

Georgia Tech
School of Literature, Media and Communication
LMC 4725/6325: Game Design as Cultural Practice

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Classroom: TSRB 113
W 1-4pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as a prototype-intensive course focused on game design fundamentals and game design as a creative practice. Talking about games may conjure memories of Pac-Man and Mario, but gaming long precedes the digital forms we know today. Games are as old as any human art form and exist across every culture; playful behavior even precedes human language.

Great games have qualities that make you eager to play them again and again. But what are those qualities? In this course we will predominantly explore this question through a formal approach, focusing on game design as a creative practice with deep history and common principles that can be studied, practiced and effectively enacted. In this setting, game design does not require mastery of code nor a life-long obsession with games. Rather, like other aesthetic and experiential forms, game design has fundamentals that may apply across media, platforms and contexts. Familiarizing ourselves with these principles is the first step to understanding their responsible deployment and crafting engaging play experiences.

Experimentation is the foundation of innovation. For the majority of this course, students will be producing one game a week, using a mix of platforms.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Given a game design assignment, the student will be able to effectively brainstorm, plan and implement basic methodologies of game design, such as: systems thinking, rule-building, iterative design, playtesting, prototyping, etc.
- When presented with a game, students will be able to articulate its formal qualities as well as its cultural and context-specific dynamics, verbally and in writing.
- When presented with a game, students will be able to offer professional feedback, verbally and in writing, which is constructive in tone, utilizes terminology from the course and offers a balance between strengths and weakness.
- Students will be able to accurately reference and discuss the major concepts of game design

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. MIT press, 2004.
- Fullerton, Tracy. *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* CRC Press, 2014.

ASSIGNMENTS

This is a project-centered course in which students will be evaluated largely based on meeting a challenging prototyping schedule and the thoughtfulness of their reflection on their output. Class assignments include:

- 50%: 7 weekly solo game design projects**
- 30%: Final Project: Polish and Ship a Game**
- 15%: Team game, 2-person 2-week design project**
- 5%: Participation**

Projects

Weekly Solo and Team Games

Course projects involve producing original game prototypes in response to weekly prompts. Each project must be uniquely developed by the student. Seven assignments will be completed individually on a weekly schedule and one game will be completed in a team of two over 2 weeks. Game prompts are intended to inspire, stimulate, and frustrate. Good game design comes from struggle and friction!

Learning how to move between tools is a skill unto itself. This course encourages students to experiment with game-making tools and platforms. In developing their 8 game projects, students will be required to use at least 4 of the following 12 platforms and/or mediums.

| | | |
|------------|-----------|----------------------------------|
| Unity | Pico-8 | Twine |
| Processing | Emotica | Game-Maker |
| Phaser | RPG Maker | Tabletop Game (board, card, etc) |
| Interlude | Kool Tool | Physical games |

Alongside each game that you design, you will write and submit a short paper (500 – 700 words) in which you reflect on the game you have designed. In coherent, paragraph form, these papers should respond to the following questions:

1. How would you describe this game?
2. How does the game respond or emerge from the prompt?
3. Describe your design and development process.
4. How did the platform or tool you chose influence the game you designed?
5. What are you most proud of about this game?
6. Describe the game's inspirations (can be games, art, readings, etc)
7. If you continued working on this game, what would you add or change?

Final Project

During the final month of class, students will have four weeks to polish and “ship” one of the game prototypes they developed in class. This involves producing:

- An enhanced, self-contained game experience that can be downloaded from the internet
- A website for your game that contains all necessary information and inspires play
- A minimum 30-second game trailer

Participation

The participation grade evaluates a student's level of attentiveness, preparation, and participation in class activities.

A Note on Grading

Your weekly assignments, including your team game, will be graded for completion. To receive full

credit for an assignment, your work must represent sufficient effort, strong critical and creative thinking, and appropriate levels of polish. This includes both game and reflection paper. It must also comply with the stated requirements of the assignment.

Points will be deducted as follows (each game will be graded on a 10 point scale). Determinations about points lost are ultimately at the discretion of the professor.

- Late work: 2 points lost per calendar day
- No reflection paper: 4 points lost
- Does not meet prompt requirements: 5 points lost

Any student who does not use 4 different platforms will lose a full letter grade.

Submitting Your Work

Assignments are due by the start of class in the course Dropbox folder (link is provided in Announcements on T-Square). Within the folder of the assignment number, create a folder using your last name and upload game and reflection paper into that folder.

Reflection papers should be submitted as Word documents. These documents double-spaced, 1-inch margins, w/ numbered pages. Use Times New Roman, 12-point font.

Digital game submissions should be submitted as a PC-compatible executable file that the professor can double-click and immediately open. Please title your game files using your last name and the project number.

Analog games should be submitted in class.

COURSE POLICIES

Absences and Lateness

Students are expected to arrive on time for class, and be present for the entirety classes. Students with routine tardiness will be subject to grade penalties at my discretion.

As this is a weekly course, attendance is extremely important. Students are permitted 1 absence during the semester. Absences are yours to do with as you please; I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. After 1 absences, you may begin to lose up to 5% off your final grade with each subsequent absence. After 3 absences, I reserve the right to fail you in the course.

