
GAM 355: Solo Game Development Project

Winter 2023-24

Course Modality: Course meets MW 3:10PM - 4:40PM in 14EAS 00212 at Loop Campus

Instructor Info

Instructor: Richard Wetzel (he/him)

Office: Daley 205D

Phone: 312-362-6955

Email: richard.wetzel@depaul.edu

Office Hours: M 1:30PM – 2:15PM and W 12:45PM – 1:30PM
(in person or <https://depaul.zoom.us/my/richardwetzel>)

Communication: Email is the best way to reach me, and I will typically respond within 2 working days. I am not checking email outside of normal work hours or on weekends. Before emailing, please check if the answer can be found in this syllabus.

Course Description

Students independently create a complete short video game serving as its designer, programmer, and artist. The project is structured around a compressed development cycle that supports an appropriately scoped, polished game. From brainstorming an innovative concept to rapidly prototyping and iterating on gameplay, the course focuses on core gameplay loops and game feel. A survey of noteworthy games developed by single authors in short timeframes provides students with references to draw from.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Plan and manage the development of a game artefact following a typical production cycle from ideation to release
 - Appropriately scope a project and prioritize features
 - Build a game from scratch to completion
 - Utilize industry standard code management tools
 - Reflect critically on your own practice and learning
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Recommended Materials

Lemarchand, Richard. A Playful Production Process: For Game Designers (and Everyone). MIT Press, 2021.

Swink, Steve. Game feel: a game designer's guide to virtual sensation. CRC press, 2008.

Approach

This course will see you develop a full game all by yourself. This can be a daunting task! My main job as instructor will be to keep everyone on track making steady progress on your project. Therefore, this course features a relatively high amount of required submissions and check-ins. These are designed for your own benefit and ideally will prevent an end-of-term crunch.

There are also no pre-planned formal lectures. Instead, we will use class time for constant playtests of your artefacts (usually happening every Wednesday) and discussing topics that are relevant for the individual state and demands of your projects (mostly happening Mondays).

To identify useful topics, we will regularly have a meta discussion about the course. These discussions will e.g., relate to specific topics that should be covered, pace of the course, content of assignments and their grading, and other course modalities. In short, you as individuals and cohort will be able to shape the course so that it matches your needs and interests. However, this requires that you actively participate in these discussions and reflect on your own learning and learning requirements.

If you are struggling in the course, please let me know! Either in class, by email, or by making use of my office hours. I am there to help you, and asking questions is always appreciated.

Course Schedule

In the course we are applying a production cycle consisting of three distinct phases: Pre-Production, Production, and Post-Production.

Pre-Production (weeks 1 to 3):

During Pre-Production you will be working on ideation and developing a vision document, creating a time-plan and showing a first (rudimentary) playable prototype. These will set you up to be ready to work on the full game.

Production (weeks 4 to 8):

During this phase, you will need to create an alpha and a beta build of your game. We are going to use a highly iterative process with playtests and discussions of your artefact every week.

Post-Production (weeks 9 to 11):

The last phase contains the finished release build, as well as reflecting on the work you have done over the course of the term.

Class Policies

Changes to the Syllabus

This class will be shaped based on your participation, input, and interests. This means that not only the lesson plan but also this syllabus might be adapted during the term. We will discuss any changes during class, and the new syllabus will be uploaded to D2L, and announced via email.

This is syllabus version 1.0.

Attendance

There is no strict attendance policy in this course. It is your own responsibility to make the best use of your time.

In general, we will use Mondays for individual project support, discussing upcoming assignments, and requested inputs about relevant topics.

On Wednesdays, we will hold our weekly playtests and also present different milestones. As such, Wednesday participation and provision of peer feedback is a crucial element for everyone to gauge their progress and received invaluable feedback on their projects.

If you have to miss a class, this is not an issue. Please just send an email before start of class to announce your absence. You do not have to provide any detailed or personal reasons for this. If you are feeling sick, you should certainly not attend class!

If attendance will become an issue for individuals or the whole cohort over the course of the term (accompanied by low quality work), then attendance will become mandatory for everyone.

Late Work

This course operates on a rather strict timeline. Assignments are due regularly, and they are designed to keep you on track and also build on one another. As such, slipping into late work might affect the progress of the whole term for your. Therefore, it is advised to submit assignments on time, even if they might not be of the highest standard. You can make up for any lost points along the way.

Of course, sometimes missing a deadline is unavoidable. If you realize you will not be able to submit on time, you have to email me before the actual deadline. In your email, you need to propose a new reasonable submission date.

If you submit late work without emailing beforehand, you will lose 5% of the available points for the assignment per full day or part thereof that your submission is late. E.g. submitting 60 seconds or 23 hours late would both decrease your points by 5%. Submitting 25 or 47 hours late would lead to a loss of 10%, and so on.

