

## Syllabus

**Class Meeting Time & Location**

Tuesday 1:30pm - 4:45pm  
Classroom CDM 200

**Instructor**

Mischa Hiessboeck  
[mhiessbo@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:mhiessbo@cdm.depaul.edu)

**Office Hours:** Loop Campus CDM 430

Monday / Wednesday 9:10am-11:10am  
Tuesday / Thursday 9:10am-10:10am

**Important Dates WQ 2017/18**

January 2<sup>nd</sup>: Last day to drop classes with no penalty

February 12<sup>th</sup>: Last day to submit your IRB certificate

February 19<sup>th</sup>: Last day to withdraw from AQ classes

**March 13<sup>th</sup> 2:30pm to 4:45pm Last day of class**

March 26<sup>th</sup>: WQ 2017/18 Grades are due

**Course Description**

Playtesting is one of the key skills every game designer needs to possess. Its importance in the development process cannot be stressed enough. In this course, students will learn how to identify design goals, form hypotheses about their designs, articulate good research and interview questions, plan and conduct playtests, as well as how to evaluate playtest data so it can inform design iterations and help to make better games.

To practice playtesting in all stages of game development – from an initial mechanic, to a moment-of-gameplay, to a fully playable game – students will engage in rapid prototyping, playtesting and iteration from experimental mini interactions to bigger projects.

**Learning Objectives**

After participating in this course, you will be able to:

- Clearly identify design goals
- Effectively plan a playtest
- Identify research and survey questions to gather relevant data for design iterations
- Demonstrate effective ways to present evaluation findings
- Make informed choices between usability and playtesting methods to reach design goals

**Prerequisites**

- GAM 244

**Required materials**

Relevant readings will be provided as links or pdf on D2L, contents.

Prototyping materials will be very helpful: deck of cards, index cards, dice, jenga blocks, legos. I'll be providing most of what we need, but can't hurt to also have access to materials yourself.

**D2L**

We are using D2L (<http://d2l.depaul.edu>) as the supporting learning platform for this course. All course materials including weekly lecture slides and class info (i.e. syllabus, lesson plan, assignment descriptions etc.) are available through D2L under “contents”.

Assignments are submitted to its dedicated submissions folder on D2L.

## POLICIES

- **Participation and Attendance:** You are expected to attend all classes and participate in class activities as scheduled. Do not underestimate the importance of attendance and participation in this class. Playtesting requires active engagement on the sides of those who playtest and the playtesters. Your feedback and suggestions will be paramount to inform design iterations, so physical presence alone is not enough.  
As stated below, 8% of your grade depends on participation and attendance. You should not assume that these points are “a given”. On the contrary, participation must be earned by showing up on time to every class, displaying full engagement in all discussions and activities, completing all assignments, and listening actively and attentively to the instructor and your peers.

Regarding attendance, 1/3 of a letter grade will be docked from your final grade in the course for each absence beyond one (1). For example, if you end the class with an A-, but have missed 2 classes in total, your final grade would be a B. Think of the “free” absence as sick day or emergency day. If you use it for other reasons early in the term, you may find yourself in a bind if you get sick later on, or need to miss class for a family emergency. Because it is impossible for me to determine fairly what constitutes a compelling reason to miss class, there are no excused absences beyond this one. In all cases, please make every effort to contact me and explain the circumstances of your absence before you miss class. Always check with me about any work or assignments you may have missed. You can track your attendance on D2L, where it will be entered every week.

Please be aware that being absent on a day you are assigned to present / playtest your design in class will result in a grade of zero for that assignment. You will know your presentation / playtesting date for each assignment at least one week before the assignment is due. Since you will be aware of your schedule well in advance, no unforeseen conflicts should arise and thus no make-up work will be permitted. Should dire circumstances render you physically unable to present on the agreed-upon day, you must make every effort to contact me and explain your circumstances prior to the class. Examples of circumstances that would make you physically unable to present include a highly contagious illness, accidents, or deaths in the family. If you have a cold or other minor illness, you will still be expected to show up.

