



Course FTVM/DIGITAL 368.002 – Topics in Digital Media Studies: Queer and Trans Gaming

WGS 380.002 – Special Topics: Queer and Trans Gaming

Professor Dr. Josef Nguyen (he/him/his)

Term Fall 2025

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

PROFESSOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

Email Address josefn@umich.edu

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

Office Hours By email appointment, with in-office and online options

GENERAL COURSE INFORMATION

Course Description This course centers queer and trans experiences, relations, and knowledges to explore how gaming—from design to play—negotiates normative understandings and practices of gender and sexuality. Students will discuss a range of queer and trans games alongside readings in queer and trans game studies to consider how games participate in the constitution and potential reimagination of gender, sexuality, and the worlds they shape.

Learning Outcomes Students will:

- Become familiar with how queer and trans gaming (including design, play, and reception) negotiate normative gender and sexuality in the U.S.
- Develop facility with sociohistorically situated close textual and cultural analysis of games
- Advance proficiencies in critical thinking, research, and writing
- Incorporate insights from existing scholarship and media production into their own research and creative practice

Content Note As this course engages with queer and trans lives, experiences, and meanings as situated in a dominantly phobic world, course content will frequently discuss, reference, and engage with homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny 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 & Materials Aether Interactive, *LOCALHOST*, [aetherinteractive.itch.io/localhost]
Hexecutable, *Beglitched*, [hexecutable.itch.io/beglitched] (contains flashing visuals, depression, self-deprecation)
Kitfox Games, *Boyfriend Dungeon*, [kitfoxgames.itch.io/boyfriend-dungeon] (contains violence, blood, body horror, depression, suicidal ideation, stalking behavior, unwanted advances, emotional manipulation)
ryan rose aceae and Heather Flowers, *GENDERWRECKED*, [gendervamp.itch.io/genderwrecked] (contains gore, body horror, suicidal ideation)

All other readings, games, and additional materials are available for free in the Dropbox folder for the course.

Grading Criteria	Thoughtful Class Engagement	50%
	Queer and Trans Gaming Audio Journal	25%
	Final Project	25%

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 ecrtoffice@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, 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 lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity.html

Generative Artificial Intelligence (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 STUDENT SUPPORT RESOURCES

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 can include 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) (ssd.umich.edu) 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 (ssd.umich.edu/)
- 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 Well-Being

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 (wellbeing.studentlife.umich.edu/resources-list). 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 are in need of any accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible. You may also reach out to mcasp.org and CEW+ for resources and community support.

ASSIGNMENTS & ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Week 01: Monday, 25 August 2025

Beginnings IN CLASS:

Syllabus Overview

Class Introductions

Introduce Thoughtful Classroom Engagement Assignment

Introduce Queer and Trans Gaming Audio Journal Assignment

Wednesday, 27 August 2025

BEFORE CLASS:

PLAY: HiroRCK, *My Buddy Did Something Weird And Now I Have*

Feelings For Him??!?!?, [hiorck.itch.io/my-buddy-did-something-weird]

Week 02: Monday, 1 September 2025

Adjusting to the **NO CLASS MEETING – LABOR DAY**

Fall Semester

Wednesday, 3 September 2025

NO CLASS MEETING – INSTRUCTOR AT CONFERENCE

Introductory Audio Journal entry due by 11:59PM

Week 03: Monday, 8 September 2025

Queerness and/in BEFORE CLASS:

Games **READ:** Colleen Macklin, “Finding the Queerness in Games,” *Queer Game Studies* (eds. Bo Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw)

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PLAY: Anna Anthropy, *Queers in Love at the End of the World*, [w.itch.io/end-of-the-world]

Wednesday, 10 September 2025

BEFORE CLASS:

READ: Edmond Y. Chang, “Queergaming,” *Queer Game Studies* (eds. Bo Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw)

PLAY: Hatoge, *Boyfiends*, [hatoge.itch.io/boyfiends]

Week 04: Monday, 15 September 2025
Queering Play **BEFORE CLASS:**
* READ: Amber Muller, “Queering *Girl Talk* (*The Board Game*),”
[analoggamestudies.org/2015/07/queering-girl-talk-the-board-game/]
BRING: Personal example of an experience of queering play

Wednesday, 17 September 2025
BEFORE CLASS:
PLAY: Kitty Horrorshow, *Wolf Girls in Love*,
[kittyhorrorshow.itch.io/wolfgirls] (contains violence)
PLAY: Sean Wejebe, *when i was a boycow*, [wedgiebee.itch.io/when-i-was-a-boycow]

Week 05: Monday, 22 September 2025
Queering Game Design **BEFORE CLASS:**
* READ: Michael A. DeAnda and Gracie Lu Straznickas, “Undetectable Starting Points: Rethinking ‘Passing’ in Level Design through Queerness, Disability, and *Roxy’s Got Balls*”
PLAY: meritt k, *LIM*, [merritk.itch.io/lim] (contains flashing visuals)

Wednesday, 24 September 2025
BEFORE CLASS:
PLAY: Bakiara, *sHApELeSs*, [bakiara.itch.io/shapeless] (contains flashing visuals)
PLAY: Kara Stone and Kayte McKnight, *Cyborg Goddess*,
[karastone.itch.io/cyborg-goddess] (contains flashing visuals, blood)

Week 06: Monday, 29 September 2025
Queering Game Failure **BEFORE CLASS:**
* READ: Bo Ruberg, “No Fun: The Queer Potential of Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt”
PLAY: Christine Love, *Even Cowgirls Bleed*,
[scoutshonour.com/cowgirl/] (contains flashing visual effects, gunshot sounds, violence, blood, self-harm, possible suicide)

