
ENGL 4XXX: Esports XXX 202X

*As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule
in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course.*
– Doug Stark

Instructor Information

Instructor Name

Doug Stark, Ph.D. (he/him/his)

Office Location

[Carlisle 413](#)

Office Phone Number

817-272-2692

Email Address

douglas.stark@uta.edu

Faculty Profile

[Doug Stark](https://www.uta.edu/academics/faculty/profile?username=starkdj) (https://www.uta.edu/academics/faculty/profile?username=starkdj)

Office Hours

Tu 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM and by appointment.

Communication Guidelines

Either chat with me after class or send me an email. I endeavor to respond within 48 hours.

Course Information

Section Information

ENGL 4375/ CSE 4392 - 001

Time and Place of Class Meetings

[EES 109](#), Mo/We 4:00 PM – 5:20 PM (CT), in person.

Description of Course Content

Since *Rolling Stone* covered the first event of its kind in 1972, competitive video gaming has grown into a global industry known as “esports.” This course surveys that development from arcade competitions to online platforms, examining esports from five perspectives: as sport, as design, as

business, as entertainment, and as culture and community. We will consider how video games are legitimated as sports, how design choices support fair play and spectacle, how institutions profit from competition, how media formats shape viewership, and how players and fans sustain grassroots communities. Alongside critical study, students will engage directly with esports practice. Activities include playing and analyzing competitive games, experimenting with training environments, meeting coaches and athletes, and participating in live match analysis. For final projects, students will receive technical support in The Basement, where they will have free access to games and production equipment. Assignments include weekly response papers, group presentations, and a choice of two culminating projects: 1) a ten-minute video essay or media production project, and 2) a short competitive video game or training environment accompanied by a four-page write-up.

Prerequisites

English majors must have earned a C or better in [ENGL 3350](#) and in one literature survey course ([ENGL 3340](#), [ENGL 3341](#), [ENGL 3351](#), [ENGL 3352](#), [ENGL 3361](#), or [ENGL 3362](#)). Non-English majors, apart from CSE majors, must have earned a C or better in 3 hours of sophomore literature ([ENGL 2303](#), [ENGL 2309](#), [ENGL 2319](#), [ENGL 2329](#)). For CSE majors, the only prerequisite is admission to the professional program.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Define and contextualize** key terms and concepts related to esports, including competitive gaming structures, genres, tournament formats, streaming cultures, and underlying technological infrastructures.
2. **Explain and critique** the historical development of esports from arcade competitions to contemporary global digital media ecosystems.
3. **Analyze and evaluate** the similarities and differences between esports and traditional sports, considering athleticism, skill metrics, digital training tools, institutional frameworks, and cultural recognition.
4. **Understand and assess** the organizational, economic, and technological structures of the esports industry, including roles of game publishers, teams, sponsors, event organizers, digital distribution platforms, and data analytics providers.
5. **Apply critical theories and technical methods** from media studies, cultural studies, game studies, and human-computer interaction (HCI) to investigate esports audiences, interactive streaming experiences, user interface (UI) design, and digital spectatorship practices.
6. **Identify and discuss** critical issues surrounding esports, including player health and ergonomics, ethical governance, algorithmic moderation, and community management strategies.
7. **Conduct independent critical and technical research** into esports topics, integrating empirical observations, scholarly literature, and design skills to produce an original work of esports scholarship, media coverage, or game development.
8. **Collaborate effectively** with peers in experiential learning activities involving practical technical work, such as gameplay analytics, training environment design, stream production, and esports event simulations.
9. **Exercise clear written, verbal, visual, and technical communication skills**, enabling professional-level discussion of esports phenomena, presentation of data-driven analyses, and clear documentation of technical projects.

Recording of Classroom and Online Lectures

Faculty maintain the academic right to determine whether students are permitted to record classroom and online lectures. Recordings of classroom lectures, if permitted by the instructor or pursuant to an ADA accommodation, may only be used for academic purposes related to the specific course. They may not be used for commercial purposes or shared with non-course participants except in connection with a legal proceeding. As the instructor of this course, I elect to prohibit the recording of classroom or online lectures, unless other arrangements have been made with my consent.

Assessment

Assignments and Weightings

Grades will be posted on Canvas. There are 100 points on offer. Totals equate to final letter grades:

A (90-100), B (80-89), C (70-79), D (60-69), F (<60)

The instructor reserves the right to adjudicate whether averaging up is warranted (e.g. 89.5 may receive an A). Further information on all assignments will be provided on Canvas and discussed in class. Unless stated otherwise, every assignment is due by 11:59 p.m. CT on the listed due date.

