

POLI 452

Conflict Simulation

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Rex Brynen
email: rex.brynen@mcgill.ca

CLASS HOURS: While the class is formally scheduled on Minerva for TR 16h05-17h25, there will be **no in-person class activities** this term.

Instead, course material will be delivered in several ways:

Video lectures. A series of prerecorded lectures will be posted to myCourses.

Zoom sessions. There will be regular seminar-style Zoom sessions on Thursdays at 16h05-17h00 discussing the lectures and presenting additional material. Although these will be recorded, you are expected to attend if possible—game design is an interactive process, and simply watching others discuss it is not the best way to learn.

Gaming participation activities. There will be a variety of (virtual) participation activities offered during the term: attending online professional conferences or presentations, taking part in serious games hosted on Zoom, and so forth. These will be scheduled at different times and days. You will need to take part in some of these to earn full participation grades, but which ones you “attend” will be entirely up to you. You can also contribute to online (myCourses) discussions.

OFFICE HOURS: I will have two types of “office hours” this term. First, I will be available after the Zoom session each Thursday, from 17h00 until 17h30. Second, you may email me for a Zoom appointment for any day of the week—just let me know your availability. I will not be available for in-person meetings.

IMPORTANT: If anything is not clear, if you are encountering difficulties dealing with the online format of the course, or if the COVID-19 pandemic (or other issues) are interfering with your studies, **please reach out and let me know and I’ll be happy to make appropriate adjustments.** This is a challenging experience everyone, and effective communication, flexibility, and feedback will be key to making it work. Be sure to check myCourses often for information, announcements, and updates.

Course Description

This course will introduce students to conflict simulation design and explore the use of wargaming and other serious games for military planning, policy analysis, training, and education.

Prerequisites

Students are required to have taken at least one previous course in comparative politics or international relations.

Course Texts

The required texts for this course are:

Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict Through Simulation Games* (Continuum Books, 2012). Available from the McGill bookstore or Amazon (Kindle).

UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence Wargaming Handbook* (Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, 2017). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-wargaming-handbook>

Course Requirements and Grading

Quiz 1 (January 25-26)	8%
Quiz 2 (February 15-16)	8%
Quiz 3 (March 15-16)	8%
Final exam (university-scheduled)	26%
Conflict simulation activities and participation	15%

Plus, either:

Individual research paper	
• research paper proposal (due February 11)	5%
• research paper (due March 25)	30%

or:

Group conflict simulation design project	
• game design proposal (due January 28)	5%
• finished game design (due April 10)	30%

Quizzes: These will consist of a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions, written via myCourses. Each quiz will be available for 48 hours and you will have 3 hours to complete it (although it should take only an hour or so).

Final exam: "Take-home" exam (short and essay answers) via myCourses. You will have 72 hours to complete it, and it will be due on the day and time scheduled by the university.

Conflict simulation activities and participation: You will be able to earn up to 15% of your course grade by taking part in online gaming demonstrations, attending virtual lectures and conferences, and downloading and playing certain

digital games. You can also earn credits by contributed to online myCourses discussions. A full list of eligible activities and their credit value will be posted to myCourses throughout the term.

There are two possible project activities, EITHER an individual research paper OR a group game design project. You must decide on one or the other by February 11 and have this approved by the instructor.

Research paper: If you opt to write a research paper it should examine some aspect of serious games or explore the political significance of gaming as a social activity. This is a solo assignment—you may not submit a group paper.

A *research paper proposal* is due on February 11, outlining your proposed research question and discussing how you will address it. This should be up to 250 words in length, plus a one page working bibliography. Further guidance will be posted to myCourses. Late proposals will be accepted up to February 18, at a penalty of 2% per day.

The *research paper* itself is due on March 25. This should be 4-5,000 words in length, not including notes and references/bibliography. Late papers will be accepted up to April 1, at a penalty of 2% per day.

