



FTVM/DIGITAL 368: Topics in Digital Media Studies

WGS 344: Sp. Topics in Gender, Culture, and Representation

Lara Croft and Feminist Media

Winter 2026

MW, 4:00-5:30PM in NQ 1175

Syllabus Outline

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Instructor Information

Instructor Information

Josef Nguyen (he/him/his) | Office: NQ 6429 | josefn@umich.edu

Instructor office hours are by email appointment, with in-office and online options.

Contact Information

Please format and address all emails to the Instructor professionally, include the course information in the subject line, and allow up to 24 hours for responses (and longer for weekends).

Course Description

Focusing on critical approaches to *Tomb Raider* as a transmedia franchise and Lara Croft as a recognizable and controversial representation of white Western womanhood, this course approaches Lara Croft as a central case study for investigating the shifting terrains of feminism(s) and media cultures over the last three decades. This course does so by exploring the historical influences and contexts that shaped Lara Croft's introduction, her continued evolution and reception, and her wide-ranging impact on popular culture, media industries, and feminist politics. Examining games, films, television, comics, and fan practices, this course considers the cultural production of and cultural contestation over Lara Croft as a born-digital icon shaped by transmedia industries, heterogenous audiences, and dynamics of social identities and differences including gender, race, sexuality, class, and nation.

Learning Objectives

- Become familiar with critical approaches in feminist, queer, and trans theory; media studies; popular culture studies; and fan studies
- Develop facility with sociohistorically situated close textual and cultural analysis of media texts and social practices attentive to structures of power
- Advance proficiencies in critical thinking, research, and writing
- Incorporate insights from existing scholarship and media production into their own research and creative practice

General Course Overview

Content Note

As this course engages with feminist questions and concerns in a dominantly phobic world, course content will frequently discuss, reference, and engage with misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, colonialism, racism, and ableism both directly and indirectly. Additionally, I have done my best to provide content notes for particularly sensitive issues, sensory or stimuli concerns, and other triggers beyond these in the academic calendar and schedule where appropriate. If there are additional concerns regarding content, please reach out to discuss and explore accommodations with me.

Required Texts and Materials

There are no texts or materials that require purchase.

The following films for class are available for free through University of Michigan Library on the Swank streaming platform. The films should also be available in DVD and/or Blu-ray form at the UM Shapiro Library as well.

- *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981)
- *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001)
- *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – The Cradle of Life* (Jan de Bont, 2003)
- *Tomb Raider* (Roar Uthaug, 2018)

All additional materials are available through the Dropbox folder for the course. Assignments are submitted to students' individual folders for the course on Dropbox.

Grading Overview

Coursework will be graded per the following breakdown:

- Thoughtful Class Engagement – 25% of final grade
- LCFM Audio Journal – 25% of final grade
- Annotated Concept Map – 10% of final grade
- Narrated Film Analysis – 20% of final grade
- LCFM Zine – 20% of final grade

Course Policies

Classroom Conduct

It is our responsibility to work together to produce a classroom environment where everyone can share, discuss, and question the materials at hand as well as contribute their own work respectfully and productively. Conflicting perspectives are unavoidable. To ensure that participants feel comfortable contributing a diverse set of thoughts, comments, and views, we will not use oppressive or harmful language nor tolerate harassment, personal attacks, and other actions or behaviors that unduly distract from the educational mission and that inflict emotional, physical, or psychological harm on those involved.

Part of the role of encouraging a diverse learning environment is acknowledging that individuals should feel safe and respected to contribute to the classroom in good faith. This involves not only allowing everyone opportunities to contribute their thoughts but to be mindful of how we recognize and address others. Do not assume things about others' identities, backgrounds, or experiences—whether that is age, race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, etc... Address people by their names, pronouns, and other identifiers that they disclose. Avoid insisting on imposing identity markers onto others. Allow people to self-identify as they feel comfortable.

What you share with and create for this class reflects not only you as both a student and a civic subject, but it also reflects on me as your instructor, the class as a learning community, and the University of Michigan as an academic institution.

