

The University of Texas at Austin
Dept. of Radio-TV-Film & Dept. of Computer Science
RTF 343 & CS 378
MASTER CLASS IN VIDEO GAMES AND DIGITAL MEDIA
RTF Unique Number 08920; CS Unique Number 56715

Mondays | 1–4PM in CMA 4.204 | 5–8PM in CMB Studio 4D

Warren Spector, Lecturer | wspector@junctionpoint.com
Arie Stavchansky, Instructor | ariestudents@sbcglobal.net

WELCOME

They've chosen to work with the most liberating of media -- and yet they snatch back with their left hand what they offered us with their right. Remember, gamewrights, the power and beauty of the art of game making is that YOU AND THE PLAYER COLLABORATE TO CREATE THE FINAL STORY. Every freedom that you can give to the player is an artistic victory. And every needless boundary in your game should feel to you like a failure.

Orson Scott Card
COMPUTE! Magazine, 1991

a Radio–Television–Film and Computer Science
Master Class in

VIDEO GAMES & DIGITAL MEDIA

... the computer can engage us as intellectual partner, playmate, or artistic palette, types of interaction that demand self-expression by the very nature of their activity... We invest ourselves in our relationships with computers, and from this we learn more about ourselves.

Mark Pesce
The Playful World, 2000

[Gaming] is a medium that includes still images, moving images, text, audio, three-dimensional, navigable space—more of the building blocks of storytelling than any single medium has ever offered us ... A new medium of expression allows us to tell stories we could not tell before, to retell the age-old stories in new ways, to imagine ourselves as creatures of a parameterized world of multiple possibilities, to understand ourselves as authors of rules systems which drive behavior and shape our possibilities.

Janet Murray
"Game-Story to Cyberdrama"
First Person, 2004

COURSE DETAILS

Goals

- To expose students to the field of video game design & production.
- To clarify the nature of the play experience and the aesthetics of videogames by cultivating a language for game criticism.
- To instill the principles of game design within students.
- To inform students of the complex interdisciplinary relationships necessary in the creation of videogames.
- To learn about the history of the modern video game.

Description

The course frames videogames as a medium that allows new forms of communication to emerge. Throughout the semester, students consider the characteristics that differentiate videogames from traditional media. As the course is rooted within conceptual models for rules-based game play, it attempts to map the development of the interactive media product and its subsequent cultural impact. Readings for the course outline critical skills for designing videogames and for comprehending the experience of game play.

The course is composed of class sessions with two parts: laboratory sessions are followed by lectures from videogame industry experts and practitioners. While listening to and interacting with guest speakers, students gain insights as to the trends and best practices for videogame design, production and criticism.

Lecture and interview topics will act as spring boards for discussions during lab sessions. During lab, students learn how to critique and discuss videogame products in order to develop a vocabulary appropriate for various interactive media genres. Additionally, actual game play will occur during lab sessions which will help clarify content and structure across a variety of games.

Expectations

While you are not expected to be a devout video game player, you should have some interest in how video games play a role in culture and society. You are expected to do work outside of the classroom as this course only meets once a week. Assignments require that you maintain access to electronic gaming devices whether it be on a PC, home console, hand-held, or a website. You should come to lab with creativity and vision for where video games should be placed within the context of culture.

In addition, there will be group work and critiques. You will be required to work with other students in an efficient capacity. In addition to all this, you should strive for a good deal of patience and attention for fellow classmates who may be demonstrating a video game for all other students during lab. Be prepared for a good deal of collaboration with your fellow classmates.

What You Will Need

- An interest in video games as a cultural product
- An inquisitive mind that maintains attention and thinks critically
- Creativity, imagination, and dreams
- Required course readings
- BevoBucks for printing
- Time

COURSE DETAILS CONTINUED

Readings & Quizzes

Tracy Fullerton's *Game Design Workshop: Designing, Prototyping, and Playtesting Games* is our only required course text, but there will be additional readings. Please note that the course text is available as an electronic resource through the UT Library website. The course text contains practical examples that will help you understand the fundamental tasks for the game *designer*. You will be expected to relate what you learn from the text to your assignments and during lab.

