CLASS MEETING TIME & LOCATION
Monday, PM 3:10-4:40pm
Location: LEWIS 01509

INSTRUCTOR
Doris C. Rusch
Office: CDM building, room 513
Office hours: M 10:00am-12:00pm; M 4:45pm-5:30pm; W 4:45pm-5:30pm
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

GAM 226 provides students with a practical foundation in game design with a focus on concept development, design decomposition, and prototyping. Using game design theory, analysis, physical prototyping, playtesting, and iteration students learn how to translate game ideas, themes, and metaphors into gameplay, game pitches, and design documents.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will learn to
  • develop the vocabulary and critical understanding to describe and analyze the components of games and gameplay experiences,
  • develop a game idea from concept to playable, analogue prototype,
  • use common methods for documenting game designs such as game design documents and playtesting reports,
  • communicate their game ideas effectively through a game pitch.

REQUIRED MATERIALS
  • Fullerton, T. (2007). Game Design Workshop: A playcentric approach to creating innovative games. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

  • Other recommended reading
      ◦ Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. (2004) Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
      ◦ Schell, J. (2008) The Art of Game Design. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Inc.
      ◦ Brathwaite, B. & Schreiber, I. (2009): Challenges for Game Designers. Boston, MA: Course Technology.

GAME DESIGN JOURNAL
You are expected to bring a game design journal to class. You will be asked to write in your game design journal: (a) during class and (b) to write down ideas you have outside of class. This will help you learn to see life through the eyes of a game designer. As

your game designer eyes develop (focus) you will find that game ideas will pop up everywhere and the journal will provide a place to collect them for future reference. You might also be asked to present ideas from you design journal. The more you put in, the more you get out.

RESOURCES: As a student in the class, you have access to the CDM Gaming labs (see http://defrag.depaul.edu for details). If you're working on an assignment, you have priority for the use of the lab hardware and software. Student ID is required to use the labs.

POLICIES

- Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes and participate in class activities as scheduled.

- Late assignments: Late assignments will be accepted ONLY if you (1) contact me at least 6 hours before the due date and (2) turn in the assignment within three days of the due date. Each day the assignment is late will decrease the possible point value by 10%.

- Please note that some of the main assignments for this class consist of in-class playtesting of your projects. Since these assignments require your presence on the day of playtesting, deadlines are fixed and extensions cannot be granted.

- While this class does not emphasize essay writing, game rules and text are expected to be clear, spell-checked, and demonstrate a high proficiency in written English. The Writing Center offers free one-on-one professional advice from published writers about all types of academic, creative, and professional writing and oral presentations. Go to http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/ for more information and to set up appointments.

- Email: Email is the preferred means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. My email is drusch1@cdm.depaul.edu

- Plagiarism: It is your professional responsibility to ensure that all submitted work is your own. Please read DePaul's policy on plagiarism and other academic integrity violations at:http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/ContributionFolder/Resources/Students/ViolationDefinitions.html#aiPlagarism

- Student rights: You have rights as a student. To learn about these rights please read DePaul's policies for students regarding student rights, located here http://sr.depaul.edu/catalog/catalogfiles/current/undergraduate%20student%20handbook/pg51.html

- Incomplete: An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final and approved by the Dean of the School of Computer Science, Telecommunications and Information Systems. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

- Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussion will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of the course) and be sure to contact the following office for support and additional services:

  Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD)
  Lincoln Park Campus, Student Center #370, 773.325.167 7phone
  Loop Campus, Lewis Center #1400. 312.362.8002 phone
  - www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd
  - csd@depaul.edu

GRADING:

Grand total of 100 possible points.
A = 91+
A– = 90
B + = 89
B = 88-81
B– = 80
C + = 79
C = 78–71
C– = 70
D + = 69
D = 68– 61
D – = 60
F = 59 or lower

LESSON PLAN

Please note that the lesson plan is not part of the syllabus anymore and that some of these sessions and readings may change during the course. Please check the schedule on D2L for updates.

