



MUCH 495: Music, Sound, and Video Games

Fall 2021

Class Times and Location: T/Th 8:00am-9:15am (Bishop Hall C303)

Instructor

Dr. Erin Brooks

Email: brooksem@potdamsd.edu

Office: Schuette Hall A102

Office hours:

Office hours can be in person or via Zoom or by phone—any office hour is scheduled by appointment in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine!

Please email or message me to set up these office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space.

****For in-person office hours, we are likely to meet in my office and wear masks (depending on current campus protocols).**

Course Description and Objectives:

Though a small number of publications on video game sound appeared in the late 20th century, scholarly writing and analysis of game sound exploded in the first decade of the 21st century, from specific case studies in journals such as *Popular Music* to monographs such as Karen Collin's *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music* (2008) to a growing number of dissertations. A decade later, the state of this field is immense, and the term "ludomusicology" has emerged to detail the study of music and sound in, or related to, games.¹ To give a few examples: Ludomusicology, a Videogame Music Research Group organized in 2011, holds annual international conferences on video game music. The North American Conference on Video Game Music will hold its eighth annual meeting in 2021. And the bibliography compiled by the Society for the Study of Sound and Music in Games contains nearly 600 entries.

Drawing on this recent work in ludomusicology, "MUCH 495: Music, Sound, and Video Games" will explore the relationships between music, sound, and video games through an examination of how the concepts of play and gaming have changed over time and an analysis of the intellectual, didactic, physical, and emotional roles of music in video games. To guide our inquiry, we will study foundational writings by play theorists, game scholars, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists. We will investigate how music structures games, particularly in terms of participation/interactivity/adaptivity and non-linearity. Some units will include close listening and analysis of selected works. We will also focus on issues of spectatorship, competition, and racial, class, national, and gender identities.

While this is a musicology class—and therefore reading and analysis comprise a large portion of the classwork expectations—there are opportunities for video game play included in the course design. Yet no one's skill level is important; what is essential is that we think about how sound and music impact these games, our experience of them, and what roles such games play in contemporary media culture.

During the semester you will develop an individual research project. The topic of music and games is too broad for this class to even attempt a thorough coverage, which leaves plenty of room for you to research a topic that speaks to your particular interests (I will assist you in the expiration of topics). For your final project, you may choose to explore a specific genre or a theoretical issue. You should include personal analysis and observations, as well as discussion of your topic from published scholars (drawn from sources we have discussed in class or further readings you have discovered through your own research). Research, methods, and analysis will be shared with classmates at various stages; at the end of the semester, you will present your work and engage in peer commentary on each other's projects.

Students who successfully complete MUCH 495 should be able to:

- Articulate foundational theories about play and how those relate to/impact games in general, and video games in particular
- Recognize vocabulary, styles, genres, forms, and individual works from our class units on various aspects of music, sound, and video games
- Think creatively about how this class work influences your relationships with music
- demonstrate facility with resources for music history research
- frame a research question related to the course topic & identify appropriate sources for exploring the question
- analyze primary sources & critically read the secondary literature related to your research question in order to construct an argument

¹ As Will Gibbons notes in his Grove Music entry on ludomusicology, "broadly speaking, the term may apply to any type of game or sport, or to the relationship between music and play more generally...in practice, however, 'ludomusicology' has most commonly referred to the study of music and video games, or interactive media."

- communicate your ideas to classmates at various points in the research and writing process
- produce a final project

Course Prerequisites and Requirements:

Undergraduate students enrolled in this course should have successfully completed MUCB 323 (History III) or be co-enrolled.

Recommended Materials and How to Access Reading/Assignments:

There is no required text for this course. All readings and recordings for this course will be available to you through the Moodle site for this course. Visit <https://moodle.potsdam.edu> for your course resources.

For each class, log on to Moodle to access the materials—each day's module on Moodle will contain PDFs, links, etc for each class. Any reading or homework assignment listed for a specific day should be completed **prior to coming to class**—please come to class prepared and ready to ask and answer questions. You are responsible for regularly checking Moodle for assignments, discussion questions, and any possible updates/changes.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you are having any problems accessing any course materials. If you're having issues with Moodle or other computer-related problems, the number to the Computing & Technology Services (CTS) helpdesk is 315-267-4444 or helpdesk@potsdam.edu

For additional help with your assignments, the Crane Music library has a vast variety of resources. The url <https://library.potsdam.edu/music> will take you to a page with essential resources such as links to audio/visual databases, articles, the library catalog, etc. We'll talk more about specific resources as the class progresses.