Assignment	Points	Description	SLOs	Due
Response Papers	30 (2.5x12)	500–1000 word Response Papers (RP) that prompt students to reflect on the week’s content (including reading/watching, lecture material, and experiential learning activities). There are 13 RP opportunities across the semester, each worth 2.5 points. Your best 12 will count toward your grade (30 points total). This means you may drop up to two responses if you submit more than 12.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Every Sunday starting 8/31
Group Debriefs	10 (5x2)	Twice during the semester, each group will serve as discussion leads at the start of class (5 points each time). Group Debriefs are 15–20 minute sessions designed to synthesize the previous week’s content and spark conversation. Groups should: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Summarize 2–3 key insights from the week’s readings, screenings, lectures, or activities.2. Connect these insights to the broader themes of the course or to esports culture/industry more generally.	1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9	Each group will be assigned two weeks during the semester to lead discussion. Debriefs are delivered

		<p>3. Pose at least two open-ended discussion questions for the class to consider.</p> <p>Each group should prepare a handout or short set of slides. Grading will be based on clarity of synthesis, quality of questions, and ability to foster discussion.</p>		ed in-class at the start of the assigned day.
Final Project Proposal + Annotated Bibliography	10	A 2-page proposal (double-spaced) outlining the final project, accompanied by a 0.5-page work timeline. Students must also include an annotated bibliography of at least 3 scholarly sources that support their project.	5, 7, 9	10/12
Final Project Draft	10	Submit a draft deliverable for feedback: video essayists turn in a 3–4 page script and media plan; designers turn in a 3–4 page design document. Both must include a timeline for completion.	5, 7, 9	11/2
Final Project	30	A ten-minute video essay, or competitive video game prototype/training environment with a 4-page write-up.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9	12/3
Participation	10	Participation (5): Curious, courteous, and prepared participation during class. Attendance (5): We have 29 meetings, attend 25 and receive 100%.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	N/A

Grounds for Grade Reduction

- Inappropriate, overbearing, or disruptive behavior in classes or on asynchronous platforms.
- Lateness: Late weekly assignments will not be accepted. Late one-off assignment submissions will receive a 1-point reduction per day late. Extensions will be granted on a case-by-case basis, but you must contact me *several days in advance* of the deadline. Three late arrivals to class will convert to an absence.
- Sloppiness: All assignments should include a title and the student's name and adhere to supplied formatting and style guidelines. Failure to do so will receive a 0.5-point reduction.
- Lack of attention: We allow devices in class, but only if they amplify your learning. Inattention will damage your participation grade.
- Seven or more absences may result in a failing grade for the course.
- Plagiarism in any mode of assessment will result in a failing grade for the course.

Grade Grievances

Any appeal of a grade in this course must follow the procedures and deadlines for grade-related grievances as published in the current [University Catalog Grades and Grading Policies](#).

Course Schedule

Week and Topic	Monday	Wednesday	Sunday
Week 1: History	8/18 (#1) Lecture: Introductions	8/20 (#2) Lecture: From Spacewar to Stadiums <i>Watch</i> Valve, Free to Play (2014), 1h 15 min <i>Read</i> Nothelfer, Jenny, and Besombes, “Defining and Spelling Esports” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 6-17	8/24 Nothing due
Week 2: Athleticism	8/25 (#3) Lecture: Esports vs. Traditional Sports <i>Read</i> Witkowski, “ On the Digital Playing Field ” (2012), 349-374	8/27 (#4) Activity: Skill and Training Lab <i>Play</i> (in class) Aimlabs (State Space Lab, 2023) Cornhole (circa 1980)	8/31 RP #1: Are esports players athletes? Why/why not? Due Tuesday 9/2
Week 3: Training	9/1 Labor Day (No Class)	9/3 (#5) Lecture: Esports Science <i>Read</i> Karhulahti, “Preface” and “Noob” in Esport Play (2022), x-20	9/7 RP #2: Identify a gaming skill you’ve acquired intentionally and explain how you developed that skill.