Sprint I:	*The Basics*		
Jan 7th	- intro & course overview - role of a game designer Reading: GDW CH1: "Role of Game Designer"	Jan 9th	Brainstorming (1000 blank, white cards) Reading: GDW CH6: "Conceptualization"
Jan 14th	- discussion of game ideas - formal game elements - Types of games (Caillois) - meaningful play Due: One Paragraph Game Idea #1 Reading: GDW CH3: "Formal Elements"	Jan 16th	- Rules and procedures (FLUXX) Due: One Paragraph Game Idea #2 Reading: GDW CH5: "Working With Formal Elements"
Sprint II:	*Creating Experiences*		
Jan 21st	- discussion of game ideas - player types and play personalities Due: Designing a Kindness Reading: - Stuart Brown: Play - Richard Bartle: players who suit Muds http://www.mud.co.uk/ richard/hcds.htm	Jan 23rd	- flow - opposition / challenge - In-class: Us vs. It Reading: GDW CH10: "Functionality, Completeness and Balance"

Jan 28th	games and story Reading: GDW CH4: "Working with dramatic elements"	Jan 30th	in-class: 100 Zombies Due: one page narrative game design Reading: GDW CH11: "Fun and Accessibility"
Sprint III:	*Prototyping & Playtesting*		
Feb 4th	team project selection Due: one sentence pitch Reading: - GDW CH12: "Team Structures" - GDW CH 13: " Stages of Development" (particularly: how to make a project plan, p.382)	Feb 6th	- analog prototyping lecture Reading: GDW CH7: "Prototyping"
Feb 11th	- prototyping exercise Due: - team formation & schedule; - one pager description - game design pillars	Feb 13th	- playtesting / usability and game research lecture / game research lab tour (guest lecture Cynthia Putnam) Reading: GDW CH9: "Playtesting"
Sprint IV:	*Final Project Creation*		

Feb 18th	- game design doc writing - game pitching Reading: GDW CH14: "The Design Document" Due: - final project progress report #1	Feb 20th	IndieGame: the Movie Reading: GDW CH16: "Selling Yourself and Your Ideas to the Game Industry"
Feb 25th	in-class playtesting	Feb 27th	in-class playtesting Due: - final project progress report #2
Sprint V:			
Mar 4th	TBA (open session) Due: - final project progress report #3 - submit 10 pager design doc. for feedback	Mar 6th	in-class playtesting
Mar 11th	in-class playtesting Due: - final project progress report #4	Mar 13th	game pitch presentations Due: - game pitch presented in class
Mar 18th	final project presentation: game showcase Due: - final project presentation in class - revised 10 pager design doc - peer evaluations		

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS and GRADING POLICY:

All original IP for the game designs will belong to the students of the class.

Attendance and In-Class Participation: 40% (2% for each class)

The structure of this course relies greatly on your active contribution. You are expected to attend all classes and participate actively in class activities and discussions. If you miss more than 3 classes without a doctor's note or another very good reason (e.g. your cousin's wedding is NOT a good enough reason), your grade will automatically be lowered one grade.

One Paragraph Game Ideas: 6% (3% each) of final grade
Assignments 1 and 2, due Jan 14th and Jan 16th

Write one paragraph describing a game idea for a single-player videogame. Choose a short title for the game. In the description, focus on the following:

- what is the game's setting (1-2 sentences are enough)
- what is the game's goal?
- what are the winning / losing conditions?
- what are the core mechanics (i.e. what does the player do on a moment-to-moment basis to reach the goal?)
- what is the conflict in the game?
- USP: give 2-3 reasons why this game is interesting / different from other games and potentially engaging.

Grading Rubric:
- C: one paragraph game idea submitted on due date BEFORE class on D2L, addressing all points mentioned above.
- B: the above plus game idea is tangible with goal, mechanics, conflict being clearly spelled out.
- A: the above plus game idea is original and demonstrates particular attention to engaging gameplay.