Course Evaluation:

Grading will be based on four overall categories: Moodle weekly short assignments, in-class work (attendance, participation in in-class activities, discussion, in-class writing, etc), play days and reports, and a final research project (which has a number of internal steps). For more details on specific categories, see below:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Weekly assignments/posts on the Moodle forum | 20% |
| 2. Class attendance, Participation, Preparation | 20% |
| 3. Play Days and Reports (3 of these during the semester) | 30% |
| 4. Final Project | 30% |
- Projected due dates for each internal part will be posted on Moodle at the beginning of Week 4.
 - I reserve the right to push due dates back due to unforeseen events, etc

A little further explanation on each category:

#1: Weekly Assignments/Moodle Post/Discussion Forum Procedures and Guidelines:

- * After doing the reading/listening for a specific course day, I'll usually ask you to either complete an assignment and/or a discussion forum post on Moodle. Start early, stay on top of it, and it should help us start our discussions from a more complex and interesting place!

- * You are required to complete the assignment/post to the discussion forum throughout the semester. You may miss three of these assignments with no penalty whatsoever. If you miss additional ones beyond the three freebies, I'll enter those as zeros into your overall average for this section.
- * If I ask for a Moodle response, I typically mean: something in the neighborhood of half a page of writing, a nice fully-formed paragraph. Typically the best responses will pick up on something specific in the readings that you'd like to discuss—feel free to use direct quotes to ask questions, ponder ideas, pose dilemmas to your classmates. (Conversely, less good responses are more "generic," i.e. where it's not clear that you've done the reading or are referring to some specific content within it). I will often give you some specific guidelines or things to think about to help you focus your thoughts a little.
- * Your post or assignment must be completed the evening before our synchronous class, 11:59pm (so that I and others can read them before class that morning)

#2: Class attendance/Participation/Preparedness Procedures: Individual class sessions will combine lecture, listening, and discussion, and overall MUCH 495 will only succeed based on the amount of effort that you invest in it and to the extent to which it becomes an engaged, active learning community.

Each week during our class sessions, I will track attendance and participation. For participatory elements, you are expected to contribute (simply being present is not enough). You should always come to class session having taken notes on the assigned materials and ready to respond and ask questions. I will assess your participation grade based on your preparation and thoughtful participation in class. If participation in spoken class conversations is difficult for you—based on personality types, learning styles, access, etc—please come see me and we can find additional ways to make you feel more comfortable as you participate.

You can miss **three** classes for whatever reason with no penalty.

If you miss more than **three** synchronous classes, your participation grade will be docked by 5% for each additional absence. You are encouraged to check in with me or other class members to catch up on material you missed in any specific class.

If you have more extended issues this fall—illness, family concerns, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend the synchronous sessions—please schedule a time to talk to me *as soon as possible.* I want to help anyone in need find workarounds, but I can't help if I don't know the situation.

Except under extraordinary circumstances, if you miss more than **ten** classes during the term, I reserve the right to fail you in this course.

If you have a religious observance during the semester, any missed coursework during that particular class will not count against you. However, you must inform me before the relevant absence, you must still do the relevant coursework for that class date, and I reserve the right to give you alternate assignments.

#3 Play Day Reports and #4 Final Project—Individual Assignment sheets will be given on both these projects.

Course Policies

Grading

All grades will be determined on the following scale:

4.0: 95-100

2.7: 82-84

1.3: 68-71

3.7: 92-94	2.3: 78-81	1.0: 65-67
3.3: 88-91	2.0: 75-77	0.0: 0-64
3.0: 85-87	1.7: 72-74	

Please note that passing grade for an undergraduate course is a 2.0 (75% or above).

Grade Appeals

If you have questions about a grade, please speak with me (in person) first. Please note that the Undergraduate Catalog includes the specific criteria upon which you are allowed to appeal a course grade. If we cannot come to an informal resolution, you would then complete a formal Grade Appeal Form and we would consider if additional resolution is necessary. Details about the specific steps and timelines for this process are located in the Undergraduate Catalog: <https://catalog.potsdam.edu/content.php?catoid=4&navoid=191>