Please discuss with me any concerns you have regarding an unsafe or hostile classroom environment, particularly if something arises that causes distress.

Sexual Misconduct

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success. We encourage anyone dealing with sexual misconduct to talk to someone about their experience, so they can get the support they need. Confidential support and academic advocacy can be found with the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center (SAPAC) on their 24-hour crisis line, 734.936.3333 and at sapac@umich.edu.

Alleged violations can be non-confidentially reported to the Equity, Civil Rights, and Title IX Office (ECRT) at ecrtooffice@umich.edu.

Class Attendance

Attend class regularly and in full to the best of your reasonable ability.

Severe Inclement Weather

In cases of severe inclement weather that may impede safe travel to campus, we may instead meet on Zoom. In such situations, I will do my best to notify the class by 8am the day of. For those already on campus or in Ann Arbor and who do not otherwise have a designated space to attend an online course meeting without disruption, our regular classroom will still be available during our scheduled meeting time for such purposes.

Please reach out with any concerns about access to appropriate computing equipment to attend any online class meetings.

Technology in the Classroom

Laptops, phones, tablets, and other computing devices can be used in the classroom specifically for purposes directly pertinent to the educational activities and discussions at-hand. Please avoid any technology use in the classroom that may be distracting you or others from the course during class meetings.

Classroom Recording

Unless specified in approved documented accommodations and with a completed Audio Recording agreement between student and instructor, students are prohibited from recording and distributing any part of this course. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use as relevant for the course.

Additional information regarding course recordings and privacy concerns can be found on the UM ITS Recording and Privacy Concerns webpage.

Late Work

If you need an extension on assignments, please let me know in advance as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Misconduct

The University of Michigan community functions best when its members treat one another with honesty, fairness, respect, and trust. The college promotes the assumption of personal responsibility and integrity and prohibits all forms of academic dishonesty and misconduct. All cases of academic misconduct will be referred to the LSA Office of Student Academic Affairs. Being found responsible for academic misconduct will usually result in a grade sanction, in addition to any sanction from the college. For more information, including examples of behaviors that are considered academic misconduct and potential sanctions, please see the [LSA's Academic Integrity policy](#).

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI)

Any potential use of generative AI tools (e.g. U-M GPT, ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) for work in this course should be done only in the interest of supporting the successful achievement of our student learning outcomes and assignment objectives and with a critical perspective on how such use contributes to learning and development. Major assignments for the course all include an accompanying critical reflection that asks students to discuss their process and experience for ideating and completing the assignment (e.g. original plans and goals, sources of inspiration, tools and skills used, encountered challenges, and self-assessment of the completed assignment). Please disclose and discuss any use of generative AI in the assignment's corresponding critical reflection to demonstrate thoughtful and critical use of such tools in supporting achievement of student learning outcomes and assignment objectives.

Accommodations and Support

Disability Accommodations

The University of Michigan recognizes disability as an integral part of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and is committed to creating as accessible educational environment for students with disabilities/disabled students as possible. Disability also includes mental health conditions, ADHD, learning disabilities, autism, chronic illness, physical conditions, sensory conditions, and more.

If you anticipate or are experiencing barriers based on disability or temporary injuries, , [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) is the office that students work with to explore reasonable accommodations, tools, and resources.

- If **you are already connected** with SSD and have approved accommodations, please share your letter through Accommodate as soon as possible so that we can discuss how your accommodations will be implemented in this course. The sooner I know about your disability access-needs, the more equipped I can be to facilitate accommodations.
- **You should reach out to me as soon as possible so we can discuss how to meet your specific accommodation needs as they relate to this specific course.** A letter from SSD alone is insufficient for us to address your individual needs in the context of this course, as accommodation letters only provide abstracted and general guidelines.
- If **you have not connected** with SSD and anticipate, or are experiencing a disability-related barrier, and would like to discuss accommodations and/or resources, please contact SSD by completing their [initial information form](#).
- If you have a **temporary medical injury/condition**, such as a broken arm, I may be able to assist in minimizing classroom barriers. In situations where additional assistance is needed, you should contact the SSD as noted above.