Conflict simulation design project. In a group of 3-5 students you will design a serious game that examines:

- a historical or current conflict in a way that balances accuracy and playability, while offering insight into conflict dynamics and the choices faced by real-world actors; or
- a potential future conflict, in a way that offers insight into capabilities, strategies, and choices.

A *game design proposal* is due on or before January 28. This should consist of a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation in which you “pitch” your idea, delivered live via Zoom. If this proposal is rejected or is considered too difficult for online design, you will be asked to complete a research paper instead.

During the February 25 and March 25 Zoom sessions you will have an opportunity to brief the rest of the class on your progress. This briefing is not graded but is an excellent opportunity to get feedback.

The *finished game* is due on April 10. This game should include:

- a physical or virtual copy of the playable game
- a copy of the rules
- background research on the conflict (c1,500 words, plus bibliography of sources consulted)
- a development diary, documenting the rationale behind the game design, as well as an account of development, meetings, playtests, and revisions (c2,000 words)

The rubric to be used in assessing each game will be posted to myCourses, as will additional information on the assignment.

Important Fine Print

Group work can be challenging, and games take far longer to design, playtest, and revise than you think. This is not something that can be left until late in the term! Good project management and teamwork skills are essential, especially in an online environment. Failure to contribute to group efforts will result in a substantial reduction of your grade.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Also, it is important to note that incidents of plagiarism will be dealt with severely. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is or how to identify your sources, ask your teaching assistant. MCGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE, ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Schedule

The Zoom sessions will be of greatest value if you have watched the lecture and done the readings in advance.

Week 1: Introduction (January 7-10)

Read course outline

Introduction to POLI 452 video lecture

Zoom seminar (January 7)

Week 2: History of Wargaming (January 11-17)

Invicta, "How Did War Become a Game?" YouTube, 28 June 2019, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-seIA9tukDs>

Defense One, "Wargames," *Defense One Radio*, 29 October 2019, at <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/10/ep-58-wargames/160923>

Paul Strong, "Wargaming the Atlantic War: Captain Gilbert Roberts and the Wrens of the Western Approaches Tactical Unit," paper presented to the MORS wargaming special meeting, October 2017, accessed via PAXsims at <https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2017/12/20/wargaming-the-atlantic-war-captain-gilbert-roberts-and-the-wrens-of-the-western-approaches-tactical-unit/>

History of wargaming video lecture

Zoom seminar (January 14)

Week 3: Principles of serious game design (January 18-24)

UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence Wargaming Handbook* (Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, 2017), Chapters 1-3, Annex A

ED McGrady and Peter Perla, "Why Wargaming Works," *Naval War College Review* 64, 3 (2011), at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol64/iss3/8/>

Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict Through Simulation Games* (Continuum Books, 2012), chapters 1-4.

Principles of serious game design video lecture

Zoom seminar (January 21)

Quiz 1 (January 25-26)

Week 4: Distributed gaming and game design (January 24-30)

Pete Pelegrino, "Distributed Gaming Taxonomy," *YouTube*, 18 August 2020, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ax8W-6JgsNg&feature=emb_logo

Distributed gaming and game design video lecture

Zoom seminar (January 28)

Week 5: Modelling conflict I (February 1-7)

Philip Sabin, *Simulating War: Studying Conflict Through Simulation Games* (Continuum Books, 2012), chapters 5-8.

CNA, "How to Make a Wargame," *CNA Talks* episode 22 (2018), at <https://www.cna.org/news/podcast>

Modelling conflict I video lecture.

Zoom seminar (February 4)

Week 6: Modelling conflict II (February 8-14)

Rex Brynen, "Gaming the Nonkinetic," and Brian Train and Volko Ruhnke, "Chess, Go, and Vietnam: Gaming Modern Insurgency," in Pat Harrigan and Matthew Kirschenbaum, eds., *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2016).

CNA, "Playing a Wargame," *CNA Talks* episode 26 (2018), at <https://www.cna.org/news/podcast>

Modelling conflict II video lecture.

Zoom seminar (February 11)

Quiz 2 (February 15-16)

Week 7: Connections North (February 15-21)

Various presentations and sessions associated with the Connections North professional wargaming conference (February 19-21).