At the beginning of each lab session, you will be given a short quiz that verifies whether or not you read the week's reading assignment. The quizzes may have questions that address the topics from the lecture session. **There are a total of 14 quizzes. There are no make-up quizzes, but you have an opportunity to drop one quiz.**

Assignments

You will be required to turn in a total of six assignments and one final project. Each assignment is tailored so that you are challenged to think about video games from a design and/or critical perspective. The assignments will help you understand the process by which games are conceived from within a development studio. Please be prepared to write papers for this course. While actual game production is not part of this course, game *design and analysis* is emphasized. You will learn the details of each assignment during lab sessions. Every week, you will be asked to post a question to Blackboard about the current week's guest. This short posting will count as part of your participation grade.

Assignment 1 Favorite Games	Discuss your five favorite games and the criteria for your choices.
Assignment 2 Game Play Critique	Research a game you know well, play it, critique it, and add to it.
Assignment 3 Game Tuning	Propose new rules for an existing game, playtest, and report findings.
Assignment 4 Paper Prototype	Create a table-top game in a group, create a set of rules, playtest.
Assignment 5 Content Analysis	Analyze a game from the perspective of one of the guest speakers.
Assignment 6 Cultural Analysis	Discuss games' or game genres' impact on individuals and society.
Final Project Game Producer	Put together a prospectus for a video game to be produced.

Attendance & Late Work

It is expected that you arrive to class on time. Missing class is generally frowned upon and reflects on your final grade. If you are absent for more than three consecutive class sessions without communicating with your instructor, it will be assumed that you have withdrawn from the course. This class emphasizes deadlines so please submit your assignment on time. For each day that an assignment is late, three points will be deducted from the evaluation grade for that particular assignment. Please note that if you do not turn in any work for an assignment on the day that it is due, a zero will be recorded for that assignment until it is turned in.

Grades

It is advisable that you keep track of your grades in order to ensure your instructor does not miscalculate your final grade. Grades for assignments are based on the thoroughness, creativity, and quality of your written and creative work.

The course grade is composed of the items on the right.

Grade Itemization

Attendance	5%
Participation	10%
Quizzes	15%
Assignments	40%
Final Project	30%

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Due on **September 17**

Assignment 1 | Favorite Games

Write up a list of your five favorite games. Describe your criteria and tell why they are your favorites. Draft a list of the 5 *best* games, in your estimation, and describe the criteria you used for that list. Were the lists different? If so, why?

Due on **September 24**

Assignment 2 | Game Play Critique

Pick a game you know well and describe how that game came to be and the process the creator(s) of the game went through to make it a viable commercial project. Find the game's core mechanics, and report how they encourage or discourage interaction and competition among players and how they support game fiction. Describe how a newly proposed rule would effect the game.

Due on **October 15**

Assignment 3 | Game Tuning

Propose new rules for an existing game, try them, tune them and report your results. You will do your own playtesting and report the results of your playtest sessions. In lab, other students will play and critique your tuned game.

Due on **October 29**

Assignment 4 | Paper Prototype

In a groups of four or five, create a tabletop game, from scratch, with a group of students. You will write a set of rules, clear enough so that other people can play from them. You will mock up the game, using components from other games or created from scratch. Other students will interact with your game during lab, so playtest it before lab time.

Due on **November 12**

Assignment 5 | Content Analysis

Write a paper analyzing a game from the perspective of, and utilizing the philosophy of, one of the guest speakers.

Due on **November 26**

Assignment 6 | Cultural Analysis

Discuss a game, company or genre's impact on individuals, society and world culture. This paper can offer a bit of personal story but *should* offer a bit of history, a bit of mainstream and/or web news coverage and, ideally a bit of original cultural and/or political analysis.