For more information, call 734-763-3000 or email ssdoffice@umich.edu.

Health and Wellbeing

While regular attendance and engagement in class are important, it should not be done at the undue expense of student health and well-being. As such, please treat your health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of others, as a priority, such as by focusing on resting and recovering when ill. It is also important to care for one's needs for rest outside of those concerns typically designated as valid medical illness and injury, such as during periods of high stress, menstruation, or fatigue.

Additionally, university students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressures and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. If the source of your stressors is academic, please contact me so that we can find solutions together. For personal concerns, U-M offers a variety of resources, many of which are listed on the [Resources for Student Well-being](#) webpage. You can also search for additional well-being resources on that website.

Student Parents and Caregivers

If you are pregnant, a parenting student, or primarily responsible for providing care for a loved one or family member, and you need any accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. You may also reach out to [Michigan Caregivers and Student Parents](#) and the [Center for the Education of Women+](#) for resources and community support.

Writing Support

The [Sweetland Center for Writing](#) offers free one-to-one writing support to all U-M undergraduate and graduate students, regardless of assignment type or discipline. Sweetland faculty and peer writing consultants meet with student writers to help with any stage of the writing process, from initial brainstorming to final revisions.

Course Schedule

<u>UNIT 0: BEGINNINGS</u>	
<u>Week 01:</u> Getting Started	Wednesday, 7 January 2026 <u>IN CLASS:</u> Syllabus Overview Class Introductions
<u>UNIT I: THE ADVENT OF LARA CROFT</u>	
<u>Week 02:</u> On an Icon	Monday, 12 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> PREPARE: Notes about 3 different people's thoughts, opinions, and takes on Lara Croft READ: Josef Nguyen and Amanda Phillips, "On 30 Years of Lara Croft" (2025) <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce LCFM Audio Journal Assignment Introduce Annotated Concept Map Assignment Wednesday, 14 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Mary Flanagan, "Mobile Identities, Digital Stars, and Post-Cinematic Selves" (1999)

Table 1: Course Schedule - Week 01-Week 02

<u>Week 03:</u> Archaeological Fantasies	Monday, 19 January 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING – IN OBSERVANCE OF MLK JR. DAY</u> Wednesday, 21 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: <i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i> (Steven Spielberg, 1981) [contains violence, blood, gore; dubious consent; gaslighting] PLAY: <i>Rick Dangerous</i> (Core Design, 1989) for 10-15 minutes, [http://rickdangerousflash.free.fr/]
<u>Week 04:</u> Representing Women	Monday, 26 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Sarah Banet-Weiser, “Postfeminism and Popular Feminism” (2018) Wednesday, 28 January 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: “Damsel in Distress: Part 1 - Tropes vs. Women in Video Games” (Feminist Frequency, 2013), [https://youtu.be/X6p5AZp7r_Q]
<u>Week 05:</u> Lara’s Debut	Monday, 2 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Teddy Pozo, “The Male Gamer and the Transness of Lara Croft” (2025) <u>IN CLASS:</u> Class meets in the Computer and Video Game Archive (Room 4041, Shapiro Library) Wednesday, 4 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Helen Kennedy, “Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo?” (2002), [https://gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/] WATCH: <i>She Puppet</i> (Peggy Ahwesh, 2001), [https://vimeo.com/9197535]

Table 2: Course Schedule - Week 03-Week 05

<u>Week 06:</u> Work on Annotated Concept Map	Monday, 9 February 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on Annotated Concept Map Wednesday, 11 February 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Annotated Concept Map due by 11:59PM
<u>UNIT II: LARA’S TRANSMEDIA EMPIRE</u>	
<u>Week 07:</u> Lara on Film	Monday, 16 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: <i>Lara Croft: Tomb Raider</i> (Simon West, 2001) [contains violence, blood, gore] <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce Narrated Film Analysis Assignment Wednesday 18 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Missy Molloy, “Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft: Gender, Celebrity, and Transnational Cinema” (2025)
<u>Week 08:</u> Lara’s Global Impact	Monday, 23 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Rukmini Pande, “‘You Can Be Lara Croft Too!’ Examining the Extractive Colonial Logics of <i>Tomb Raider</i> Fan Tourism in Cambodia” (2025) Wednesday, 25 February 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: <i>Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – The Cradle of Life</i> (Jan de Bont, 2003) [contains violence, blood, gore]

