Course Syllabus: The Art of Fighting Games

Japan 198, Spring 2024, 2 units

Time: Tuesday (Lecture), 5-6:30 pm at Etcheverry 3119
     Thursday (Lab), 5-6:30 pm at the Cal Esports Community Center

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             Matthew Kwon (aoxb321@berkeley.edu)

Faculty Sponsor: Chika Shibahara
Office Hours: By appointment/email

Course Prerequisites
There are no prerequisites. Extra experience in gaming, especially fighting games, would be helpful to have, but not necessary. The only thing you do need is a willingness to learn and fail! The course will not be graded on how well you perform in the game but on your eagerness, commitment to improvement, and effort in the course assignments.

Course Description
Welcome to 1980s Japan: you are a salaryman coming home from a long day of work, but before you return home, you stop by the cultural haven of the entertainment industry at the time: the arcade. Arcades, and in particular, fighting games, have always been a pillar of Japanese culture and media. From references in pop culture to a vast esports scene surrounding the genre, the modest origin of fighting games in arcades has evolved into a global phenomenon uniting community, competition, and culture all through the unlikely medium of games. Although the genre of fighting games has always been infamous for being a difficult genre of video games due to its seemingly higher levels of execution, in this course, we are aiming to help bring students with less than 100 hours of experience to a mid-level of play with guided assistance to offer the smoothest introduction to the world of fighting games. Additionally, we will also explore beyond the game itself and spend some time focusing on the community, history, and impact of fighting games on Japanese culture. Besides just fighting game skill and knowledge, this course is also designed to serve as a gateway to understanding modern Japanese culture and will offer students a way to interact with Japanese history and even the Japanese language. By the end of this course, you will be more proficient in the fundamentals of a fighting game and be more knowledgeable about the genre overall, on top of having a more informed understanding of how modern-day Japan’s media culture came to be.

Disclaimer: This course is teaching fundamentals of 2D fighters, not platform fighters like Super Smash Bros.
Learning Objectives Q#2
● Understand the fundamentals of fighting games
● Understand fighting game jargon
● Learn different techniques to improve game sense and technical execution
● Learn to identify how to improve oneself in a competitive environment
● Learn about the culture and history of the fighting game community and Japan
● Learn about tournaments and how they are run

Course Format Q#3
We will meet twice a week for twelve weeks. One hour and a half will be dedicated to a lecture and practice going over various topics to learn in a fighting game. The other hour and a half is a lab section, in which we will have a discussion about the topics we learned in class before testing out some of the knowledge obtained from lectures hands-on in a fighting game against peers.

Required Materials
● Computer to play at home or bring to lecture
  ○ Any operating system that will be able to run Fightcade, the software we will be using to play this semester’s game.
  ○ Ideally, the student can bring their computer to lecture to learn while we are teaching.
● Controller to play fighting games (whatever you would like to play on, choose one!)
  ○ Keyboard (Personal one or there will be some at the community center)
  ○ Controller (Xbox or Playstation)
  ○ Fightstick (Hitbox, etc.)
● Joining the Discord (specific to the class)

Grades and Assessments Q#4
● All grades will be posted on Bcourses. Google Form links will be sent out via email and the class Discord for students to submit their assignments.
● P/NP: This class can only be taken P/NP.
● Attendance (30%)
  ○ Every time we meet there will be an attendance form to fill out.
  ○ Please let us know if you will not be able to make it to a lecture or a lab section in advance. If you do not let us know it will count as an unexcused absence and will potentially fail you this course.
  ○ You will have 3 unexcused absences total for both labs and lectures. If you meet this threshold you will not pass the course.
● Homework (20%)
○ Every week (except for exam weeks) there will be a reading, written assignment, or video submission to complete for credit.
○ Each assignment will be due the following week before each Tuesday lecture.
○ If you cannot complete the assignment within that time frame, please let us know so we can grant an extension.
○ You will need to complete 6 of 8 homework assignments to pass the course.

● Exams (20%)
○ At the end of every chapter, there will be a Swiss-style tournament in which every student will fight other students. Replays of the matches will be saved, and to receive full credit one must submit a reflection on their experience and what they think they should improve on. If a student is unable to make the tournament date, they will instead receive a separate project assignment related to the previous unit’s material.

