

INTEGRATING REACTING TO THE PAST GAMES INTO ENES 3100

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I Overview: Integrating Reacting to the Past Games into ENES 3100

This project has changed significantly since my original proposal, which was to incorporate an Enlightenment-related game into my ENES 1010 class. But I have decided to create the new course for the juniors rather than for the first-year students. The ENES 3100 course that we teach at Herbst has a great books legacy. This means that some of the course elements are fixed, for example, that we must teach a Shakespeare play. In my course, we will study notions of Enlightenment to some degree, but not as extensively as the freshmen do. We study a fair number of ancient Greek works, both philosophical and literary. This Spring (2025), in preparation for this project, I launched my 3100 students into a microgame, which is a far smaller commitment, of just one class period, to see how they would handle it, and to see how I would handle it. It went very well—I give a breakdown of that below. The junior students are quite a bit more mature and can handle this kind of thing with more competence (overall) than the freshmen, but also, the microgame (called *Athens Besieged*) can very easily be connected to a larger game called *Athens 403 BCE, the Threshold of Democracy*. Rather than studying some of the literature and philosophy in isolation we could do it within the context of a game that lasts for six to nine class sessions. I would connect it with the microgame, so that would be another two sessions. Feedback from my students convinced me that one session (which was the recommended class length) was too short for the microgame.

Many sample syllabi that incorporate these games seem to include two or more of them, creating an entire semester comprised of games. I could say that that would be too bold a move for me, but it is also not what I want for my engineering students. They lack exposure to the humanities in general, and they need various types of exposure, such as listening to music, reading poetry, and analyzing philosophy and literature. The game is just one type of exposure, and so the challenge of the project is to integrate the long and the short Athens games with the rest of the coursework, and to organize the other coursework around it. Also, I feel strongly that the success of my microgame in the spring of 2025 lay to some degree in the work we had done prior to the game in learning how to work together as a group through the other materials and teaching techniques that I use. So, for the larger game, I also want to make sure that we have some weeks of set up to establish the rapport between members of the class.

II The Importance of this project

AND

III The Desired Result

As humanists teaching engineers, we in the Herbst program must consider what, specifically, this kind of student needs that can help them both in their careers and as people. In general, we can see that engineering students may get stuck in their pursuit of a single, correct answer to a complex problem, and that they may have difficulty seeing the big picture or understanding the ethical implications of their projects. Studying the humanities and developing confidence in their

own voices is crucial, and most especially so during this time of AI and algorithms that attempt to direct a person's thinking. The idea for this course is for me to incorporate a newer form of teaching (through a ReActing to the past game) into a seminar class on the foundations of democracy. This course also integrates a set of fundamental skills (based on deficiencies I have noticed over the years) that I have determined are important for the developing engineer to complement their STEM-based education. My hope is to successfully teach this course in the spring of 2026.

IV. Short description of the project (What did you do?)

My work for this second and final portion of the project consisted of four parts:

1. Learning how to run a ReActing Game by attending a conference, participating in one game myself, and reading literature on the efficacy of such games.
2. Running a smaller game in the spring of 2025 and figuring out the value for the students based on feedback from them as well as my own assessment of how well it worked.
3. Choosing a more complex game, assessing how large or small it would be within the course, determining the overall purpose of the course, and integrating it with materials that will allow students to study and question some fundamental principles that form the basis of democracy both in the past and currently. How a democracy survives (or does not) under the pressure of real or perceived crises is perhaps the most fundamental question students will address.
4. Designing a syllabus that integrates the game and questions of democracy with ancient and Enlightenment-era philosophies as well as art, music, and literature within the framework of the set of skills that I delineate below.

V. Main Components of the Project: Skills (A), Syllabus (B), and Future Launch (C)

A. Some skills learned through the humanities from which engineers can benefit

1. Gaining confidence in their ability to think even if material is unfamiliar
With the advent of generative AI, students are struggling to find ways to express their authentic thinking at a high level. Engineering students are particularly susceptible to this because AI of all kinds is closely connected with their fields. Like any other student, they may try to save time by putting a prompt into AI, they may think they cannot write effectively, and they may try to use high-level seeming academic-sounding jargon in their papers. A game from ReActing to the Past forces them to play a role and to engage deeply with it and with their peers who are playing other roles. If they write something they will likely have to speak what they write, and it will need to have a direct impact on those two whom they are speaking. In this way, they can prepare for what it means to communicate on a high level when they present to peers in their own fields.