Learning Environment

Critique, passionate engagement and disagreement are part of the creative process. Yet passion for your position is not a license to disregard other's feelings. Striking that balance between firmness and consideration is a core part of working with others and giving productive feedback. Peer-to-peer communication, as well as communication with your instructor, should be constructive in tone, utilizes terminology from the course and offers a balance between strengths and weakness.

Additionally, I ask that all students take time to consider their own backgrounds and avoid, as much as possible, projecting their own presumptions on other students. Your interpretation of a student's gender,

race, nationality, economic status or other demographic qualities may not match a given student's experience or self-identification—so try not to presume. Use gender neutral language, and avoid stereotypes and definitive statements.

Sexist, racist, homophobic or other forms of alienating or violent language don't have a home in this classroom. Threatening or abusive behavior (verbal or physical) will be cause for immediate dismissal from class and notification to the Office of the Dean of Students.

Laptop and Cell Phone Courtesy

Cell phones are not permitted in class, period. They should be left on silent and stowed with your personal belongings. Laptops should be used only for reviewing course material or participating in course assignments.

Email Policy

Responding to students via email is a courtesy I extend to you, and I promise to get back to any student within 48 hours (so please note: a "night before" email may not get answered in time!). I do not discuss grades or class performance over email.

Grade Appeals

Please allow two days to pass before you submit a grade appeal. This gives you time to reflect on my assessment. If you still want to appeal your grade, please submit a short but considered paragraph detailing your concerns. Based on this paragraph I will review the question and either augment your grade or refine my explanation for the lost points.

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism

When it comes to creative production, you may have heard that imitation is the best form of flattery (or as some like to put it: "steal like an artist."). Similarly, it's easy to get inspired by other examples of great design. But what's the boundary between inspiration and plagiarism in a creative context?

In this classroom context, it is not appropriate to represent work as your own or your group's that you did not ideate, brainstorm, prototype and refine (this goes for both the game mechanics and written components such as game rules or any story/narrative). Any instances of such behavior will be given serious review and may be taken to the Office of the Dean of Students. For more information on the Georgia Tech Honor Code, please see: <http://www.honor.gatech.edu/>

Students in this course are also bound to the Georgia Tech Student Code of Conduct, which address plagiarism as well as other issues related to academic dishonesty:
<http://www.catalog.gatech.edu/rules/19b.php>

Office of Disability Services

The Office of Disability Services provides information, resources, and support services to students with disabilities at Georgia Tech. Disability Services, located in the Office of the Dean of Students (Charles A. Smithgall Jr Student Services Building, Suite 210), provides students with information and support. Disability Services assists students self-identifying as having a disability. Any student who wishes to

receive accommodation for a disability is encouraged to do so and will be fully accommodated, provided they submit the necessary university accommodation form.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

August 24: Course Introduction

- Greetings + Review syllabus, assignments and course goals
- [GAME #1 ASSIGNED]

August 31: Playcentric Design

- Tracy Fullerton, “The Role of the Game Designer” from *Game Design Workshop* pp. 1-22.
- [GAME #1 DUE]
- [GAME #2 ASSIGNED]

September 7: Integration and Discernability

- Salen and Zimmerman, “Meaningful Play” from *Rules of Play* pp. 30-37
- [GAME #2 DUE]
- [GAME #3 ASSIGNED]

September 14: Playtesting and Prototyping

- Tracy Fullerton, “Prototyping” and “Playtesting” from *Game Design Workshop* pp. 197-229; 271-304
- [GAME #3 DUE]
- [GAME #4 ASSIGNED]

September 21: Rules and Rule Writing

- Salen and Zimmerman, “Rules on Three Levels” from *Rules of Play* pp. 127-138
- [GAME #4 DUE]
- [GAME #5 **TEAM GAME** ASSIGNED]

September 28: The Magic Circle

- Salen and Zimmerman, “The Magic Circle” from *Rules of Play* pp. 92-99

October 5: Formal Structures

- Tracy Fullerton, “Working with Formal Elements” from *Game Design Workshop* pp. 55-84
- [GAME #5 **TEAM GAME** DUE]
- [Game #6 ASSIGNED]

October 11: Systems and Interaction

- Tracy Fullerton, “Working with Systems Dynamics” from *Game Design Workshop* pp. 127-155
- [GAME #6 DUE]
- [GAME #7 ASSIGNED]

October 19: Finding Fun

- Tracy Fullerton, “Fun and Accessibility” from *Game Design Workshop* pp. 341-373
- [GAME #7 DUE]
- [GAME #8 ASSIGNED]

October 26: Bending, Breaking and Ignoring the Rules

- Salen and Zimmerman, “Breaking the Rules” from *Rules of Play* pp. 127-138
- [GAME #8 DUE]
- [PICK GAME FOR FINAL]

November 2

- **Pitch and Playtest**

November 9

- **In-Class Work Day**

November 16

- **Playtest**

November 30: Final Games

- **Final Showcase**

Guidelines for Group Critique

In this classroom, we strive to create a welcoming, inclusive, and respectful environment that is conducive to giving and receiving constructive feedback.

As we learn and get the hang of constructive feedback, we're going to use a 3-statement process:

Start with **“I LIKE....”**

Transition to **“I WISH....”**

End with **“I’D TRY...”**

Start every critique using these tools and soon you'll be in the habit of respectful *and* helpful critique.