Zoom seminar (February 18)

Week 8: Game design workshop (February 22-28)

Student game design briefings

Other readings TBA

Zoom seminar (February 25)

Reading Break (March 1-5)

Week 9: Negotiation simulations (March 8-14)

Natasha Gill, *Inside the Box: Using Integrative Simulations to Teach Conflict, Negotiation, and Mediation*, (Zurich: Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2015), at http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Inside_the_Box-Gill.pdf, read Chapter 1 and skim rest.

Negotiation simulations video lecture.

Zoom seminar (March 11)

Quiz 3 (March 15-16)

Week 10: Seminar and matrix games (March 15-21)

Rex Brynen, Tom Fisher, and Tom Mouat, *Matrix Game Construction Kit User Guide* (The Game Crafter, 2016), via myCourses.

Negotiation simulations video lecture.

Zoom seminar (March 18)

Week 11: Game design workshop (March 22-28)

Student game design briefings

Other readings TBA

Zoom seminar (March 25)

Week 12: Best and worst practices (March 29-April 4)

UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence Wargaming Handbook* (Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, 2017), Chapter 4.

CNA, "After the Wargame," *CNA Talks* episode 32 (2018), at <https://www.cna.org/news/podcast>

Best and worst practices video lecture.

Zoom seminar (April 1)

Week 13: Conclusion and Review (March 29-April 4)

Pete Pellegrino, What is a War Game? US Naval War College *YouTube* (2012),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maHpGR-Vj4Q>

Zoom seminar (April 8)

Additional Resources

You may find these works useful in your coursework or if you want to dig deeper into a topic, but they are not required. Content from these will NOT appear in the quizzes, unless they have been discussed in class.

Jeff Appleget, Robert Burks, and Fred Cameron, *The Craft of Wargaming: A Detailed Planning Guide for Defense Planners and Analysts* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020). Useful self-directed learning on designing wargames for the national security community.

Matt Caffrey, *On Wargaming* (US Naval War College Press, 2019). A detailed history of wargaming. Available as a free e-book at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/newport-papers/43/>

John Curry, Chris Engle, and Peter Perla, eds., *The Matrix Game Handbook* (History of Wargaming Project, 2018). Examination of various matrix game approaches and techniques.

Stephen Downes-Martin, "Your Boss, Players, and Sponsor: The Three Witches of War Gaming," *Naval War College Review*, 67, 1 (Winter 2014), at <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1245&context=nwc-review>

James F. Dunnigan, *The Complete Wargames Handbook* (1997). A guidebook to the design of commercial wargames for the hobby market. Available at <http://www.professionalwargaming.co.uk/Complete-Wargames-Handbook-Dunnigan.pdf>

Geoffrey Engelstein and Isaac Shalev, *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2020). An extremely useful "encyclopaedia" of game mechanics. Available as e-book via McGill library.

Graham Longley-Brown, *Successful Professional Wargames: A Practitioners Handbook* (History of Wargaming Project, 2019). Very useful discussion of wargaming techniques.

Peter Perla, *The Art of Wargaming* (Naval Institute Press, 1990). A modern classic on the design and use of wargames.

US Naval War College, *War Gamers' Handbook: A Guide for Professional War Gamers* (Annapolis: US Naval War College, nd) Detailed overview of the steps involved in designing, organizing, and analyzing a large, professional wargame. Yes, the US NWC spells "war gamers" as two words.

Christopher Weuve et al, *Wargame Pathologies* (CNA, 2004), at https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/D0010866.A1.pdf

In addition, you will always find much of interest at:

PAXsims at <http://www.paxsims.org>

Georgetown University Wargames Society *YouTube* channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw0nVuQu5KoHv0kFic9yX4Q/videos>

King's Wargaming Network *YouTube* channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgHWLM5I32fRKgoClCDaNhg>

Table Top History (videos and other resources by Pete Pellegrino) at <https://www.tabletohistory.net>

