6G4yn-Ps), (pill scene, excerpts)
   Play: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
   Quest Lab 10: An Open Interpretation

Friday—No Class/ Spring Holiday

Week 11 — Ready Player One

Monday—April, 1:
   Read #35: Cline, Ready Player One (pages 1-133)
   Play: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Wednesday—April, 3:
   Read #35: Cline, Ready Player One (pages 133-266)
   Play: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Friday—April, 5
   Read #35: Cline, Ready Player One (pages 266 – end of book)
   Play: The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Week 12 — Second Life — Religious Self

Monday— April, 8
Skyrim Presentations

Wednesday — April, 10:
Read # 36: Boellstroff, Coming of Age in Second Life (excerpts)
Read # 37: Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (excerpts)
Read #38: Turkle, Life On the Screen (excerpts)

Friday— April, 12
Read # 39: HoboNoteCards
Quest Lab 10: Creating an Avatar

Week 13 — Second Life — Religious Practice

Monday— April, 15:
Read # 40: Dibbell, My Tiny Life (excerpts)
Read # 41: Radde-Antweiler. "‘Virtual Religion’: An Approach to a Religious and Ritual Topography of Second Life.”
Read # 42: Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power.”

Wednesday— April, 17:
Read # 43: Shim."‘Til Disconnections Do We Part: The Initiation and Wedding Rite in Second Life"
Read # 44: Turner, “Marriage”
Look: http://secondlife.com/destinations/romance/wedding

Friday— April, 19
Quest Lab 12: Analyzing a Religious Practice

Week 14 Second Life — Religious Community

Monday— April, 22:
Read # 45: Boellstroff, Coming of Age in Second Life (excerpts)
Read # 46: Weckman, “Community”

Wednesday— April, 24:
Read # 47: Geertz, “Thick Description”

Friday— April, 26
Quest Lab 13: Analyzing a Religious Community
Week 15 — The End Game

Monday — April, 29: Casual Gamer
   Workshop: Small research Paper
   Quest Lab 14: Small Research Paper

Tuesday — April, 30: The Boss
   Workshop: Poster Session
   Quest Lab 15: The Boss: Poster
   Quest Lab 16: Exceptional Project

Final Exam May 6th, Noon EUC — Poster Sessions, all Quest Labs due

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY: Each student is required to sign the Academic Integrity Policy on all QuestLabs. Refer to UNCG Undergraduate Bulletin/Graduate Bulletin.

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Because the point of the course is not simply to complete assignments, but to engage in a community of learners, attendance is key to success in the course. YOU ARE REQUIRED TO ATTEND ALL CLASSES, including computer labs. Each unexcused absence beyond three, will lower you grade by one level (See QuestLab chart above). For excused absences, you must turn in a 250-word summary for each assigned text. You will be dropped from the course if you miss more than nine class sessions.

FINAL EXAMINATION: A poster session in the EUC will occur during the final exam period.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS: Students must be prepared for class: this means (1) having read, comprehended, and analyzed all the required texts; (2) having a copy of the texts in hand (this can be either a paper or electronic copy); (3) being well fed, and rested. If these preparations are not met, students will be marked absent. The following infractions may also cause you grade to be lowered, (1) Eating in class (drinks are fine); (2) Use of electronic media which is not directly related to class instruction (this means your phone); (3) During seminars and lectures, having electronic devices connected to the Internet. Also remember that class participation is part of your final grade (see attached rubric).