Wednesday, 1 October 2025
BEFORE CLASS:
PLAY: Robert Yang, *The Tearoom*, [radiatoryang.itch.io/the-tearoom]
(contains gun imagery, gunshot sounds)

Week 07: Monday, 6 October 2025

Queering BEFORE CLASS:

Simulation ****** READ: Teddy Pozo, “Queer Games After Empathy: Feminism and Haptic Game Design Aesthetics from Consent to Cuteness to the Radically Soft,” [gamestudies.org/1803/articles/pozo]

PLAY: Nicky Case, *Coming Out Simulator 2014*, [ncase.itch.io/coming-out-simulator-2014] (contains physical and emotional domestic abuse)

Wednesday 8 October 2025

BEFORE CLASS:

PLAY: Mattie Brice, *Mainichi*, [mattiebrice.com/mainichi/]

PLAY: micha cárdenas, *Redshift & Portalmetal*, [micharoja.itch.io/redshift-and-portalmetal]

Week 08: Monday, 13 October 2025

Queer **NO CLASS MEETING – FALL HOLIDAY**
Representation

**** Wednesday, 15 October 2025**

BEFORE CLASS:

READ: Adrienne Shaw, Evan W. Lauteria, Hocheol Yang, Christopher J. Persaud, and Alayna M. Cole, “Counting Queerness in Games: Trends in LGBTQ Digital Game Representation, 1985–2005”

EXPLORE: LGBTQ Video Game Archive, [lgbtqgamearchive.com/]

IN CLASS:

Introduce Final Project Assignment

Week 09: Monday, 20 October 2025

Queering BEFORE CLASS:
Representation ****** READ: Amanda Phillips, “Welcome to MY Fantasy Zone: *Bayonetta* and Queer Femme Disturbance,” *Queer Game Studies* (eds. Bo Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw)
BRING: Example of a queer reading of a canonically non-queer character

Wednesday, 22 October 2025

BEFORE CLASS:

READ: Ari Gass, “Glitch as a Trans Representational Mode in Video Games”

PLAY: Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, *RESURRECTIONLAND.COM*, [resurrectionland.com] (contains flashing and disorienting visuals)

Week 10: Monday, 27 October 2025

Queering BEFORE CLASS:

Romance ** PLAY: Nina Freeman, Emmett Butler, David Coss, and Jonathan Kittaka, *How Do You Do It?*, [ninasays.so/howdoyoudoit/]
PLAY: Jimmy Andrews and Loren Schmidt, *Realistic Kissing Simulator*, [jimmylands.com/experiments/kissing/]

Wednesday, 29 October 2025

BEFORE CLASS:

PLAY: Carrot, *Texting the Awkward Ace Guy You've Had a Crush on Since High School*, [justacarrot.itch.io/texting-the-awkward-ace-guy-youve-had-a-crush-on-since-high-school]
PLAY: Anna Anthropy and Leon Arnott, *Triad*, [w.itch.io/triad]

Week 11: Monday, 3 November

Queering BEFORE CLASS:

Interfaces *** READ: Whit Pow, "How the Computer Taught Us to See"
PLAY: Porpentine, *Foldscape*, [porpentine.itch.io/foldscape] (contains violence)

Wednesday, 5 November

BEFORE CLASS:

WATCH: D. Squinkifer and Jess Marcotte, *The Truly Terrific Traveling Troubleshooter*, [jeka.games/the-truly-terrific-traveling-troubleshooter/]
PLAY: Robert Yang, *Hurt Me Plenty*, [radiatoryang.itch.io/hurt-me-plenty] (contains light nudity, spanking) – play at least five times

Week 12: Monday, 10 November 2025

Case Study – BEFORE CLASS:

LOCALHOST *** PLAY: Aether Interactive, *LOCALHOST*, [aetherinteractive.itch.io/localhost] – 30 minutes of playtime – play at least twice

Wednesday, 12 November 2025

NO CLASS MEETING

BEGIN PLAYING *Beglitched*

Week 13: Monday, 17 November 2025
Case Study – BEFORE CLASS:
Beglitched *** PLAY: Hexecutable, *Beglitched*, [hexecutable.itch.io/beglitched]
(contains flashing visuals, depression, self-deprecation) – 6-7 hours
of playtime

Wednesday, 19 November 2025
NO CLASS MEETING
BEGIN PLAYING *Boyfriend Dungeon*

Week 14: Monday, 24 November 2025
Case Study – BEFORE CLASS:
Boyfriend *** PLAY: Kitfox Games, *Boyfriend Dungeon*,
Dungeon [kitfoxgames.itch.io/boyfriend-dungeon] (contains violence, blood,
body horror, depression, suicidal ideation, stalking behavior,
unwanted advances, emotional manipulation) – 5-6 hours of playtime

Wednesday, 26 November 2025
NO CLASS MEETING – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 15: Monday, 1 December 2025
Case Study – BEFORE CLASS:
GENDER- *** PLAY: ryan rose aceae and Heather Flowers, *GENDERWRECKED*,
WRECKED [gendervamp.itch.io/genderwrecked] (contains gore, body horror,
suicidal ideation) – 60 minutes of playtime

Wednesday, 3 December 2025
NO CLASS MEETING

Week 16: Monday, 8 December 2025
Wrap Up IN CLASS:
Wrap up and reflection

FINALS WEEK Final Project due Wednesday, 17 December 2025 by 11:59PM

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