-
- **Emails:** I check email several times a day; if you don't hear back from me within 24 hours, feel free to try again. Please make sure to check your campus email regularly—I frequently send essential updates or class comments via email.
 - **Appointments/Office Hours:** Office hours can be in person or via Zoom or by phone—any office hour is scheduled by appointment in order to maximize the overlap between your schedule and mine! Please email or message me to set up these office hour meetings; I'm very happy to discuss course material or just offer a supportive ear for anything you'd like to share in a safe space. **For in-person office hours, we are likely to meet in my office and wear masks (depending on current campus protocols).
 - **Pandemic-related Protocols:** I know we're all very hopeful and grateful to gather here to make music, talk music, and have the opportunity to recreate an in-person community this fall (after so long!) And I know we all want to do this as safely as possible. Without emphasizing every point of the pandemic protocols, I'll just make note of the following couple of points (all are from <https://www.potsdam.edu/about/potsdam-prepared>):
 - SUNY Potsdam requires face coverings for all students, employees and visitors to campus. This policy will be evaluated after two weeks, based on case numbers on campus and in our surrounding community. The masking requirement will apply to all students and employees reporting to campus, regardless of vaccination status. Indoors: All students and employees must wear face coverings in shared indoor spaces, including classrooms, laboratories, studios, libraries, the Loughheed Learning Commons and faculty offices, and at campus activities/events. Social distancing is not required when everyone is fully masked. Masks may be removed in personal residence hall rooms and personal offices/workstations when individuals are socially distanced. In music classes, masks are required for all students, unless they are playing their wind instrument or if their professor asks them to remove it to sing (note: this is not necessary in this course).
 - Every SUNY Potsdam student and employee returning to campus will be asked to adhere to strict protocols recommended by public health. Inspired by our Potsdam Pledge, we will commit to protect each other's health and safety by: getting vaccinated (unless approved for an exemption, to protect ourselves and each other); if unvaccinated, wearing a face covering in all public spaces, complying with weekly testing, and maintaining social (physical) distancing in the presence of others in all campus spaces; getting tested for COVID if we start experiencing any symptoms; agreeing to complete

- quarantine or isolation periods when required; practicing good hygiene; being considerate of others, especially those at high risk.
- I will strictly follow campus protocols, namely that masks are required for the first two weeks of class. Based on campus numbers, guidance from administration, and the physical environment of our classroom, etc, I reserve the right to continue the masking policy beyond these two weeks if needed.
 - Given the changing nature of the pandemic and campus case numbers, it is entirely possible that circumstances may change during the semester (for better or worse). As the campus notes: "SUNY Potsdam will continue to work with our public health partners to ensure that our academic and campus preparations meet all the latest federal and state guidelines." As a faculty member, I will continue to follow official campus guidelines, which may mean that our classroom policies could change over the course of the semester (particularly concerning the wearing of masks). I'll keep you posted about any changes in policy as we go.
 - Please let me know if you have concerns—depending on the nature of the question, some of those inquiries may be redirected to the Dean or Assistant Dean, but I'm happy to work with you if you have any questions or concerns related to pandemic policies.
 - **Trauma-Sensitive Teaching:** In my entry ticket for the course, I asked each of you to feel free to come to me with any personal issues and/or other limitations that might impact your ability to participate in the semester; please always feel free to keep me updated should your circumstances change during the semester.
 - I am committed to using trauma-sensitive teaching and learning principles to support your resilience and success in this course. Trauma-sensitive principles help create a safe, transparent, connected, and collaborative classroom environment where you feel empowered and respected. Be sure to do periodic self-checks on how course material—and the ways in which material is delivered and discussed—are affecting you, and please talk with me if you are having difficulties with any aspect of the course. Getting support from friends, colleagues, family, and mental health professionals is also important, especially if you have risk factors or you find yourself becoming distressed. For additional links to campus and community services, see <https://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/wellness/counseling-center>
 - **Accessibility:** I'd like to borrow a few words from the wonderful scholar Mimi Khúc (scholar/artist/activist in Residence in Disability Studies at Georgetown University): "Everyone's access needs matter, and we will try collectively to meet them as they arise. Access needs are needs that when met enable participation in the course to the fullest--therefore they are wide-ranging and can be met in wide-ranging, creative ways. I am committed to making participation as accessible as possible. Please let me know if anything comes up that makes participation feel hard....We are taught not to have needs, that needs mean we are "weak"; resist this impulse. Access is relational. This means that creating access and accessibility is something we do together, in relationship and community. It requires a shared commitment to each other's wellbeing and participation in the community space, and requires communication and negotiation and flexibility. We learn each other's needs and try to meet them as best we can, so that we can all participate as much as possible in this classroom space. Everyone has access needs, and these needs change over time. I will try to anticipate as much as possible but I cannot know everyone's needs at all times. When you become aware of your access needs, please communicate them to me."
 - Note that there are no exams for this course, so there's no need to be concerned about any time constraints in terms of exams (though if you have other concerns please let me know). If you have any concerns about our in-class work, please let me know and I will work with you to find acceptable accommodations. I know that some of you may have a registration on file with Accommodative

Services (<http://potsdam.edu/support/oas>)—you're very welcome to share these with me. I look forward to talking to all of you about your access needs as we work together this semester.

- **Classroom conduct:** In this class, it is inevitable and important that we will disagree with points in the readings, critical approaches, and with each other. Critical engagement—which should include reasoned debate, critique, and questions—is essential to the central questions of this class, and is often the way we all learn the most. It is essential, however, that we be considerate in the ways we conduct these discussions; have an open mind, don't make assumptions about your classmates, have respect for different viewpoints, and hone your ability to listen thoughtfully and compassionately to each other and the instructor. Please let me know if you have any concerns about discussions during the semester.