Designing a Kindness: 3% of final grade
Assignment 3, due Jan 21st

Game design is about creating experiences – experiences that evoke pleasurable changes in emotional states. Often gameplay is accompanied by tension, excitement, drama, frustration and finally relief. Designing this up and down of experience that makes players come back for more requires knowledge about the structure of

experiences. Whenever we put thought into what we are going to wear to make an impression, how to broach a difficult subject or maybe wiggle out of a difficult situation - we try to design an experience for others.

This assignment aims to hone your skills in creating experiences for others and focuses on designing a kindness for a person of your choice. The goal is to make that person happy. What exactly you are going to do is up to you, but the focus needs to be on the other person: what he or she would like; how to create a pleasurable experience for him / her. Post a one paragraph write-up on D2L that addresses the following:

- consideration about the recipient of the kindness - what would make him / her happy?
- consideration about creating the experience: what did you do to make the experience special or memorable? How did you build up to it? What happened in the middle? At the end?
- observation about the recipient of your kindness: how did the person you designed the kindness for react to it? What was his / her mood in the beginning? In the middle? At the end?
- Is there anything you would do differently the next time?

Grading Rubric:

- B: one paragraph write-up on designing a kindness submitted on due date BEFORE class on D2L.
- A: the above plus all points above are addressed.

Narrative Game Design: 4% of final game
Assignment 4, due Jan 28th

Find a folktale/myth/urban legend. Plot this tale against the dramatic arc (see class slides on D2L under "contents" for details).
- Define gameplay that captures what you feel to be the essential experience of the story.
- Write a one page design doc oriented towards a mainstream game audience. Include:
  - Sketch of interface and aesthetics that keep the player in the overall game vision.
  - Detail 3 mechanics that you feel are essential to the game and help to also convey the story experience (a strong connection between the gameplay and the story is essential here)
  - Submit one page design to D2L.
- Be prepared to present the tale and your designs in class.

Grading Rubric:

- C - all deliverables delivered:
- B - the above plus game idea is tangible with mechanics being spelled out clearly so the workings of the game become apparent. Game clearly captures an essential aspect of the original story in its mechanics.
- A - the above plus the idea is well presented / written.

One Sentence Pitch for Final Design Project: 1% of final grade
Assignment 5, due Feb. 4th

Come up with a game idea for the final design project. Distill your idea down to a one-sentence pitch. E.g. fight enemies and jump on things to save princess. Or: do yoga poses to overcome hordes of Undead and find inner peace. Bring this one-sentence pitch to class on an index card.

Grading:
- A - one-sentence pitch on index card delivered!

Team Formation and Schedule Document: 3% of final grade
Assignment 6, due Feb. 11th

This is a one page document that lists all the members of your team, tentative roles on the project (e.g. design, art, QA) as well as a tent4ative schedule of when the team is going to meet and work on the game until the end of the term. Be precise about the schedule. Don't just claim you'll be working xx hours on it every week. Spell out meeting times and define milestones. What do you want to have done after the 1st week, the 2nd week. Make a note on when you are going to do internal playtesting etc. Focus on iterative design. Build outwards: start with the core of the game, its most basic mechanics and plan on including more features later.
One document / team to be submitted by team leader.

Grading:
- B - document contains list of team members and a schedule with regular meetings and is turned in on time on D2L.
- A - schedule includes milestones and shows careful planning and awareness of the quickly approaching end of term.

One Pager for Final Game Design Project: 3% of final grade
Assignment 7, due Feb. 11th

Please note that one pagers are ONE page only - never more. Each team's leader submits one document. Everyone contributes to that document!
One pagers must include:

- game title
- say which audience it is for (target demographic)
- intended game system?
- briefly summarize the game's story, focusing on gameplay
- what is the game's objective, it's winning / losing condition
- pay special attention to core mechanics: and what does the player do on a moment-to-moment basis to win the game?
- describe each mechanic individually and as context-independent as makes sense. Include in the description of each mechanic its name, such as "grab rope". Describe the in-game operation of each mechanic. Include any objects needed for its operation.
- clearly describe a moment of gameplay in the game. Don't just tell a "story" of what happens: focus on the rules and how it works - how the various elements of the game relate to each other and react to the player's input.
- define player experience goal(s).
- unique selling points (USPs): these are the "bullet points" found on the back of the box. List about 3-5 USPs. What are the amazing features of your game that make it stand out and would get players to buy it?
- competitive analysis: what games are already out there that do something comparable to your game? You need to be aware of your competition.