Due on **December 3**

Final Project | Game Producer

Compose a prospectus for a video game that you think should be produced. Use all the previous assignments to help argue the case for your game to be developed and published. Take into account gameplay factors, business factors, historical/genre factors, marketability and other relevant factors

READING SCHEDULE

Analysis: How do games work?

Week 1

Jenkins, Henry. (2000). "Art Form for the Digital Age." [Technology Review](#).

Week 2

Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 1, 2, and 3." [Game Design Workshop](#). San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

LeBlanc, Marc. (2006). "Tools for Creating Dramatic Game Dynamics." [The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M., Zubek, R. (2004). "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research." [Proceedings of the Challenges in Game AI Workshop, Nineteenth National Conference on Artificial Intelligence](#).

Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004). "Chapter 7: Defining Games." [Rules of Play](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Week 3

Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 4 and 5." [Game Design Workshop](#). San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004). "Chapters 11 thru 14." [Rules of Play](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Church, Doug. (2006). "Formal Abstract Design Tools." [The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Falstein, Noah. The 400 Project. http://www.theinspiracy.com/400_project.htm

Kreimeier, Bernd. The Case for Game Design Patterns. http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20020313/kreimeier_03.htm

Week 4

Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004). "Chapters 26 thru 27." [Rules of Play](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Jenkins, H. (2006). "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." [The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology](#). Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.

Wikipedia Entry. Videogame Genres. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_and_video_game_genres

Wolf, M. Genre and the Videogame. <http://www.robinlionheart.com/gamedev/genres.xhtml>

READING SCHEDULE

Practice: How do you create a game?

Week 5 Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 6 and 7." Game Design Workshop. San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.
Ebert, Roger. Why games aren't art.
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060418/SCANNERS/60418001>
<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070721/COMMENTARY/70721001>
Clint Hocking response: http://clicknothing.typepad.com/click_nothing/2007/08/on-authorship-i.html

Week 6 Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 8 thru 10." Game Design Workshop. San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

Week 7 Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 12 and 13." Game Design Workshop. San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

Week 8 Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapter 14" Game Design Workshop. San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

Business: How do games reach the audience?

Week 9 Fullerton, T., et. al. (2004). "Chapters 15 and 16." Game Design Workshop. San Francisco, CA. CMP Books.

Week 10 Schoback, K. The Economics of a Next-Gen Game. http://www.idga.org/biz/GDC05_NextGenEconomics.ppt
IDGA: Industry Best Practices. http://www.idga.org/biz/best_practices.php

Week 11 Rabin, S. (2005). "Chapter 7.3: The Publisher-Developer Relationship." Introduction to Game Development.
Hingham, MA. Charles River Media, Inc.

READING SCHEDULE

Culture: How do games affect us?

- Week 12** Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004). "Chapters 29 thru 33." Rules of Play. Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.
- Jenkins, Henry. (1999). Congressional Testimony on Media Violence. http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/jenkins_ct.html
- Anderson, C., Dill, K. "Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.
- Yee, N. Rethinking Virtual Violence—A Critique of Methodologies used in Violent Videogame Research.
- Keegan, P. Culture Quake. Mother Jones. <http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/1999/11/quake.html>
- Jones, G. Violent Media is Good for Kids. http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2000/06/violent_media.html
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- Week 13** Salen, K., Zimmerman, E. (2004). "Chapters 28: Games as Social Play." Rules of Play. Cambridge, MA. The MIT Press.
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LECTURE TOPICS

During the course of the semester, the following lecture topics will be addressed (not in this particular order).

- Games as cultural artifacts and approaches to game criticism
- Uniqueness of the game medium and its significance
- The place of story within the game medium
- The mainstream game industry and game commercialization
- The significance and nature of the independent game movement
- The interdisciplinary nature in developing games
- Authorship and individual expression in game development
- Games as teaching and learning tools
- The game effects controversy
- Language and vocabulary for game design and evaluation
- Differences in platform and exhibition
- The distinct discipline of the game designer
- Historical development of video games and game design
- Technical and art direction
- Game development as software engineering.
- Computer graphics for video games from a historical perspective

LAB SCHEDULE

September 10

Course Structure & Syllabus Review

Overview of course structure and syllabus review. Discussion of student expectations. Assessment of student backgrounds and skills. Introduction to available technology.