		<p><i>Watch</i> Lol Esports, “Nike LPL League of Legends Documentary,” 15 min.</p>	
Week 4: Sport	<p>9/8 (#6) Lecture: Esports Beyond Athleticism</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>T.L. Taylor, “Computer Games as Professional Sport” in Raising the Stakes (2012), 35-84</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>9/10 (#7) Activity: Video Editing Workshop Library 109</p>	<p>9/14 RP #3: Compare and contrast esports and traditional sports.</p>
Week 5: Design	<p>9/15 (#8) Lecture: Accident or Intention? On Designing for Esports</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Ashton, “Esports Developers, Publishers, and Design Considerations” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 54-64</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>9/17 (#9) Activity: B04 Game Design Workshop</p>	<p>9/21 RP #4: With reference to examples, which game design decisions do you think prime a video game to become a successful esports title?</p>
Week 6: Designing to Earn	<p>9/22 (#10)</p>	<p>9/24 (#11)</p>	<p>9/28</p>

	<p>Lecture: Monetizing Games as a Service (GaaS)</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Joseph, “Battle Pass Capitalism” (2021)</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>Activity: <i>Fortnite</i> in B04</p>	<p>RP #5: How does <i>Fortnite</i> generate revenue without (necessarily) charging an upfront cost, and what does this reveal about the link between game design and business strategy?</p>
Week 7: Business	<p>9/29 (#12)</p> <p>Lecture: Esports Business and Finance</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Parshakov and Barajas, “Esports Business and Finance” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 284-291</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>10/1 (#13)</p> <p>Activity: Follow the Money</p>	<p>10/5</p> <p>RP #6: With reference to an esports title that isn’t <i>Fortnite</i>, how do esports make money?</p>
Week 8: College	<p>10/6 (#14)</p> <p>Lecture: Esports on Campus and Beyond</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Richard et al., “Collegiate Esports as Learning Ecologies” (2019), 1-34</p> <p>Various authors, “UTA Esports News”</p> <p><i>Watch</i></p> <p>Aguilar, “Esports in Higher Education,” 12 min.</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>10/8 (#15)</p> <p>Activity: Esports Athlete Panel</p> <p><i>Task</i></p> <p>Prepare one question for our panel of esports athletes</p>	<p>10/12</p> <p>RP #7: What value does an esports program add to a university?</p> <p>Final Project Proposal + Annotated Bibliography due</p>

<p>Week 9: Aesthetics</p>	<p>10/13 (#16) Lecture: Beauty from Sports to Esports</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Foster-Wallace, “Roger Federer as Religious Experience” (2006)</p> <p>Partin, “Dota 2 as Religious Experience” (2014)</p> <p>Lehrer, “Sports” in <i>Encyclopedia of Aesthetics</i> (2014)</p> <p><i>Watch</i> (in class)</p> <p>Riefenstahl, excerpts from <i>Olympia</i> (1938)</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>10/15 (#17) Activity: Analyzing Performance From Sports to Esports</p> <p><i>Watch</i></p> <p>TheScore, “The Story of Daigo Umehara” (2013)</p>	<p>10/19 RP #8: When compared to traditional sports, which aesthetic challenges do esports face in their attempt to fascinate us?</p>
<p>Week 10: Broadcasting</p>	<p>10/20 (#18) Lecture: Streaming Killed the TV Star</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>T.L. Taylor, “Esports Broadcasting” in Watch Me Play (2018), 136-211</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>10/22 (#19) Activity: Watch Party</p>	<p>10/26 RP #9: How does watching esports through broadcasting differ from experiencing it live in the arena, and what does this difference reveal about the role of media in shaping spectatorship?</p>
<p>Week 11: Live Streaming</p>	<p>10/27 (#20) Lecture: Watch me Twitch, Watch me Play Play</p> <p><i>Read</i></p>	<p>10/29 (#21) Activity: Twitch Stream Analysis</p>	<p>11/2 RP #10: How do Twitch streams maintain our attention? Consider both the streamer</p>

	<p>T.L. Taylor, “Home Studios” in Watch me Play (2018), 66-135</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i> JRGT09</p>		<p>and the user interface.</p> <p>Final Project Draft Due</p>
Week 12: Cultural Problems	<p>11/3 (#22) Lecture: Critical Concerns in Esports</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Brock and Cote, “Introduction to Critical Concerns in Esports” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 479-481</p> <p>Then, as a group, decide to read ONE other chapter from the section on “Critical Concerns in Esports” (482-574)</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>11/5 (#23) Activity: Critical Concerns Discussion</p> <p><i>Task</i></p> <p>Be prepared to talk about why your group’s critical concern matters.</p>	<p>11/9 RP #11: Which critical concern in esports do you find most urgent, and why?</p>
Week 13: Practical Solutions	<p>11/10 (#24) Lecture: Who Plays? Who Watches?</p> <p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Helmefalk et al., “Organizing Esports Events” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 302-314</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>11/12 (#25) Activity: Ethical Event Design Challenge</p>	<p>11/16 RP #12: If you were charged with making esports a more ethical industry, what event would you propose, how would you run it, and why would it be important?</p>
Week 14: The Future	<p>11/17 (#26) Lecture: What’s Next?</p>	<p>11/19 (#27) Final Project Workshop</p>	<p>11/23 RP #13: Drawing on course materials and</p>