2. Speaking and Communication Skills on the micro and macro levels
 - a. A less threatening way to learn to communicate one's thoughts about material one is reading for class is to practice this skill in small groups. I

keep these groups consistent for a class period but do my best to change them at each subsequent small-group assignment. Usually, the group is required to present ideas or conclusions at which they have arrived to the larger group. As the members of the class becomes more comfortable with one another and realizes that we are building a non-threatening environment, these conversations inevitably become more animated.

b. The small group practice allows students to feel more comfortable speaking to the larger group, and this will help hone their abilities to give speeches and to present within the context of the game. Presentation and communication skills are a big part of what we try to teach engineers. We will learn of the many ways in which people will not pay attention to what you are saying. And we will speak extensively about how best to prepare a speech that is moving and effective. Ancient Greek lessons on rhetoric can be helpful here, but also just reading literature that has characters with powerful communication skills can help the students in preparing their own speeches.

c. I will teach the students interactive presentation skills. Of course, students must always be aware of the level of their audience's knowledge of the subject on which they are presenting. We practice this in class with mini presentations on materials that smaller groups do to the class as a whole. Sometimes the class has read the material ahead of time and sometimes not. The presenters have a different job to do in each of those scenarios. But both cases give students to opportunity to practice interactive presentations. The most effective presentations are the ones in which the audience is able to participate. And that goes back to the basic difference between a lecture and a discussion. Obviously, there must be some lecture element in a presentation, but there can be much more useful discussion in a presentation than students realize. The ReActing games do not seem to incorporate these interactive elements in the speeches that characters give. Since every character has a motivation to win the game, each one will want to convince the rest of the characters of his or her point of view, and the best way to do this will be to allow objections to be raised during the speech, when the speaker holds the power of the podium. But of course, this will be difficult to handle, and the presenters will need to know their material so well that they will be able to respond to criticisms in real time. One key here is to know more than your audience so that you are able to remain convincing. The other key is to be confident enough in your preparation to be able to truly listen to what the comments and criticisms are from the audience.

d. Practical presenting skills I will teach include:

1. making eye contact with the audience (or looking at them just above their eyes)
2. finding common ground

3. allowing time for questions and not worrying about silence
 4. slowing down one's delivery
 5. considering one's tone—that includes avoiding vocal fry and upspeak
 6. the sparing use of gestures
 7. we will attend two performances to notice how practiced people present experiences of various kinds to an audience.
 8. In the syllabus, I plan to place the game after our study of *Hamlet* so that the students already have experience with performing.
3. Integration Skills: For engineers, this means the ability to think outside their own particular field but also the ability to zoom in and out from a problem as necessary
- a. To work on these skills we try to understand multiple texts and integrate them with one another, as well as connect them either to our world or to our own experiences.
 - b. For example, we will integrate Hegel's philosophy with Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and with Livy's story of Lucretia.
4. Concision and Simplicity:
Students are likely to try to use AI both in the game for writing the speeches for their characters and also outside the game for other writing assignments. Far from making their thinking concise and simple, the inexperienced student will produce opaque and convoluted work.
- a. We look at the works of various authors and the effectiveness with which they communicate their ideas. Students will note this effectiveness in the emotional or the intellectual power of the writing, or perhaps both.
 - b. Less is more. Sometimes students ask AI to write very knowledgeable-sounding speeches or papers.
 - i. If they are reading these to people in an interactive setting, they will need to be able to defend any of the points they are making, which means they will need to understand what they (or AI) has written quite deeply.
 - ii. If they are writing a paper, and their voice or intellectual ability sounds very different from what I hear in class, I can meet with them to make sure they understand what they have written.
 - c. In general, it is the process of thinking and laying out a logical path that will help them figure out their own arguments. Making them keep things simple forces them to confront their own thought process.

B. Syllabus for ENES 3100

Syllabus

This course is, broadly speaking, a study of democracy and its fragility given the real and pressing concerns that people in Athens faced. The course prior to the game addresses some of the foundational concepts through Enlightenment-era materials, after which we step back two thousand years in history to grapple with the problems in an actual historical situation. The inevitable connections to our society today will become clear to the students, and we will be able to discuss those during several classes after the game has ended. The addition of Dostoyevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor* after the game will allow students to question the basis of a moral code that could or should guide us.

