RETROGAMING IN THE GT ARCHIVES

Students in six sections of English 1102 used the GT Archives retrocomputing hardware and software in the Spring 2015 semester to complete an assignment as part of their course, Narrative in Videogames, taught by Dr. Josh Hussey and Dr. J. Stephen Addcox. This report will highlight the involvement of the Archives and Library staff and the results of a survey distributed to all students who used the retrocomputing equipment.

Retrogaming in the GT Archives

PROJECT REPORT   **SHERRI BROWN & WENDY HAGENMAIER**

The Assignment

From the course syllabus:

Project Three: "Retrogaming in the Archives" (10%) [100 points]
Group assignment. In Groups, at your scheduled time during the semester, visit the GaTech Archives. In the Retrocomputing center experience an old game from the manifest provided by Drs. Wendy Hagenmaier and Sherri Brown. Write a reflection about the game and the experience. Post this to your blog and link out to the archives. [Sign-up for a library visit time and date here.](#)

The Class Preparation

Wendy Hagenmaier and Sherri Brown visited each section of the course and provided a brief presentation. Wendy provided an overview of what an archives is, what our archives collects, and basic information about the assignment and how students would sign up to use the computers in the Archives. Sherri provided a brief demonstration of the computing and literary databases that might be used when researching narrative and computer or video games.

MLA International Bibliography

ProQuest Computing
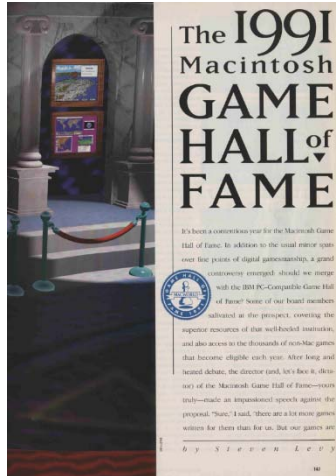
Retrogaming in the Archives

Welcome to the Archives! Be sure to take lots of notes about your observations—they'll come in handy for your blog posts. And feel free to take photos of the computer screen at various points in the game to incorporate into your posts.

Here are some questions to consider as you embark on your retrogaming adventure...

- What do you observe about the **hardware** environment (computer, monitor, mouse, etc.) you're using to play the game? How would you describe the experience of using this hardware?

- What do you observe about the **software** environment of the game experience (the game itself, of course, but also the operating system on the computer running the game)? How would you describe the experience of using this software?

- How is **narrative** constructed in the game? How might you analyze the narrative of the game in terms of various theories of narrative?

- How would you describe or characterize the mechanics of the game, apart from the narrative component?

- If your game includes associated **material** such as manuals, maps, etc., how do those elements contribute to the story and the rhetoric of the game?

- How does the game utilize components of WOVEN (written, oral, visual, electronic, nonverbal) communication to construct its story world?

- How might learning about the **context** in which the game was created, marketed, and played illuminate your own experience of playing the game?

- Does an **emulation** or modern version of the game exist (for example, can you play it online or on a modern platform)? If so, how does the experience of the emulation/modern version compare with your experience of playing the original?

Best of luck, and please let us know if you have questions or ideas, or if you encounter any technical difficulties. Onward!

Georgia Tech Archives

The 1991 Macintosh GAME HALL of FAME

It's been a contentious year for the Macintosh Game Hall of Fame. In addition to the usual minor spats over fine points of digital gamesmanship, a grand controversy emerged: should we merge with the IBM PC-Compatible Game Hall of Fame? Some of our board members salivated at the prospect, covering the superior resources of that well-heeled institution, and also access to the thousands of non-Mac games that become eligible each year. After long and heated debate, the director (and, let's face it, dictator) of the Macintosh Game Hall of Fame—yours truly—made an impassioned speech against the proposal. "Sure," I said, "there are a lot more games written for them than for us. But our games are...

by Steven Levy

Students signed up for a time to visit the Archives and play one of the games using a SignUpGenius in groups of four. They were also encouraged to bring their own headphones so that the game sounds would not disturb others using the Archives at the same time.

Wendy also created a detailed handout for Archives staff describing the project, how to help students who came to use the games, and tips for playing each game using the retrocomputing equipment available in the space.

Retrogaming in the Archives: Instructions for Archives Staff

Contents:

After students finished the game, they were asked to fill out a five question survey regarding their gaming experience.

The Computers & Games

The computers and games that were used for the class assignment were donated to the Archives by Dr. Jason Ellis, a former Marion L. Brittain Fellow in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication.

