

George Mason University

College of Visual and Performing Arts

Computer Game Design

GAME101 005: Intro to Game Design
Instructor: Matthew Randon
Office: Adjunct Lounge
Fall Semester 2016

3 Credit Hours
Class: Planetary Hall 212 (T 7:20)
Office Hours: By Appointment
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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, reflection topics, 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

Novak, J. *Game Development Essentials: An Introduction (3rd Edition)*. Thomson Delmar Learning

Grading

Grading will be based on the following criteria:

- Participation in weekly discussions and peer review (10)
- Reflection Papers (30)
- Midterm Assessment (30)
- Final Assessment (30)

Assignments Types

Reflections

The reflection papers are writing assignments where students should analyze the design decision they have to make for that week. The decisions are paced so that students should be making them in a logical order, and so the students should be able to connect each reflection together as a running journal of how the project is taking shape. Students should be able to use the required text, supplemental website materials, and their own knowledge of gaming in order to analyze the effects of the concept on other games they know, and apply that analysis to their own projects. Reflections papers should be about 600-750 words (about one page single-spaced), and showcase intelligent analysis about the week's design concept. These assignments are to be posted before class time unless otherwise noted on Blackboard.

Peer Responses

Once the reflections have been posted to the discussion board in Blackboard for the week, students will then have the weekend to respond to at least two of their peers. The goal of this assignment is to further the student's own analysis of the topic, but also to generate constructive criticism for classmates as they work on the midterm and final project. In addition to the professor's weekly feedback, the students will be responsible for helping their fellow students revise their designs over the semester. These peer responses should be about 100-250 words, and should be written in a way that furthers the conversation by offering either insightful analysis of the topic, or constructive criticism on the peer's design decision.

Midterm Project

The class features an iterative design process similar to real word 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?

In the online version of the class, the student will upload a 10-15 minute narrated gameplay demo to a streaming video website of their choosing.

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?

In the lecture version of the class, the audience will participate in the demo. For the online version, students may incorporate friends and family into the demonstration, but it is optional.

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 grades will be assigned in class, and then posted on Blackboard for reference.