	<p><i>Read</i></p> <p>Jenny et al., “The Future of Esports” in Routledge Handbook of Esports (2025), 657-670</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>		<p>your own experiences, what do you see as the future of esports, and what role might you or your generation play in shaping it?</p>
Week 15: Workshop	<p>11/24 (#28) Final Project Workshop</p>	<p>11/26 Thanksgiving (No Class)</p>	
Week 16: Review	<p>12/1 (#29) LDOC Review</p> <p><i>Debrief Lead:</i></p>	<p>12/3 Final Projects Due</p>	<p>12/7</p>

Read, Play, and Watch: Unless specified as “in class,” readings, watchings, and playings must be completed **before** the class session they correspond with. All watching and reading will be accessible online or through the course’s Google Drive. Video games will either link from the syllabus or be accessible in [The Basement](#).

Slides: I create extensive slides for posterity. If you miss a session, reviewing those slides closely – playing included videos and games, thinking through posed questions, and taking notes – will prepare you for the next class.

Required Articles, Excerpts, and Media Available on Canvas

Aguilar, Mario. “Esports in Higher Education.” Video, 2019.

Aimlabs. *Aim Lab*. State Space Labs, 2023.

Foster Wallace, David. “Roger Federer as Religious Experience.” *The New York Times Magazine* (August 20, 2006).

Goto-Jones, Chris. “Is Street Fighter a Martial Art?” 171–208, 2016.

Jenny, S. E., Besombes, N., Brock, T., Cote, A. C., & Scholz, T. M. (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Esports*. Routledge, 2025.

- Karhulahti, Veli-Matti. *Esport Play*. MIT Press, 2022.
- Lehrer, “Sports.” In *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, edited by Michael Kelly. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- LoL Esports. “Nike LPL League of Legends Documentary.” Video, 2019.
- Partin, William. “Dota 2 as Religious Experience.” *Kill Screen* (March 25, 2014).
- Richard, Gabrielle T., et al. “Collegiate Esports as Learning Ecologies.” *ToDigra* (2019): 1–34.
- Riefenstahl, Leni. *Olympia*. 1938. Film.
- Scholz, Tobias. *eSports is Business: Management in the World of Competitive Gaming*. Springer, 2019.
- Taylor, Nick, Jen Jenson, and Suzanne de Castell. “Cheerleaders/Booth Babes/Halo Hoes: Pro-gaming, Gender and Jobs for the Boys.” *Digital Creativity* 20, no. 4 (2009): 239–252.
- Taylor, T. L. *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. MIT Press, 2012.
- . *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton University Press, 2018.
- TheScore Esports. “The Story of Daigo Umehara.” Video, 2013.
- Valve Corporation. *Free to Play*. Documentary film, 2014.
- Witkowski, Emma. “On the Digital Playing Field: How We ‘Do Sport’ with Networked Computer Games.” *Games and Culture* 7, no. 5 (2012): 349–374.
- Zubek, Robert. *Elements of Game Design*. MIT Press, 2020.

University Policies

UTA students are encouraged to review the institutional policies and informational sections below and reach out to the specific office with any questions. To view this institutional information, please visit the [Institutional Information](#) page, which includes the following policies, among others:

- Drop Policy
- Disability Accommodations
- Title IX Policy
- Academic Integrity
- Student Feedback Survey
- Final Exam Schedule

Attendance

Attending class sessions is a critical predictor and indicator of student success. The University of Texas at Arlington does not recognize a single attendance policy but encourages faculty to establish class-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I will take attendance for every class session.

Generative AI Use in This Course

The use of Generative AI (GenAI) in course assignments and assessments must align with the guidelines established by the instructor. Unauthorized use of GenAI could result in breaches of academic integrity. Instructors bear the responsibility of clearly delineating the permissible uses of GenAI in their courses, underscoring the importance of responsible and ethical application of these tools.