Table 3: Course Schedule - Week 06-Week 08

<u>SPRING BREAK</u>	Monday, 2 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Wednesday, 4 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u>
<u>Week 09:</u> Multiplying Laras	Monday, 9 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Jessica Aldred, “<i>Tomb Raider: Transmedia Play</i>” (2019) WATCH: “The History of Tomb Raider: The Ride” (Defunctland, 2018), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=uCCuwqPFLfk] Wednesday, 11 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: “Tomb Raider: Official Trailer (E3 2011)” (IGN, 2011), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=nFBrgesSij-0] (contains violence, blood, gore) WATCH: “Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny Official Trailer” (Lucasfilm, 2023), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=eQfMbSe7F2g] READ: Carly A. Kocurek, “Becoming Lara” (2025)
<u>Week 10:</u> New Lara, New Tricks	Monday, 16 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: <i>Tomb Raider</i> (Roar Uthaug, 2018) (contains violence, blood, gore; intense physical violence and injury to women) Wednesday, 18 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Samantha Blackmon, “Magic Colonizer Fingers: On Whiteness, Womanhood, and the Theft of Culture in <i>Shadow of the Tomb Raider</i>” (2025) WATCH: “Magic Colonizer Fingers: On Whiteness, Womanhood, and the Theft of Culture in <i>Shadow of the Tomb Raider</i>” (Saffista, 2025), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=Ptk9TZYKvEM]

Table 4: Course Schedule - Spring Break-Week 10

<u>Week 11:</u> Work on Narrated Film Analysis	Monday, 23 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on Narrated Film Analysis Wednesday, 25 March 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Narrated Film Analysis due 11:59PM
<u>UNIT III: LARA’S LEGACIES</u>	
<u>Week 12:</u> Lara’s Image	Monday, 30 March 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Bob Rehak, “Mapping the Bit Girl: Lara Croft and New Media Fandom” (2003) <u>IN CLASS:</u> Introduce LCFM Zine Assignment Wednesday, 1 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: <i>Re/Visioned: Tomb Raider</i> (Ricardo Sanchez, GameTap, 2007), [https://archive.org/details/revisioned-tomb-raider-animated-series-complete] (contains blood, violence, gore)

Table 5: Course Schedule - Week 11-Week 12

<u>Week 13:</u> Global Lara, Local Life	Monday, 6 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Souvik Mukherjee, "Lara's Empire: Postcolonial Responses to Tomb Raider" (2025) READ: Trung M. Nguyen, "Stolen Objects: Lara Croft the Tomb Raider vs. Sophiline Cheam-Shapiro the Cambodian Dancer" (2025) Wednesday, 8 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> READ: Carta Monir, "Lara Croft Was My Family" (2017), [https://medium.com/mammon-machine-zeal/lara-croft-was-my-family-ca4e2b8daf12] (contains blood, violence, gore; domestic abuse; child abuse; transphobia)
<u>Week 14:</u> Lara Today	Monday, 13 April 2026 <u>BEFORE CLASS:</u> WATCH: "Tomb Raider: The Legend of Lara Croft Official Trailer" (Netflix, 2024), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=Oe7CVCjgCzI] WATCH: "Tomb Raider: The Legend of Lara Croft Season 2 Official Trailer" (Netflix, 2025), [https://youtube.com/watch?v=v-UggcoSz5c] Wednesday, 15 April 2026 <u>IN CLASS:</u> WRAP UP
<u>Week 15:</u> Work on LCFM Zine	Monday, 20 April 2026 <u>NO CLASS MEETING</u> Work on LCFM Zine
<u>FINALS WEEK</u>	LCFM Zine due Thursday, 30 April 2026 by 11:59PM

Table 6: Course Schedule - Week 13-Finals Week

The descriptions and timelines in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.