Grading Rubric:

- C - paper turned in on time in class and on D2L
- B - game idea is tangible with mechanics being spelled out clearly so the workings of the game become apparent. Much of this hinges on the moment-of-gameplay described in the paper.
- A - the paper is well written, including the suggestions below.

Mechanics
- single spaced with a normal font and normal margins, one page
- looks clean and well organized from five feet away

Style
- present tense, active voice, avoid "will"
- avoid "I" (except for the examples)
- this is not a hint book
- intended audience is veteran game designer

Game Design Pillars, 3% of final grade
Assignment 8, due Feb. 11th

When you design a game, you should invest some time into clarifying what kind of game you want to develop. Design pillars are high-level goals for your game and help you create that vision. They are crucial to identify whether a new design element fits

with the overall vision for your game or not. E.g. if one of your design pillars is that the game should be family friendly, every new design decision has to meet the criterium of family-friendliness.

In your progress reports, you have to explain design iterations in terms of how they correspond to your design pillars. This is an important assignment that helps to make sure you're not just designing *a* game, but the game you *want* to design.

As a team, define 3 design pillars for your game. Each pillar should be described succinctly in one, short paragraph. The team lead submits the doc to D2L.

Grading:
C - design pillars submitted on time.
B - the above plus design pillars give a good idea of what kind of game you have in mind
A - the above plus design pillars are clearly described and make it easy to judge design decisions.

4 Progress Reports, 8% of final grade (2% each)
Assignments 9,10,11,12 due Feb. 18th, Feb. 27th, Mar. 4th, Mar. 11th

When you are working on your game design project, you must write at least one forum post a week detailing the work you and your teammates have done on the game over some part of the previous week.

It could just be an account of what changed in your game that day or a collection of feedback from a playtest. Every member of the team must write a different post; I will start the threads for each team on D2L. Explain or demonstrate how your team is applying the iterative design process in the development of your game. Discussion between teams and members is encouraged.

Grading:
- B -Weekly posting on time that includes above and a demonstration of cooperation and respect
- A - the above plus a particularly thoughtful application of the iterative design process

10-pager design doc for final project: 8% of final grade
Assignment 13, due Mar. 18th
submit ungraded version for feedback on Mar. 4th, 2% of final grade

For detailed instructions / template see class presentation slides on D2L under "contents": 10 pages only and one submission per team. Submission is handled by team leader. All team members are expected to contribute to the 10 pager and will receive the same grade. Peer evaluation will compensate for any imbalances in effort.

This 10 pager is a "broad stroke" design document that lays out the spine of your game. The intent is for readers to quickly understand the basics of the final product without going into excruciating detail. Keeping the 10 pager interesting may be the most important part of your document. The intended audience are the people who are going to finance your game.

Format: submit as pdf file containing images and other supporting material to illustrate your game idea.

Grading Rubric:
  • C - Paper turned in on time on D2L and follows the format on page 432 of Level Up.
  • B - Game idea is vividly described and all parts of the one-pager are well elaborated on.
  • A - All of the above plus the paper is well written and provides visuals and other supporting material to make the idea come to life.

Mechanics
  • Looks clean and well organized from five feet away.

Style
  • Present tense, active voice, avoid "will"
  • Avoid "I"
  • This is not a hint book
  • Intended audience is your publisher (the person with the check book!)

Game Pitch Presentation for Final Project: 8% of final grade
Assignment 14, due Mar. 13th

Each team prepares a pitch to "sell" their game idea. All team members are expected to contribute to making the presentation and to giving it in class, and will receive the same grade. Peer evaluation will compensate for any imbalances in effort.

The pitch should include the following elements and be presented in the format of a pdf presentation in class:

  • 1st slide:
    • title and logo of game
    • team name
    • date

- contact information

- 2nd slide: cover the basics of your game (what kind of game? Genre? Platform? Rating? Intended audience? How long does it take to play it?)