The [UTA Office of Community Standards](#) articulates the university's stance on [academic integrity and scholastic dishonesty](#). These standards extend to the use of GenAI. Unauthorized or unapproved use of GenAI in academic work falls within the scope of these policies and will be subject to the same disciplinary procedures.

As the instructor of this course, I have adopted the following policy on Student use of GenAI: **Cited use of GenAI, which means that** this course permits the use of Generative AI (GenAI) as a resource for completing assignments. However, transparency is crucial: Students are required to explicitly cite any GenAI tools they utilize in the creation of their work. This citation requirement allows for the acknowledgment of the collaborative nature of GenAI in the learning process while enabling the assessment of student learning to remain focused on the achievement of the course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

That said, the instructor reserves the right to assess AI misuse on a case-by-case basis: If the instructor deems that the use of AI in a particular context is impeding SLOs, then the instructor will first offer the student a warning before delivering grade penalties for subsequent misuse.

Academic & Wellness Resources

Academic Success Center

The Academic Success Center (ASC) includes a variety of resources and services to help you maximize your learning and succeed as a student at the University of Texas at Arlington. ASC services include supplemental instruction, peer-led team learning, tutoring, mentoring, and TRIO SSS. Academic Success Center services are provided at no additional cost to UTA students. For additional information visit: [Academic Success Center](https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance) (https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance). To request disability accommodations for tutoring, please complete this [tutoring request form](https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance/tutoring/request) (https://www.uta.edu/student-success/course-assistance/tutoring/request).

The English Writing Center (411LIBR)

The Writing Center offers **FREE** tutoring in 15-, 30-, 45-, and 60-minute face-to-face and online sessions to all UTA students on any phase of their UTA coursework. Register and make appointments online at the [Writing Center](https://uta.mywconline.com) (https://uta.mywconline.com). Classroom visits, workshops, and specialized services for graduate students and faculty are also available. Please see [Writing Center: OWL](http://www.uta.edu/owl) (http://www.uta.edu/owl) for detailed information on all our programs and services.

Academic Plaza

The Library's 2nd floor [Academic Plaza](http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza) (http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza) offers students a central hub of support services, including IDEAS Center, University Advising Services, Transfer

UTA and various college/school advising hours. Services are available during the [library's hours](https://library.uta.edu/hours) (<https://library.uta.edu/hours>) of operation.

UTA CARE Team

UT Arlington is committed to the safety, success, and well-being of our students. To support our community, UTA has created a CARE Team, which is a dedicated group of campus professionals responsible for helping students who could benefit from academic, emotional, or psychological support, as well as those presenting risk to the health or safety of the community. If you know of someone experiencing challenges, appearing distressed, needing resources, or causing a significant disruption to the UTA community, please submit a [CARE Referral](#) by visiting the [Behavior Intervention Team](#) (<https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/dos/behavior-it>) page. You may also submit a referral for yourself if you would like additional support.

NOTE: If a person's behavior poses an immediate threat to you or someone else, contact UTA Police at 817-272-3303 or dial 911. If you or someone you know needs to speak with a crisis counselor, please reach out to the [MAVS TALK 24-hour Crisis Line](#) (<https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/caps/crisis>) at 817-272-8255 or the [National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) (<https://988lifeline.org/>) at 988.

Student Services

Everything you need to make the most of your time as a student (and beyond) is all on campus. Below are a few resources to get you started.

- [Student Services Home](#)
- [Student Access and Resource \(SAR\) Center](#)
- [Military and Veteran Services](#)
- [Health Services](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)
- [Activities and Organizations](#)
- [Recreation](#)

Librarian to Contact

Each academic unit has access to [Librarians by Academic Subject](#) (<https://libraries.uta.edu/research/librarians>) that can assist students with research projects, tutorials on plagiarism, and citation references, as well as support with databases and course reserves.

Safety Information & Resources

Face Covering Policy

Face coverings are not mandatory; all students and instructional staff are welcome to wear face coverings while they are on campus or in the classroom.

Emergency Exit Procedures

Should we experience an emergency event that requires evacuation of the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located on your left after going left out of classroom EES 109. When exiting the building during an emergency, do not take an elevator but use

the stairwells instead. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

MavAlert System

The MavAlert system sends information to cell phones or email accounts of subscribed users in case of an emergency. Anyone can subscribe to MavAlerts at [Emergency Communication System](https://www.uta.edu/uta/emergency.php) (<https://www.uta.edu/uta/emergency.php>).

Emergency Phone Numbers

In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number 817-272-3381