

George Mason University

College of Visual and Performing Arts

Computer Game Design

GAME101 DL1: Intro to Game Design
Instructor: Matthew Randon
Office: Adjunct Lounge

3 Credit Hours
Class: N/A (Online)
Office Hours: By Appointment
Email: mrandon@gmu.edu

Course Description

This course is an introductory overview of the video game development process with an emphasis on game design. Through detailed study of historical as well as current games, students will learn the language and structure needed to develop their own game ideas during the course term. Students will learn the many aspects of a game development team and how each of these roles contributes to a game's overall design. A strong focus on the elements of game design and process will support the development of a tabletop game through the iterative design process. Quizzes and tests will draw from reading and will be administered at the instructor's discretion.

The mid-term project will require students to develop an alpha prototype of a tabletop board game. The final project will require students to revise their initial design and further develop the prototype into a polished, functional game.

Course Objectives

Students who complete this course will:

- Be able to evaluate the video game industry and market
- Understand the basic mechanics of traditional games
- Be able to identify the roles and within a game development team
- Develop a traditional game in a team environment

Course Requirements

During the semester students should be prepared to discuss the assigned readings, design blogs, and game examples. In addition, students should be prepared to discuss with the class the status of their midterm and final projects.

Participation in class discussions and activities is necessary for the course. Some of the information for the course can be found in the text, but not everything. The lecture or supplemental materials will cover additional information and discuss topics that will inform smart design choices for the projects.

Required Reading

Barthwaite, B. and Ian Scheiber. *Challenges for Game Designers*. Charles River Media. 2008.

Grading

Grading will be based on the following criteria:

- Design Blog (30) and Peer Responses (10)
- Midterm Assessment (25)
- Midterm Peer Feedback (5)
- Final Assessment (30)

Assignments Types

Design Blog

The Design Blog is a series of writing assignments where students analyze the concept of the week, and then make a careful decision about how their game will implement that design concept. Students should use the required text, supplemental website materials, and their own knowledge of gaming in order to analyze the effects of the concept on games they know, and apply that analysis to their own projects. Students should use multimedia in the form of sketches, computer-generated images, pictures, or videos in order to enhance their ability to illustrate for the reader the work they are doing on their project.

There should be 7 entries in your blog by the end of the course, so not all weeks will have a designated entry. Blog entries should be about 300-500 words (about half a page single-spaced) if multimedia is used to effectively communicate design principles, or 500-750 words (about one page single-spaced) if no multimedia is used for that week. *View the rubric on Blackboard for more specific grading criteria.*

(If possible, please separate your analysis of the design concept from the design decision so that I can quickly ascertain the direction your project is heading.)

Peer Responses and Midterm Feedback

Once the Design Blog entries have been posted for the week, students will have the weekend to respond to two peers in the blog area of Blackboard. The goal of this assignment is to further the student's own analysis of the design concepts, but also to generate constructive criticism for classmates as they work on the final project. These peer responses should be about 100-250 words, and should be written in a way that furthers the conversation by offering insightful analysis of their classmates' midterm prototype.

Midterm Project

The class features an iterative design process similar to real world game design scenarios. The students will read a case study about a failed game design team, and be tasked with completely redesigning the game according to the best practices discussed during the course. Students should be creative in their approach, but should implement some elements of strategic decision making, and avoid trivia games wherever possible. The midterm does not need to be as polished as the final, but should still be easy to understand from a grading perspective. The grading criteria for the project are as follows:

- (5) Instructions: How well are the instructions communicated? Can they be understood easily the first time?
- (5) Skill Play: Can a player increase their skill level each time? Can luck override skill?
- (5) Gameplay: Is it fun? This can be subjective, but would a player have a reason to play again?
- (5) Aesthetics: Do the materials for your game look good? Are they easy to manipulate?
- (5) Demo: Does the demo go smoothly? Does it showcase your game and all of its features?

Students will turn in their project in the form of a 10-15 minute narrated gameplay video.

Final Project

The final project is the last iteration of the design process where students are able to apply all of the feedback they have received over the course and turn it into a polished tabletop game. The students are expected to create an original concept and use non-copyrighted materials in order to demonstrate their game for the final project, and special consideration will be given to students that effectively use the feedback from the course to make positive changes to their game design. The grading criteria for the final project are as follows:

- (10) Adaptations: How well did you take into account the feedback from the alpha test?
- (5) Skill Play: Can a player increase their skill level each time? Can luck override skill?
- (5) Gameplay: Is it fun? This can be subjective, but would a player have a reason to play again?

(5) Aesthetics: Do the peripherals for your game look good? Are they easy to manipulate?

(5) Demo: Does the demo go smoothly with players that are not intimately involved in the development of the game? Does it showcase your game and all of its features?

Students are not required to invite others to test their final prototype with them, but having others play the game can showcase how the rules are clear enough for an outside observer to understand and execute.

Grading Scale

- 100-97: A+
- 96-93: A
- 92-90: A-
- 89-87: B+
- 86-80: B
- 79-77: C+
- 76-70: C
- 69-60: D
- 59-00: F

Academic Honesty

All Students are expected to observe the George Mason University Honor Code. For complete information about the University's policies on academic honesty, please see: <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>

Honor Code

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

GMU Resources

GMU student information and resources: <http://www.gmu.edu/mlstudents/>

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office. Students must inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester, and the specific accommodation will be arranged through the Disability Resource Center.

Calendar of Assignments

Refer to the reading calendar for all reading pacing and major grades for the course. Smaller weekly assignments will be assigned in class, and then posted on Blackboard for reference.