(Variations from the schedule given below will be announced in class and on Canvas)

WEEK DATE TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS

*Read the assigned material **before** the class for which it is assigned. Take notes in your course notebook and answer any questions that may be in the reader. Review your notes before class, and be prepared to discuss the readings. **Names in the syllabus refer to authors to be found in our hard copy books, our reader, our game manual, or on Canvas.***

I Thu. 8 Jan Introduction to Enlightenment and other Readings

Read: we will read in class:

1. First Day Readings: various texts
2. WG sections I-II (WG = Writing Guide, in your reader),
3. Kant: (short version of "What is Enlightenment" on Canvas)

II Tue. 13 Jan. Stoic Philosophy: (Read this material for **this day of class)**

Read:

1. Epictetus: *Enchiridion* (In your Course Reader)
follow the instructions and answer questions in the course reader. Your answers to the questions should be recorded in your Course Notebook.
2. WG (Writing Guide) sections III-IV.
3. Guide to Close Reading

Thu. 15 Jan. Applications of Stoic Philosophy

Read:

1. Stockdale: "Courage under Fire" (On Canvas),
and answer questions from Course Reader in your Course Notebook
2. Henley: "Invictus" (when there are no questions, just take some notes in your notebook, recording your impressions of the text)

III Tue. 20 Jan. Exclusion from Enlightenment

1. Livy
2. Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Chs. I–IX; answer questions 1–16 in your course notebook .
3. Hegel

Submit: Essay for Prompt 1: Epictetus

Update: Your Text Links

Thu. 22 Jan. Exclusion from Enlightenment:

Read: 1. Douglass: Chs. X–XI plus Appendix; answer questions 17–20
Answer questions in Course Reader

2. Wollstonecraft: “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman”
Questions in Course Reader

3. Short Poems: Langston Hughes “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “I Saw a Man Pursuing the Horizon,” by Stephen Crane. (on Canvas)

Submit: Your Text Links

IV Tue. 27 Jan. The Tragic Prince

Think about attending a cultural event (you need two reviews—See Prompt 6). Many events at the College of Music are free.

<https://www.colorado.edu/music/events>

Read: 1. Shakespeare: *Hamlet* Act I/i – I/iii

Submit: Essay for Prompt 2: Hegel and Douglass

Thu. 29 Jan. Sage Advice

In class, find a partner/group for text link discussion and presentation preparation. You and your partner need not present same text link. You can also set up the presentation where you are a foil and sounding board for one another. Present on **Feb 10 and 12**

Read: 1. *Hamlet*, Act I/iv–I/v

2. Bacon: “Of Revenge” on Canvas

V Tue. 3 Feb. Is He Mad?

Read: 1. *Hamlet*, Act II (form groups for *Hamlet* and choose scene with your partners. Your performance is on **February 19**. Find an online version of our edition of *Hamlet* here: <https://tinyurl.com/3ppt4f6y>

Submit: Essay for Prompt 3: Annotated Rewrite of Prompt 1 including original plus comment sheet

Thu. 5 Feb. The Most Famous Speech

Read: 1. *Hamlet* Act III, Answer Questions on Canvas
2. Attwood “Gertrude Talks Back,” On Canvas

VI Tue. 10 Feb. Things begin to Fall Apart

Read: 1. *Hamlet* Act III, scenes 3 and 4

Thu. 12 Feb. The Tragedy of Ophelia

Read: 1. *Hamlet* Act IV

Submit: Essay for Prompt 4: Annotated Rewrite of Essay 2

VII Tue. 17 Feb. What Went Wrong?

Read 1. *Hamlet* Act V

Thu. 19 Feb. Acting Day: Perform Scenes from *Hamlet*

Submit: Prompt 10: Annotated Script of a scene from *Hamlet*

OUR GAME: *THE THRESHOLD OF DEMOCRACY: Athens in 403 B.C.E.*
(the game will take up the next eleven sessions of our class)

VIII Tue. 24 Feb. Setup Session 1: Introduction to the game, led by Lisa de Alwis

Read: Historical Background section (Part 2, pp. 20–53) of the game book

Thu. 26 Feb. NO CLASS: MIDTERM READING DAY

IX Tue. 3 Mar. Setup Session 2 (led by Lisa de Alwis)

Read: 1. Parts 1, 3, and 4 of the game book (pp. 1–19, 54–87)

1. Role sheets and faction advisories for the microgame

Play: Micro game: *Athens Besieged: Debating Surrender.*

I will distribute: Individual roles, Faction advisories.