September 17

Presentation of Favorite Games List with Criteria

In a brief PowerPoint presentation, share your arguments for choosing your five favorite games. Use examples to help us understand what you enjoy most about your favorite games. Introduction to abstracting interaction for use in game play critiques.

September 24

Game Play Critiques & Abstracted Interactions

Students present a “critique” of a game play experience. Students will present a novel way to describe the aesthetic of the game play. Game tuning exercises will be performed on various casual game.

October 1

Cross Media Experience and Game Play

In-lab game play of games that have crossed into various media. For example, Tomb Raider, will be examined as a game and a motion picture. We will discuss the differences, or similarities, of the content presented in different forms.

October 8

Ideation, Conceptualization, and Paper Prototyping

Exercises for creating ideas and concepts for games will be done in lab. Here, you will begin the design of a game that will eventually be “pitched” at the end of the course. This will be done in groups, and with paper-based prototyping methods for representing various aspects of the video game content.

October 15

Foundations of Digital Prototyping

You will gain some scripting, and graphics knowledge to create a very rough and basic digital prototype of your paper prototype.

October 22

Digital Prototyping Continued

This lab continues where the previous one left off in regards to technical knowledge for prototyping video games.

October 29

Playtesting Prototypes

Your final digital prototypes will be presented in class where other students will play your games. The game will be discussed and feedback will be given with regards to tuning and game play.

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LAB SCHEDULE

November 5

Project Management Tools

Introduction to the tools and techniques for managing a gaming project. In class exercises will help you understand appropriate ways to creating schedules for development, budget creation, and “pitch” documents.

November 12

Indie Developer Marketing

This lab will introduce you to the fundamentals of web design and implementation in the context to independent game promotion. Various existing game websites will be discussed.

November 19

Pitch Session

You will be pitching your video game proposal in this lab session.

November 26

Simulation vs. Physical Reality

This lab session will introduce basics of digital video editing and compositing. You will capture 3D first-person game play to video. Then, with a camera, you will record the same camera movement as in the video game play footage. Composite the two, side-by-side, to compare and contrast.

December 3

Course Assessment & Final Projects

Coursework will be assessed and discussed amongst students and instructor. Finally, students will submit their revised video game pitch documents based on recommendations from the “Pitch Session”.

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COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts

Fullerton, Tracy (2004) *Game Design Workshop: Designing, Prototyping, and Playtesting Games*. CMP Books.
(Note: You can read an electronic version of this book using your UT EID and the UT Library Website)

RTF 343: Master Class in Video Games and Digital Media Course Packet.
Available for pickup at Jenn's Copying and Binding at Guadalupe and Dean Keaton.

UNIVERSITY POLICY

Accommodations

At the beginning of the semester, students with disabilities who need special accommodations should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Services for Students with Disabilities Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259 or 471-4641 TTY.

Scholastic Dishonesty

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonest damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>.

Undergraduate Writing Center

The Undergraduate Writing Center, located in the FAC 211, phone 471-6222, offers individualized assistance to students who want to improve their writing skills. There is no charge, and students may come in on a drop-in or appointment basis.

Notice

Dates appearing in syllabus are subject to change on given notice by the instructor.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Please Fill Out This Questionnaire

In order to help us gauge the skill set of this class and to help us get to know you better, please take the time to fill out this questionnaire. Please detach this sheet from your syllabus and turn it in to us at the end of the class period. Thank you.

Name _____

Major _____

Classification _____

Email _____

Age _____

What are you hoping to gain from this class?

What was the first video game you remember playing?

What interests you about video games?

What platforms do you typically play on the most?

Do you have any experience programming for video games of any kind?

Do you want to work in the gaming industry after you graduate?