**Tardiness:** please arrive to class on time! Tardiness under any circumstances is disruptive to the class as a whole. Habitual lateness, however, is a sure sign of disrespect to your classmates. As such, it will be factored into your participation grade as the instructor sees fit. If for some reason, you have a class schedule that makes it physically impossible for you to arrive by 3:10pm, please let me know by the end of the first week of classes so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Otherwise, all students are expected to be ready to begin class at 3:10pm.

- **Late assignments:** I will accept late assignments ONLY if you (1) contact me at least 24 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 require your presence in class on the due date or provide the basis for in-class exercises. Extensions on these assignments cannot be granted. If you do not manage to deliver these assignments on time or to be present during presentation, you receive 0 points for them. In-class discussion of assignments is crucial to learning from the assignments, so it is not enough to do them, if you do not show up to also present them and participate and their critique.

- All documents delivered in this class 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 [mhiessbo@cdm.depaul.edu](mailto:mhiessbo@cdm.depaul.edu). Please bear in mind that it might take me up to 24 hours before I can respond to your email.
- 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#aiPlagiarism>
- 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, 773.325.1677 phone  
Loop Campus, Lewis Center #1400. 312.362.8002 phone
  - [www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd](http://www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd)
  - [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu)

**Class Requirements:**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** In order to stay in this course, you need to obtain IRB certification by Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup> 2018. These are the instructions you need to follow:

A. Go here:

<https://offices.depaul.edu/ors/research-protections/irb/training/Pages/default.aspx>

B. Click on Training, log in, then click on "For instructions on how to access CITI Click HERE" to get the detailed instructions. This is a pdf that tells you where you need to go, what steps to follow, and so on. Follow them carefully.

C. Your learner group is "a) Students-class projects"

This means that you will have to complete the following modules:

1. DePaul University
2. Students in Research-SBR
3. History & Ethical Principles-SBR
4. Defining Research with Human Subjects-SBR
5. The Regulations and the Social and Behavioral Sciences-SBR
6. Assessing Risk in Social and Behavioral Sciences-SBR
7. Informed Consent-SBR
8. Privacy and Confidentiality-SBR

(if you're curious, I had to do 18 modules!)

D. Once you've completed the course successfully, you need to save your certificate as a pdf (I recommend printing it to pdf). **You need to upload this pdf to D2L as an assignment called "IRB training"**. This will prove to me that you have completed the course. The IRB will also receive notification of your completion.

If you have recently completed IRB training for another course, you can upload notification of completion from that course.

**If I have not received your certificate before class on Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, I will ask you to drop the course.**

If you have any problems with the CITI site or other questions, please let me know!

**GRADING:**

A = 91-100	B- = 80	D+ = 69
A- = 90	C+ = 79	D = 68-61
B+ = 89	C = 78-71	F = 60 or less
B = 88-81	C- = 70	

**OTHER REQUIREMENTS:**

Participation: 8%

Assignments: 92%

- Assignment 1: Article Insight, 3%
- Assignment 2: Mechanical Ritual, 2%
- Assignment 3: Mechanical Ritual Playtest, 8%
- Assignment 4: Final Project Playtest 1, Prep., 3%
- Assignment 5: Final Project Playtest Report 1, 10%
- Assignment 6: Final Project Playtest 2, Prep, 3%
- Assignment 7: Final Project Playtest Report 2, 10%
- Assignment 8: Final Project Playtest Plan 1, 4%
- Assignment 9: Final Project Playtest Report 3, 15%
- Assignment 10: Final Project Feature Complete Prototype, 0%
- Assignment 11: Final Project Playtest Plan 2, 4%
- Assignment 12: Final Project Playtest Report 4, 15%
- Assignment 13: Post Mortem Presentation, 14%
- Assignment 14: Peer Evaluations, 1%

**NOTE: One of the most difficult things about playtesting is to recruit enough (and suitable) playtesters. Start your recruitment process early! I recommend setting up an Eventbrite or other online tool to invite testers and allow them to sign up for playtesting timeslots during our big Play 4 Change playtests (see lesson plan for dates).**

To facilitate playtesting, you also have access to a participant pool from which you can recruit playtesters, but I do not recommend relying on this as your sole source for testers because responses can be very hit or miss. Go to this website and follow the instructions:

<http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/academics/research/Pages/Instructions-for-Researchers.aspx>

Detailed description of assignments and grading rubric is available on D2L under “contents”, “course info”. Hard copies of assignment descriptions will be handed out in class throughout the term in time before each assignment is due.

