

RIAN C. JOHNSON, PHD

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APPOINTMENTS

2025-present

Visiting Assistant Professor

Virginia Commonwealth University

Department of Focused Inquiry

2024-2025

Residential Research Fellow

Virginia Commonwealth University

Humanities Research Center

EDUCATION

May 2025

Ph.D. | Media, Art & Text | Virginia Commonwealth University

Interdisciplinary Humanities | English

Research Areas: Digital Studies, Speculative Fiction, Cultural Studies

[Dissertation: "The Fantasyscape Quotidian: On \(Everyday\) Life in Other Worlds"](#)

Director: Dr. Michael R. Hall

May 2020

M.A. | East Asian Studies | University of Virginia

Chinese Language, Literature, and Culture

Research Areas: Chinese Popular Culture, Videogame Studies, Chinese Literature

Thesis: "Enemy Officer Defeated: The Dynasty Warriors Series within the Spheres of Three Kingdoms and Videogames"

Director: Dr. Jack Chen

June 2018

B.A. | East Asian Studies | Randolph-Macon College

Chinese Language, Literature, and Culture

Senior Thesis: "Chinese Memes IRL: Offline Effects of Online Events"

PUBLICATIONS IN PRINT

[Johnson, Rian C. "There Are No Good Games: Deconstructing Canonicity in Video Game Studies." *B2O: An Online Journal*. Vol. 7, no. 1 2025.](#)

[Johnson, Rian C. Review of *Anime's Knowledge Cultures: Geek, Otaku, Zhai*, by Jinying Li. *InVisible Culture: A Journal for Visual Culture*.](#)

Johnson, Rian C. "The Utopian Flow of the Mid Boss." *Utopian Studies: Special Issue: Video Game Utopianism: Form, Narrative, and Representation*. Forthcoming.

Johnson, Rian C. Review of *Speculative Whiteness: Science Fiction and the Alt-Right*, by Jordan S. Carroll. *Messengers from the Stars*, no. 8, 2025. Accepted, Forthcoming.

PUBLICATIONS UNDER REVIEW + IN PROGRESS

Johnson, Rian C. "The Virtual Quotidian: Everyday Life and Logic in Videogames." (Under Review; *Game Studies*).

Johnson, Rian C. "Beyond Mukokuseki and Metonym: Transcreation, Hybridity, and Textuality in Localized Video Games" (In Progress Towards Publication.)

COURSES DEVELOPED + TAUGHT

Focused Inquiry I + II

Virginia Commonwealth University | Fall 2025 | Spring 2026

Fulfills first-year writing requirements by establishing foundational critical literacy and rhetorical skills.

Supports diverse classroom community through broad-ranging engagement with cultural rhetorics, media texts, and written, oral, and visual communication.

Health + Videogames

Virginia Commonwealth University | Spring 2025

Introduces students to core concepts in videogame studies, and explores the textual, cultural, and empirical connections between videogames and health, broadly defined. Course requires weekly student-led discussions, mini presentations, and a formal research paper.

Developed for the Health Humanities minor under an internship with Dr. Sachi Shimomura.

Introduction to Videogame Studies

Virginia Commonwealth University | Fall 2023 | Spring 2024

Provides a survey of the history of videogames and videogame studies, centering key theoretical concepts and in-field discourses to provide students with the analytical tools to approach all videogames critically, culminating in a conference-length research paper.

Reading Contemporary Transmedial Speculative Fiction

Virginia Commonwealth University | Fall 2022 | Spring 2023 | Fall 2024

Examines late 20th and early 21st century transmedial speculative fiction spanning film, animation, graphic novels, videogames, short fiction, and hypertext fiction utilizing critical theoretical concepts from media studies, literary studies, and visual studies to understand how non-mimetic, non-traditional fiction creates meaning. Students are encouraged to use multimodal communication methods to discuss and assess content through micro-essays, presentations, live analysis, and reviews.

American “Prestige” Television

Virginia Commonwealth University | Spring 2022

Examines “prestige” television, from *Twin Peaks* to HBO to the Streaming Era, that introduces students to the visual and semiotic literacies needed to read filmic media and provokes critical interrogations of our cultural evaluations of “prestige” media. Course utilizes creation of review texts, critical comparisons, and a final presentation to classmates working with course and student sourced texts.

SERVICE + ADMINISTRATION

Faculty Mentor, Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program | Focused Inquiry | 2026—

Focused Inquiry Faculty Learning Community | Chatbots in the Classroom | 2025–2026

Committee Member | VCU Common Experience Planning Committee | 2025-

VCU College of Humanities and Sciences Teaching Summit | Generative AI | 2025

Virginia Commonwealth University | Digital Studies Interdisciplinary Working Group | 2024-present

Humanities Research Center Labs | Memory Studies Lab | 2024-present

Mentor, Peer Mentorship Program | VCU MATX Program | 2024—2025

Course Design Intern | VCU Humanities Research Center, Health Humanities Lab | Summer 2024

Grant Juror | Speculative Literature Foundation | 2023-present

MATX Representative Member | Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee | VCU English 2023-present

Student Host, J. Earl Moreland Lecture on Asia | Randolph-Macon College | 2017

CONFERENCES

“Moé for the Everyday: Database Worlds,” Popular Culture Association, April 2026 (Upcoming; Accepted).

“Towards a Critique of (Virtual) Everyday Life: Videogames and the Everyday,” Society for Cinema and Media Studies, March 2026.

“Gift Shops and Shrimp Shacks: Misdelivery and the Post-Apocalyptic Quotidian,” Northeast Modern Language Association, March 2026.

“Beyond Mukokuseki and Metonym: Textuality, Production, and East Asian Video Games in Global Contexts,” Pop Culture Association, April 2025.

“Running Errands, Killing Monsters: *Trails* as Fantastic Realist Games,” Popular Culture Association, March 2024.

“Femme Android Soldiers and Domestic Machines: An Exploration into the Biopolitics of *Nier: Automata*’s Post-Human Gameworld,” Popular Culture Association, April 2022.

“Softened Criminals: Portrayals of Care, Affection, and Love in 21st Century Organized Crime Dramas,” Northeast Modern Language Association, March 2022.

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Peter Rollins Conference Travel Grant | Pop Culture Association | **2026**

Travel Grant | Humanities Research Center, Virginia Commonwealth University | **2026**

Residential Fellow | Humanities Research Center, Virginia Commonwealth University | **2024-25**

Presidential Scholarship | Merit-based, Randolph-Macon College | **2016-2018**

MEMBERSHIPS

- International Game Developers Association, Central Virginia
- Popular Culture Association
- Northeast Modern Language Association
- Society for Cinema and Media Studies
- Speculative Literature Foundation

LANGUAGES + SOFTWARE

- Mandarin Chinese | Classical Chinese
- HTML | CSS | JavaScript