The four computers used by students included:

Macintosh Performa 550 (1994)

Apple Power Macintosh 8500/120 (1995)

Dell (1998)

3rd Gen iMac (1998)

The games the student groups had the option to play were:

PGA Tour Golf (1991)

Full Throttle: A Heavy Metal Adventure (1994)

Myst (1994)

The Dig (1995)

Civilization II (1996)

Tom Clancy's Politicka (1997)

Sim Classics 3 in 1 Pack (*SimCity*, *SimFarm*, *SimAnt*, 1996)

StarCraft (1998)
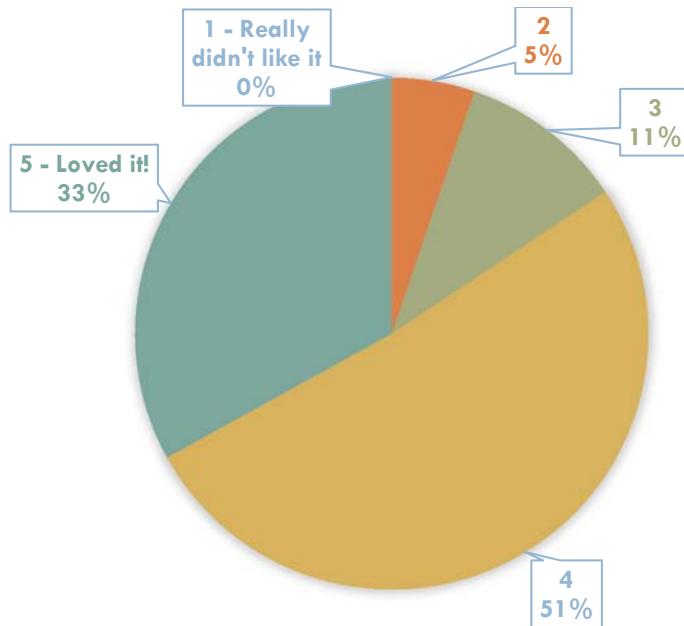
Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos (2002)

Diablo (1998)

The Survey Results

87

Percent of students who completed the retrogaming survey.
115 students completed the survey, out of **132** students enrolled in the course sections.

Question 1: How much did you enjoy your retrogaming experience?

(Scale 1=Really didn't enjoy it – 5=Loved it!)

1 - Really didn't like it
0%

2
5%

3
11%

5 - Loved it!
33%

4
51%

Question 2: How useful do you think your retrogaming experience was, as an educational component of your course?

(Scale 1=Not useful at all – 5=Extremely useful)

1 - Not useful at all
2%

2
6%

5 - Extremely useful
25%

3
22%

4
45%
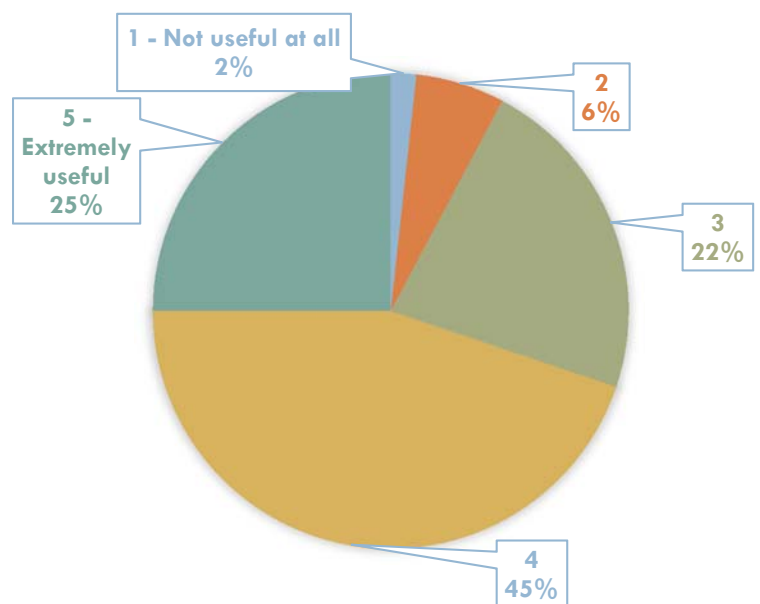
Question 3: What could the Archives do to improve the retrogaming experience (Did everything work okay, was the sign-up process smooth, would you make any adjustments to any part of the experience?

Top Responses & Suggestions   # Respondents

Top Responses & Suggestions	# Respondents
Good, smooth experience	60
Need more space for computers/groups	19
Sound-related: Provide headphones or speakers	18
Computer/mouse/keyboard slow or not easy to use	8
Specific game-related issues: stalling/crashing (Starcraft, Diablo, Doom/Doom II)	6
Archives difficult to locate: Better signage/directions	5
Would like retrogaming consoles	4
Would like more or different games	3
Would like game emulation on newer machines	3
Unfamiliar with game controls/need to save progress	3
Would like games allowing multiple players at once	2
Time issues (don't need 2 hrs, want later time slots, etc.)	2

Question 4: What is your favorite video game of all time?