**LESSON PLAN: please note that this lesson plan and the assignments are not part of the syllabus anymore and liable to change.**

### **Week 1 – January 2<sup>nd</sup>: What is Playtesting and Why Do We Need It?**

Lecture

- Overview: difference between playtesting, usability and QA.
- Different player types

Design Exercise

- “Us vs. It” - importance of playtesting for fine tuning challenge & designing for dramatic effect

#### **❖ Home Assignment 1, Reading, due January 9<sup>th</sup>, 3%**

- Read and post insights on the following articles to D2L:
  - Liz Lerman article on “critical response”, on D2L, content, week 1
  - [Gamasutra article](#) on rapid prototyping

### **Week 2 – January 9<sup>th</sup>: Designing for Experience**

Method:

- Playtesting methods incl. “critical response process” and “think aloud”

Design Exercise:

- 7 Deadly Sins (courtesy of Clint Hocking, Game Design Workshop, GDC)
- Apply “critical response process” method and “think aloud” to practice
- Playtest & Iteration

#### **❖ Home Assignment 2: Mechanical Ritual, due January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2%**

- Design a mechanical ritual aimed to evoke an emotional experience inspired by a song / poem of your choice and which uses 3 (no more no less) personal objects.

### **Week 3 – January 16<sup>th</sup>: The Art of Asking**

Lecture:

- Asking good questions for playtesting – from research questions to survey questions

Exercise:

- In pairs, workshop the questions for each particular mechanical ritual
- Playtest with someone new to test the design as well as the questions
- Revise questions if needed for home assignment

#### **❖ Home Assignment 3: Mechanical Ritual Playtest, due January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 8%**

- Playtest mechanical ritual with players outside of class. Go through at least 2 rounds of development (One round of development consists of: building – testing – iterating).
- Submit a description of your mechanical ritual as well as your playtest report to D2L submissions folder “mechanical ritual playtest”.

### **Week 4 – January 23<sup>rd</sup>: Pragmatics of Playtesting & Final Project Kick Off**

Lecture:

- Planning and conducting a playtest, player script, and other considerations

Reading: Focus Testing Basics

#### **Design exercise – start FINAL PROJECT**

- Form teams of 4
- Choose your challenge: climate change, financial literacy, or GGJ 2017
  - See handouts for challenge descriptions
- Find the heart of your game and start by designing the core system and interaction / mechanical ritual

that players will perform on a moment-to-moment basis. Note that this core system and mechanical ritual is the main vehicle to achieve your game’s purpose (not the story or level design!). Whether your goal is to teach players something or evoke a specific experience, you need to make sure your core will get you there. If the experience / message isn’t transported through the core, it won’t get across at all. That’s why we start there.

- If there is time: Workshop research and survey questions in class. Finish at home.
- ❖ **Home Assignment 4: Final Project Playtest 1 Prep., due January 25<sup>th</sup> (NOTE that’s a Thursday!), 3%**
  - State your challenge and include a brief description of your core design.
  - Write up your research and survey questions for the first playtest.
  - Submit by to D2L submissions folder “Final Project Playtest 1, Prep.” so I can give feedback to your questions before your playtest!
- ❖ **Home Assignment 5: Final Project Playtest 1 Report, due January 30<sup>th</sup>, 10%**
  - Playtest twice before class next week with people outside of class
  - Submit playtest report, including your playtest plan to D2L, submissions folder “Final Project: Playtest 1 Report”

### **Week 5 – January 30<sup>th</sup>: Final Project Workshop**

Part 1: Workshop your final project in class – check-ins with Mischa

- Reflect on playtest results in your teams: what needs to be done?
- Iterate on core interaction design
- Once satisfied, move on towards creating a complete level
- If your core needs more work, or you have a more systemic game that requires more system design, keep improving the core