- 3rd slide: Explain the Game Story: who plays? what's the story? What's the conflict? What's the goal? Have a strong beginning and a dramatic middle so your audience wants to know how it ends.

- 4th slide: Game goals: what are the coolest features of your game? Why should anyone care about your game? Aim for five "back of the box" goals. How does your game outdo the competition?

- 5th slide: Gameplay summary: briefly cover the major points of gameplay. What are the basics of play for the game? Is it first person, third person, god mode? How will the play increase in challenge during the course of the game? What environments will the game happen in? What makes this game unique?

- 6th slide: Gameplay details: give more details on gameplay - what is it going to be like to play the game. Provide an illustration of a moment-of-gameplay. Either present your prototype or a gameplay video based on the prototype at this point.

  Normally, you would also talk about strategies to extend the shelf life of your game; downloadable content etc. Also, you would be asked to give an overview of the intended development team size if you were to actually make the game, development time, estimated costs etc. If you want to give this part a shot, you can, but it is not expected of you.

Grading Rubric:
- C - Pitch covers all the points mentioned above.
- B - The above, plus all the points are well presented.
- A - The above, plus pitch really sells the idea and the presentation has a performative aspect that helps to convey why this game should be made. (If you want to dress up for this, GO FOR IT!).

Mechanics
- 20 min power point presentation. Presentations will be mercilessly cut short after 20 min - so get your point across within that time.

- Everyone on the team needs to present a part of the pitch. You absolutely need to rehearse the presentation beforehand and make sure everyone knows their part.

- Take it seriously, as if it were a real industry presentation. But also have fun with this. If you are not convinced about the potential of your idea, nobody else will buy into it. Show some passion, but also some humor about your project.

Playable Prototype for Final Game Design Project: 8% of final grade
Assignment 15, due Mar 18th

Over the course of the second half of the term, you are expected to produce a complete, playable, analog prototype of your game. There will be two in-class playtesting sessions. While not graded, they are essential to your design process and must not be skipped.

As for the final prototype, grading will happen during the last playtesting session in class. All team members are expected to contribute to the development of the prototype. All team members will receive the same grade if they put in the same effort. Peer evaluation will compensate for any imbalances in effort.

Expectations for the prototype are:
- It is brought to class for all the scheduled playtestings.
- rigorous use is made of the iterative design process and feedback from playtesters and faculty is explicitly addressed in future design decisions.
- It is brought to class at the day of final playtesting, is playable and does not fall to pieces when touched.
- All rules are documented and clearly stated, so anybody could play the game without further explanation.
- It captures the core of your game through its rules and mechanics and provides a playable illustration of what your game is about and how it works.
- It illustrates potential for engagement and fun.

Grades for the prototype will be based exclusively on teamwork, adherence and rigorous use of the iterative design process, responsiveness to tester and faculty feedback from week to week.

Grades will not be determined by the "fun" of your games, but the question of "fun" or "engagement" needs to be addressed.

If the final prototype of your game idea does not show any potential for "fun" or "engagement", you need to have a good explanation why that is the case, what you initially had in mind, how you tried it out and why you think it failed. You are encouraged to experiment, but if your experiment fails, you need to be able to reflect on it so you can learn from mistakes.

Grading Rubric:
- C - Prototype is playable during final in-class playtesting session.
- B - The above, plus iterative design process has been rigorously applied and prototype captures the core of your intended game's system.
- A - All of the above plus the prototype either bears clear potential for "fun" or "engagement" or team members can provide a solid analysis of the aspects in which the prototype is lacking.

Mechanics
- Playable prototype with high enough production value that it survives transportation and handling.
- Prototype comes with a set of clearly stated game rules.
- Looks clean and well organized from five feet away.

Peer evaluation: 3% of final grade
Assignment 16, due Mar. 18th

You will be asked to complete an online form in which you will evaluate your teammates' contributions to the game project. The online form can be found on D2L under "contents". Fill it our and upload it to dropbox on D2L. Peer evaluations are important and designed as a way to balance any group inequity.