Thu. 5 Mar. Setup Session 3: led by Lisa de Alwis and Factions
Jobs will be randomly assigned. Faction members will meet to discuss ideas, assignments, strategy. Indeterminates will meet with me.

Read: 1. Plato's *Republic*, Book 1.

FRIDAY, March 6: Attend a special performance, the opera *Dead Man Walking* at performed by the CU opera department at Macky Auditorium. This could be one of your two required cultural event reviews.

X Tue. 10 Mar. Game Session 1, Assembly: Led by the president
Read: Books II and III of Plato's *Republic*
Discuss: Reconciliation Agreement:
1. Should Athenians forget the "past wrongs" of the supporters of the Thirty?
2. Should Athenians be prohibited from filing lawsuits against the supporters of the Thirty?

Thu. 12 Mar. Game Session 2, Assembly: Led by the president
Discuss: Electorate: Should metics and worthy slaves be admitted and allowed to vote in the Pnyx? To serve as jurors in the lawcourts? (The President may choose a second topic, but must announce that topic in time for players to prepare for it in advance.)

XI March 16 – 20 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK!

XII Tue. 24 Mar. Game Session 3, Assembly: Led by the president
Discuss: 1. Social Welfare: Should Assemblymen and jurors be paid
2. President may choose a second topic, but must announce that topic in time for players to prepare for it in advance

Thu. 26 Mar. Game Session 4, Lawcourts: Trial Day
This session is reserved for a trial. If no archon requests a trial in advance of Trial Day, then the GM will ask president 4 to hold an Assembly session and announce the topic in advance.

XII Tue. 31 Mar. Game Session 5, Assembly: Led by the president

Discuss: 1. Should laws and major decisions be made by the Assembly, or by a governing council? If the latter, how should the members of the council be chosen?

2. President may choose a second topic but must announce that topic in time for players to prepare for it in advance.

Thrasylbulus, Theozotides, and Anytus receive a role addendum concerning imperialism

Thu. 2 Apr. Game Session 6, Assembly: Led by the president

Discuss: 1. Remilitarization/Restoration of the Athenian Empire: Should Athens rebuild its fleet, recommence tribute collection, and reconstitute its empire?

2. President may choose a second topic, but must announce that topic in time for players to prepare for it in advance.

3. Receive Handout: “What Happened in History?”

XIII Tue. 7 Apr. Postmortem Session: Led by Lisa de Alwis

Reread: 1. Books I, II, and III of Plato’s Republic

Discuss: 1. The game: Who won; which side was in the right from our modern view

2. What really happened

3. Discussion of Democracy and Plato’s Republic

Thu. 9 Apr. FIELD TRIP TO SPECIAL COLLECTIONS Class meets on the third floor of Norlin in room N345

XIV Tue. 14 Apr. The Problem of Evil: Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Read: 1. Dostoyevsky: pp. 18–30 and answer questions 18–31 your course reader in your notebook

Sign up: 1. (sign up for conference times to prepare final paper. I will send out a Googledoc)

Thu. 16 Apr. Christianity vs Christ: Dostoyevsky: “The Grand Inquisitor” from *The Brothers Karamazov*

Remember: 1. Present your art reproduction to the class on **Apr. 23.**

FCQ and Course Evaluations: Review Syllabus, *Course Reader* for discussion of the course. Prepare by asking yourself, e.g., *What readings and assignments were most worthwhile? Why were they worthwhile? How much did you learn? Did the discussion format help you learn? Why/why not? How helpful or interesting was our Athens game? What did you*

appreciate (or not) about this way of learning? Did your writing improve? Does this course have any relevance to your success as an engineer? etc. On the FCQ that you fill out online, you will give your assessment of the course as an educational experience.

Read: 1. Dostoyevsky: finishing *The Grand Inquisitor* pp. 31–37 and answering questions 32 to 43 from the course reader in your course notebook.

XV Tue. 21 Apr. FIELD TRIP TO THE CU ART MUSEUM
Class meets at the museum.