Part 2: Workshop your questions for the next playtest – check-ins with Mischa

- Spend 30min in your teams devising the research and survey questions for your next out-of-class playtest
- Exchange questions with your class mates to critique and improve them

- ❖ **Home assignment 6: Final Project Playtest 2, Prep., due February 1<sup>st</sup> (NOTE: Thursday!), 3%**
  - State your challenge and include a brief description of your current design
  - Write up your research and survey questions for the second playtest.
  - Submit to D2L submissions folder “Final Project Playtest 2, Prep.” so I can give feedback to your questions before your playtest!
- ❖ **Home assignment 7: Final Project Playtest 2 Report, due February 6<sup>th</sup>, 10%**
  - Playtest & iterate final project at least once before class next week
  - Submit playtest report to D2L submissions folder “Final Project: Playtest 2 Report”

NOTE: Set up playtest in Play 4 Change lab for Week 7, using the recruitment tool to recruit at least 10 participants per team. Make sure to include at least 50% females as playtesters!

### **Week 6 – February 6<sup>th</sup>: Playtesting – Methods and Evaluation**

Lecture

- Playtest methods
- Data coding / coding workshop

Workshop your final project – check-ins with Mischa

- Teams work on their final projects
- Workshop your playtest plan for bigger playtest next week in the Play 4 change lab.

- ❖ **Home assignment 8: Final Project Playtest 3 Prep, due October 8<sup>th</sup> (NOTE: Thursday!), 4%**
  - Create and submit playtest plan to D2L submission folder “Playtest 3 Prep”

### **Week 7 – February 13<sup>th</sup>: Playtest 3 in the Play-for-Change lab**

This is the first, big playtest in the Play-for-Change lab. You are supposed to recruit at least 10 participants for this one, aiming for gender and background diversity!

- ❖ **Home assignment 9: Final Project Playtest 3 Report, due February 20<sup>th</sup>, 15%**
  - Write and submit playtest report, including your **revised** playtest plan to D2L submissions folder “Final Project: Playtest 3 Report”

### **Week 8 – February 20<sup>th</sup>: Final Project Workshop**

Workshop:

- Qualitative Data Coding Workshop based on each team’s first qualitative data coding attempts
  - Each team works on their projects, taking recent playtesting results into account
  - Move towards fleshing out the concept more, integrating art and sound considerations
  - Fleshing out level design
  - Check-ins with Mischa on playtest evaluation and data coding of last playtest
- ❖ **Home assignment 10: Final Project Feature Complete Prototype, due November 1<sup>st</sup>**
    - Work on projects, focus on finalizing gameplay / levels and potentially add art / sound considerations to be tested in Week 10 alongside the playable prototype
    - Bring feature complete prototype to class in Week 9
    - Recruit playtesters through recruitment tool and beyond for March 6<sup>th</sup> playtest in Play-for-Change lab

### **Week 9 – February 27<sup>th</sup>: Final Project Class-Internal Playtest and Workshop**

- In-class playtest of projects
  - Each team workshops their research and survey questions for week 10
  - Exchange research and survey questions with other teams to critique and improve them
- ❖ **Home assignment 11: Final Project Playtest 4 prep, due March 1<sup>st</sup> (NOTE: Thursday!), 4%**
    - Create and submit playtest plan to D2L submission folder “Playtest 4 Prep”

### **Week 10 – March 6<sup>th</sup>: Final Project Playtest 4 in the Play-for-Change lab**

This is the second, big playtest in the Play-for-Change lab. You are again supposed to recruit at least 10 participants for this one, aiming for gender and background diversity!

- ❖ **Home assignment 12: Final Project Playtest 4 Report, due March 13<sup>th</sup>, 15%**
  - Playtest report including playtest plan
- ❖ **Home assignment 13: Post Mortem Presentation, due March 13<sup>th</sup>, 14%**
  - Prepare reflective ppt presentation on final project and its evaluation through rapid prototyping, playtesting and iteration (instead of final)

### **Week 11 – March 13<sup>th</sup>: Post Mortem Presentations**

Final presentations

CHANGED CLASS TIME: 2:30pm-4:45pm