Note in particular: I may occasionally give content warnings in class about class material on particular class dates. Please feel free to let me know (in private) if you have any concerns about any class content in this regard and we can find a solution for you.

- **Note taking:** A few friendly note-taking suggestions:
 - If I use slides at any point in class, I will post the slides on Moodle, no need to copy down all the info directly from the slides as you go. Most of our in-class time is not lecture-based anyway. It will help you the most to focus on ways of jotting down important verbal content from classroom discussions (i.e. material beyond just copying down any information directly from a slide). While everyone assimilates information differently—I do still strongly suggest that you take notes during class, otherwise it'll be murky down the road!
- **Technology:** we're likely to be using technology regularly in this class! Please feel free to come to me personal issues and/or technology limitations that might impact your ability to participate in the semester. You'll likely find it helpful to bring laptops, tablets, or phones to class—I'll let you know in advance if there's a particular class where it is especially useful to have such devices. Regardless of what we're doing during our in-class meetings (unless we're specifically using the internet to look things up) please try to help yourself focus on your classmates by refraining from multitasking (texting, being on social media, etc).
- **Attendance:**
 - You'll notice that the course is designed so that most of our in-class meetings are devoted to discussion, class collaborative projects, etc—none of which can work without your presence, hence why attendance is centrally important.
 - All of the class dates (Tuesday/Thursday) have an attendance component. You may miss **three** class sessions with no penalty, but you will likely still need to catch up on what we covered that day in class (please contact me when this pertains to you).
 - Above and beyond these three freebie sessions, your attendance and participation grade will be docked by 5 percentage points for each additional absence.
 - Except under extraordinary circumstances, if you miss more than **ten** classes during the term, I reserve the right to fail you in this course.
 - Per New York State Law, any student with a conflict between an academic requirement and any religious observance should be given an alternative for meeting the academic requirement. If you have a conflict with a class meeting or deadline due to a religious observance, please let me know well in advance (at least two weeks). You will not be penalized for missing class material, but you will have to makeup your class material in some alternate way.

- If you have more extended issues this fall—illness, family concerns, or anything else that significantly impacts your ability to attend class—please schedule a time to talk to me *as soon as possible.* I want to help anyone in need find workarounds, but I can't help if I don't know the situation.
- **Late work:**
 - Extensions will be given as a result of conversations you have with me (I've given extensions in the past for illness, mental health needs, emergencies, tech reasons, etc)—keep in mind that extensions are necessary in certain cases, but sometimes they also just your work unnecessarily and stress you out.
 - If you know you will have difficulty meeting a particular deadline, please talk with me about it—this should happen at least a day before the deadline except in unusual or emergency cases. As noted, I'm happy to work with you about extensions or other accommodations (although these do remain within my discretion to grant). For larger assignments—exams, projects, etc—if you do submit a late assignment without having a discussion with me, I retain the right to deduct 5% for each day the assignment is late.
- **Formatting and Writing Guidelines:** I will provide you a wordcount or length requirement for all assignments (or time length for any spoken presentations). As a matter of policy, the typical style required by many journals is double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, and one-inch margins (although I will not be policing acceptable font alternatives if you're devoted to Avenir font). Footnotes and bibliographies should be in Chicago Manual of Style; if you have another citation style you would like to use, you would need to discuss this with me in advance. Assignments must be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors. Minor problems will result in deductions; major writing issues may result in a request to redo the assignment. Continued problems may result in grade deductions. While I am always happy to assisting you with revisions for assignments, note that you can also receive additional assistance from the SUNY Potsdam Writing Center: <https://www.potsdam.edu/about/administrative-offices/international-education-programs/international-students-scholars-2-5>
- **Academic Integrity:** This class will follow SUNY Potsdam's policies on academic integrity. Please consult the Academic Honor Code website (<http://www.potsdam.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/honorcode>) or the Undergraduate Catalogue for more information regarding your responsibilities as a student. In general, academic misconduct includes acts in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another person or source without authorization or citation. Examples include (but are not limited to):
 1. Cutting and pasting text from the web without quotation marks or proper citation.
 2. Paraphrasing from the web or written texts without crediting the source.
 3. Using notes in an exam when such use is not allowed.
 4. Using another person's ideas, words, or research and presenting it as one's own.

I encourage you to discuss class content with each other. For assignments—unless expressly designed as partner or group projects—no collaboration with other students is permitted. Disguising work by others as your own undermines the academic community here at SUNY Potsdam. If you have any questions about this, don't hesitate to ask me. For specific questions on intellectual property and proper citation techniques, advice is available from me, from the SCCS, and from the Writing Center. If you're in doubt—it happens and is part of the learning process—just ask me!

Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and other academic honor code violations are taken very seriously. Any suspicious situations will be dealt with through proper judicial channels and may result in

serious consequences. For more information about academic misconduct procedures, see the processes and procedures at the Academic Honor Code website.