Top Responses (including variants)	# Respondents
Skyrim/Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	9
League of Legends	5
Sims, Sims 3, Sim City, Sim City 4	5
Age of Empires & Age of Empires II	4
Don't Know & Don't Game Much	4
Fallout 3 & Fallout: New Vegas	4
Star Wars, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (KotOR), KotOR 2	4
Warcraft III & Defense of the Ancients (DotA) 2	4
Halo/Halo: Combat Evolved	3
Madden	3
Pokemon Series, Pokemon Crystal version, Pokemon Ruby Red	3
Assassins Creed	2
Batman: Arkham City	2
Call of Duty (Black Ops & Modern Warfare 2)	2
Command & Conquer: Red Alert & Red Alert 2	2
Dark Souls	2
Final Fantasy & Final Fantasy V	2
InFAMOUS	2
Kingdom Hearts	2
Minecraft	2
Starcraft II	2
Team Fortress 2	2
The Legend of Zelda (Majora's Mask & Twilight Princess)	2
World of Warcraft	2

Question 5: If you could design a retrocomputing/retrogaming lab for the Library, what elements would you include? (e.g. specific hardware, software, games, technologies, support services, etc.)

60

Number of students who responded that they would like to see old console systems, arcade-style games, and/or more older computers on which to play games – 52% of respondents.

Consoles & computers requested:

Atari

Nintendo 64 (N64)

Nintendo Entertainment System (NES)

Nintendo Game Boy

Nintendo GameCube

Nintendo VR

Playstation, PS1

Sega Dreamcast

Sega Genesis

Super Nintendo Ent. System (SNES)

Xbox (original)

Arcade games (e.g. PacMan)

Commodore 64

MS-DOS computer

ZX Spectrum

Select comments:

"Some older rare consoles would be interesting to have."

"I would definitely use computer games just like this. Maybe consoles including gamecube and gameboys would be good too."

"Individual game rooms for anyone to stop by (PCRooms)."

"Include old hardware that failed such as Nintendo VR or Sega's attempts at it."

"I would design a space with a ride array of different computer and games systems that span the decades."

"If I could design a retrocomputing lab, I would include as much hardware from the 1980s and 1990s as possible. I would include a variety of computers for people to experience such as Commodore 64, an old MS_DOS computer, ZX spectrum, and anything rare to find."

"That Nintendo VR Headset in comparison to the Oculus Rift."

"More 'action'/'simulation' type game, non-keyboard/mouse input device (ex. joystick) from the era."

31

Percent of students who responded that they would like to see more and/or a variety of games – 36 respondents. Several asked for game series. Some wanted newer games, others appreciated the retro-aspect of retrogaming.

Sample comments:

"The monumental games of each genre would be great – i.e. Halo 1, Doom, GTA 1 . . ."

"More old adventure games."

"The comparison between early games and their other series later."

"Maybe a series of games to demonstrate the improvement over each year. Series such as NFS and KOF can qualify since their roots are old enough while new ones are still coming out."

"Probably just some more recent, important games. You could use Steam to get a significant number of these."

"I would do a mini timeline of games, starting with simple text-based games and working up levels of technology."

"I would include some real time strategy games like Age of Empires or Command and Conquer as well as text based games like Oregon Trail."

"Virtual reality games (with those arcade-like first-person shooters."

"First IOS Game. Games that are both for computer and phone/tablet that are classic games."

"An MS computer with my favorite old school games like Megaman, Claw, Heretic 2, etc. A powerful computer running an older version of Windows, to make the game run super smooth."

"Progression of a series, ex. Civ II and Civ IV."

"Old tycoon games are awesome."

"Include more platform or open world games."

Other Popular & Interesting Responses:

More space (4 responses)

Emulators (3 responses)

Headphones/speakers/headsets (3 responses)

Personalized gaming assistance available (3 responses)

Better lighting (2 responses)

"For an immersive experience, posters & paraphernalia of older games in the room."

"Maybe some information on how old hardware and software worked differently."

"An area where students could come at any time to play games would be best."

"I would also add equipment such as old diskette readers or cassette readers to give a very retro experience from the time."

Future Plans

Dr. Hussey & Dr. Addcox will be teaching a similar course in fall 2015, and Wendy and Sherri plan to work with them to repeat a similar retrogaming assignment, with some modifications based on the students' feedback from the spring. We hope to pursue retrogaming as part of the retrocomputing experience in the renewed and reimagined GT Library as well.