● Research Project (30%)
○ In place of a final, there will be a research project for students to complete in groups of up to 4. Each group will research a historically significant player in fighting game history and give a presentation to the class about the player’s background, their contributions/impact on fighting games, as well as a short analysis of their playstyle through a video example.
○ Example names: Bala, Justin Wong, Xiaohai, Daigo Umehara, Tokido

Required Readings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homework</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Japanese Culture Through Videogames - Rachael Hutchinson</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2        | 1. Japanese Hip-Hop - MIT OpenCourseWare  
          | 2. INFINITE On Creating The Theme Song For The Iconic Video Game 'STREET FIGHTER III 3RD STRIKE'  
          | 3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ci9wkNnFfGA |
| 3        | Wired: Covid Is Pulling the Plug on Beloved Japanese Arcades |
| 4        | The Making of Street Fighter II  
          | OR  
          | Day in the Life of a Japanese Street Fighter 6 Game Planner |
| 5        | TBD |
| 6        | How do I practice playing against the player? - Patrick Miller |
Helpful Resources

1. The Fighting Game Glossary by Infil: an extensive glossary for fighting game jargon.
   LINK: https://glossary.infil.net/
2. Dustloop Wiki by the FGC: a wiki for anime fighting games including character descriptions, details, frame data, etc., and also more general fighting game concepts like numpad notation
   LINK: https://dustloop.com/wiki/index.php
3. Mizuumi by the FGC: Dustloop, but for niche anime fighting games
   LINK: https://wiki.gbl.gg/
4. SuperCombo.gg by the FGC: Dustloop, but for Capcom games like Street Fighter (and Smash Melee for some reason)
   LINK: https://wiki.supercombo.gg/
5. Replay Theater by setzerfgdb: Links to replays of matches for many different games
   LINK: https://replaytheater.app/

Berkeley FGC Discord
Feel free to join our regular Discord that we are active in! It will contain all the information on how to meet up for our weekly play sessions and locals. (https://discord.gg/zA9UcPvdYH)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Due Homework</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGINNER</td>
<td>1 Lecture</td>
<td>1/30/2024 Introductions, general mechanics of a fighting game, method of control, character archetypes, strike throw vs. mixup</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>2/1/2024 Japanese stereotypes in character design, how character design and stories have changed with the globalization of Japanese media. Main Question: Over time, as Japan and the rest of the world have globalized, the target audience that Japanese media companies created content for changed from a solely Japanese audience to a global audience. As this transition happened, how did Japan’s philosophy behind character design in media change?</td>
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<td>Lecture</td>
<td>2/6/2024 Origins of the fighting game community, Japanese arcades and leisure-time culture, basic offensive/defensive options, neutral triangle.</td>
<td>Due: Homework #1</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
<td>2/8/2024 Origins of Japanese and American digital interaction, Japanese inspiration on American media and American inspiration on Japanese media. Main Question: What sources of inspiration did American culture take from Japan, and Japanese culture from America? In what ways did the cultures compliment each other, and in what ways did they clash?</td>
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<td>Lecture</td>
<td>2/13/2024 Major tournaments, parry, meter, and super, intro to hit confirming.</td>
<td>Due: Homework #2</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
<td>2/15/2024 Decline of arcade culture, increased demand for convenience over community, controlling nerves in a</td>
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### Main Question:
What are the various factors behind why Japanese arcade culture declined over time? How has the definition of “digital entertainment” changed with the new digital age?

### Secondary Question:
Nerves and anxiety are something that everybody has, which are especially amplified in competitive environments. What are some common tactics to control nerves and enjoy an activity that is also competitive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Lecture 2/20/2024</th>
<th>Growth mentality, footsies, attack spacing, whiff punishing.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lab 2/22/2024</td>
<td>Exam #1 Tournament</td>
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<td><strong>In class:</strong> Exam #1</td>
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<tr>
<th>5 Lecture 2/27/2024</th>
<th>COVID-19’s impact on Japan and the fighting game community, the Japanese media industry, and the fighting game community.</th>
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<td>Lab 2/29/2024</td>
<td>Social economics behind design decisions, work culture in the Japanese media industry</td>
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<td>Main Question: What real-life events and factors affect the decisions that Japanese companies make? How does the work culture of Japan differ from our own, and how does this change how Japanese companies operate compared to American ones?</td>
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<td>Due: Homework #3</td>
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<tr>
<th>6 Lecture 3/5/2024</th>
<th>Frame data, hitboxes, hurtboxes, move properties (low crush, upper-body invulnerability), and tier lists.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lab 3/7/2024</td>
<td>Delay-based and rollback netcode</td>
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<td>Main Question: How did rollback netcode influence the post-COVID</td>
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<td>Due: Homework #4</td>
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<td>Lecture</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3/12/2024</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
<td>3/21/2024</td>
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<td>4/2/2024</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
<td>4/4/2024</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>4/9/2024</td>
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<td>Lab</td>
<td>4/11/2024</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>4/16/2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>4/18/2024</td>
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Homework
The reading assignments should not be longer than 2 pages double-spaced.

Homework 1: **Character Identity and Japanese Stereotypes**


**Assignment:** Read the excerpt above and choose a character in SF 3: 3rd Strike. Comment on some of the things the book talks about regarding the original Street Fighter and how Japanese cultural stereotypes are portrayed through it. Now choose a character in SF3: 3rd Strike ([wiki here](https://wiki.supercombo.gg/w/Street_Fighter_3:_3rd_Strike)) and explain how their character design, theme, and stage showcases how Japanese culture views this character’s identity.