Thu. 23 Apr. Art Presentations

Present: 1. Present your art reproduction to the class

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE on Monday, April 27 by MIDNIGHT

Submit: Final Paper (Prompt 13) please e-mail it to me at
Lisa.DeAlwis@colorado.edu

C. Future Launch: describing outcomes as far as possible and lessons learned.

1. I designed this Course to run in the Spring of 2026, and as such, I cannot explain what worked or did not work and lessons learned. However, there are two components that I have already completed, one of which was attending the ReActing to the past conference (a) and the other of which is the microgame that I ran with my students in the Spring of 2026 (b).
 - a. Attending the Reacting to the Past Conference, which was a virtual meeting that happened between January 17 and 19 2025 was illuminating on many levels. I had not been aware, for example, of the extensive network and community of people that exist to support this kind of teaching. There are many resources available to help teachers who are interested in adding this to their teaching techniques. The conference organizers were particularly helpful to those of us who were “newbies,” and assigned us mentors for the games in which we participated. I found the game I played to be very intense because it was necessarily compressed due to time considerations. This meant that each participant had to read a lot of material to understand the circumstance, and his or her character’s motivations and goals. I usually did the reading during the breaks between sessions. The game we played was the Athens one that I am now using for my course. Certainly, one reason for using this game, as opposed to the Enlightenment/Diderot game of my original proposal, was that

I felt slightly more comfortable with it because it was the one I myself was playing. But the main reason was connected to the fact that I pivoted from designing the course for first-year students in my proposal to junior level ones in this final iteration. The junior level course has several requirements that have to do with ancient Greek philosophy and literature. Had I stayed with the Enlightenment game, I would have run into problems fulfilling the requirements for the core components of the course.

c. Running an Athens microgame called *Athens Besieged* with my junior-level students in the spring of 2025 gave me the confidence to design a course that incorporated the larger game into both the requirements of 3100 courses as well as structuring it according to basic skills that seem to me to be important for engineering students to learn through the humanities. There was a lot of preparation prior to this small (one class session) game that I needed to do so that the game would work. This set up allows for the random elements as well as the unpredictable one, which are determined by the students, to happen. The students were excited for the game, and some of them came in costume. They had been prepared with their role sheets, but I later found out from them that they would have liked their faction sheets as well. The game designers did not encourage sharing faction sheets ahead of time, but upon review, I think the students could have gone even more in depth if they had received them. That tells me that I don't always need to follow the precise instructions of the game, although of course, that is at my own peril.

Acting as the GM (game master) was stressful for me as a newcomer to this kind of teaching. If anything, it means giving up even more control than I did because the idea is that the game proceeds on its own, and the GM is just a guide on the side. Everything, other than the random aspects, is determined by the players. If the game gets stuck in some way, the GM has several options (in this game, that can include "killing off" various characters through rolls of the die) The students loved the experience and felt that they learned something from it. The main criticism was that there was not enough time to do all that they would have wanted to do within the context of the game. To me, this means that they really wanted to go deeper into the material. I am already concerned, though, that the games will take up too much of the time in the semester. Clearly, some teachers choose to exclusively run games for a course, but we also have a mission in our teaching of engineering students, which is why I chose to use the games (both the large and the micro) within the context of the skills that I laid out as being important for these students to acquire. I think I have found a good balance between this syllabus that includes the game and the guiding skill set for what I want to achieve with my ENES 3100 students.

VI. Conclusion: Reflecting on my experience in the Faculty Fellows program and working on my project.

I very much enjoyed getting to know Amanda and Kirk and my fellow Fellows in the program! My project changed a lot from the proposal to now, but I suppose that reflects the inevitable search for focus and the casting around that happens in such endeavors. The scope was reduced in that I had originally had the hubris to assume I could *create* my own game that would somehow function with the same efficiency as the ones created by people with far more experience and time to devote. Fortunately, I realized, even prior to writing the proposal, that creating my own game would be unwise. I have outlined why I made the changes I did and why the final product looks different from the proposal.

The presentations and speakers we heard during the time of the fellowship were invaluable to thinking about how to teach differently. Most of what I do was already taking these directions, which can, perhaps, be summarized as bringing more humanity to teaching and seeing our students as individuals to be supported in their struggles but also held to certain standards. The project has helped me pull together what I believe is important for the engineering student specifically, and it will help inform me for all my future teaching as well. Thank you, Amanda and Kirk, for offering me this wonderful opportunity!