**Gaming Assignment:** Set up Fightcade and 3rd Strike on your own personal computer using our [guide](https://guide). Also, obtain recording software for submitting assignments; [OBS](https://obs) is a good, easy, and free tool that works perfectly for our case.

Homework 2: **Hip Hop in Japan**

**Videos:** [INFINITE On Creating The Theme Song For The Iconic Video Game 'STREET F…](https://video)

**Reading:** [Japanese Hip-Hop - MIT OpenCourseWare](https://reading) pg. 14-15

**Assignment:** Watch the videos and share your thoughts on the theme of the game and its origins. Read the short 2-page excerpt and respond to the following question. Is Japan’s emergence of hip-hop culture in the late 90s an “appropriation” of American culture or creating something unique of its own? Give another example from anywhere in the world supporting your argument besides hip-hop culture in Japan.

**Gaming Assignment:** Choose your favorite character and record yourself doing every special and one super move of the character. You can find what moves they have on [Supercombo.gg](https://supercombo.gg).
Homework 3: **Death of Arcades in Japan**

**Reading:**  [Wired: Covid Is Pulling the Plug on Beloved Japanese Arcades](#)

**Assignment:** Read the linked article above. Covid suddenly killed many of the long-standing competitive hubs for fighting games, but arcades have been on the slow decline for a long time. List some of the reasons explained in the article and come up with at least one on your own. How did COVID multiply these negatives?

**Gaming Assignment:** Do one of the following

- Upload a clip of yourself parrying Ryu’s Denjin Hadouken Super. Make sure to set your opponent to SA3 and do 360 motions to get multiple hits and start recording OBS the moment you start practicing it. It would really suck if you hit it and forgot to start recording + recording/stopping each attempt takes a while.
- Upload a clip of yourself punishing a blocked DP, and come up with an optimal punish that ends with a super.

If you need ANY help setting up any of these, please ask in the discord! We will help you out.

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Homework 4: **Japanese Game Design and Work Culture**

**Video 1:** 🎥 The Making of Street Fighter II

**Video 2:** 🎥 Day in the Life of a Japanese Street Fighter 6 Game Planner

**Assignment:** Choose 1 of the above videos and do its corresponding assignment.

For video 1: What about Japanese game development in the 90’s surprised you? How did the emerging console market overseas impact the game’s development cycles?

For video 2: How does Japanese work culture differ from ours? Does learning about how the game is developed behind the scenes make you more interested in trying the game out? In many ways, what was shown in the video is very atypical of what people would consider normal Japanese corporate life. What parts of his daily life seemed different from the stereotypical Japanese work culture?

**Gaming Assignment:** Play a FT5 with someone else in the Discord. Make sure you record it and submit the names of both individuals.

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Homework 5: **Learning about Offensive and Defensive Options**

**Reading:** TBD
Homework 6: **Effective Application and Research**

**Reading:** [How do I practice playing against the player? - Patrick Miller](#)

**Assignment:** Read the above article by Patrick Miller and think about how you have learned or have applied effective learning to your fighting game journey. By this point, we hope you’ve had a wide exposure to in-person casuals or online. How do you think learning fighting games is different from learning a solo sport? What goes into your training regime and what can you do to improve it?

Homework 7: **Self-Improvement and Fighting Games as Sports**

**Reading:** [Is "Street Fighter" a Martial Art? Virtual Ninja Theory, Ideology, and the Intentional Self-Transformation of Fighting-Gamers - Japan Review](#) (pg. 18-29)

**Assignment:** How have you, after learning fighting games for over a month now, felt yourself improving or changing as a person? What parts of the Virtual Ninja Code are most important to you?

Homework 8: **TBD**

**Reading:** **TBD**

**Assignment:** **TBD**

**Gaming Assignment:** **TBD**

**Academic Integrity**

The high academic standard at the University of California, Berkeley, is reflected in each degree that is awarded. As a result, every student is expected to maintain this high standard by ensuring that all academic work reflects unique ideas or properly attributes the ideas to the original sources. Individual departments often have their own ways of citing and attributing work, so it is the responsibility of each student to seek that information out if it is not otherwise provided through a syllabus, course website, or other means.
These are some basic expectations of students with regards to academic integrity:

- Any work submitted should be your own individual thoughts, and should not have been submitted for credit in another course unless you have prior written permission to re-use it in this course from this instructor.
- All assignments must use “proper attribution,” meaning that you have identified the original source and extent or words or ideas that you reproduce or use in your assignment. This includes drafts and homework assignments!
- If you are unclear about expectations, ask your instructor or GSI.
- Do not collaborate or work with other students on assignments or projects unless you have been given permission or instruction to do so.