Revisions

You can resubmit each piece of work once. Changes to your original submission must be clearly highlighted. A resubmission can only improve your original grade by up to 10% of the available points. Revisions must be submitted within one week of original grade publications.

Late submissions can never be revised.

Assignments

To help everyone stay on track, this course has regular required submissions and assignments. Details of all assignments will be discussed in class, and you will find instructions on D2L.

At the end of every week, you will be required to make a forum post in D2L updating your developer diary outlining your progress, state of your game, and any struggles you might have. At the same time, you have to use a code repository throughout the term saving your different iterations.

During pre-production, you will create a vision document that describes your idea, the target audience, the hook, core game mechanisms etc. You will then use this to develop a time-plan ranking and scheduling different features in anticipation of the different required builds. Lastly, you will present a first playable prototype that showcases a salient aspect of your idea.

Production consists of the delivery of the alpha and beta builds. The alpha build should be limited in breadth but contain at least one of each game element. For the beta build all game elements should be finished and you will have to drop any incomplete features.

Post-production gives you time to polish your game and complete the release build. Once this is done, you will have time to write a reflection looking back on the term (and making use of the aforementioned developer diaries). You also have to critically engage with a self-chosen criterion (defined earlier in the term) and self-asses your level of achievement for this. Lastly, you have to create an itch.io page for your game complete with description, short video, and screenshots.

Grading

Each individual assignment is worth a certain amount of points out of 100 total for the course. Points are either rewarded based on a letter grade for the submission or as a simple pass/fail (full points / no points).

	Points	Grading
Pre-Production		
Vision	5	pass/fail
Time-Plan	5	pass/fail
First Playable	5	pass/fail
Production		
Alpha Build	15	Letter
Beta Build	15	Letter
Post-Production		
Release Build	15	Letter
Reflection	15	Letter
Personal Criterion	15	Letter
Other		
Developer Diary	5	0.5 points per week of activity
Itch.io	2.5	pass/fail
Code repository	2.5	pass/fail

Grading Scale

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	60-69
B-	80-82	F	0-59

Extra Credit

You will be able to gain extra credit for activities that either benefit this course directly or show a deeper personal engagement with games, game design, game development, or other related topics. Examples include but are not limited to attending relevant events and reflecting on them, tutoring classmates, researching relevant external sources and sharing them, etc.

If you have an idea for something that might be worth extra credit, talk to me about details and specific requirements!

Use of AI

Generative AI tools are trained on existing texts, algorithms, and models to generate content like writing, images, and videos based on prompts from users. ChatGPT, Midjourney, Google Bard, and DALL-E are examples of generative AI tools. Please refrain from using generative AI in this course for any purpose. We will be developing skills that are important to practice on your own and using generative AI may inhibit development, practice, or understanding of those skills.

In addition, many AI tools have also been trained unethically which makes their use inappropriate.

If you are unsure if a specific tool makes use of AI, or if a specific tool is permitted for use on assignments in this course, please contact me. Attempting to pass off AI-generated work as your own will violate [DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy](#).

University Policies & Resources

COVID-19 Updates

For the latest news and resources, please visit [DePaul's response to COVID-19 page](#).

Academic Integrity

DePaul University is a learning community that fosters the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas within a context that emphasizes a sense of responsibility for oneself, for others and for society at large. Violations of academic integrity, in any of their forms, are, therefore, detrimental to the values of DePaul, to the students' own development as responsible members of society, and to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Violations include but are not limited to the following categories: cheating; plagiarism; fabrication; falsification or sabotage of research data; destruction or misuse of the university's

academic resources; alteration or falsification of academic records; and academic misconduct. Conduct that is punishable under the Academic Integrity Policy could result in additional disciplinary actions by other university officials and possible civil or criminal prosecution. Please refer to your Student Handbook or visit Academic Integrity at DePaul University (<http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu>) for further details.

Library Resources

The DePaul University Library (<https://library.depaul.edu>) provides access to authoritative information sources, such as scholarly articles, journals, and books, primary sources, and research databases. Research help is available daily in-person and via chat, email, phone, or text. You may also make an appointment (in-person, phone, or Zoom) with a librarian to discuss your research projects.

Center for Students with Disabilities

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling you to access accommodations and support services to assist your success. There are two office locations:

Loop Campus - Lewis Center #1420 - (312) 362-8002

Lincoln Park Campus - Student Center #370 - (773) 325-1677

Students can also email the office at csd@depaul.edu

Students who are registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact me privately to discuss how I may assist in facilitating the accommodations you will use in this course. This is best done early in the term. Our conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

University Counseling & Psychological Services

[University Counseling & Psychological Services](#) (UCAPS) helps remove barriers to learning and support academic success by providing free, goal-focused, collaborative, short-term, confidential, individual, and group counseling services for DePaul's students. UCAPS has a diverse multi-disciplinary staff that includes licensed mental health professionals in psychology, counseling, and social work.

Students* can talk to a therapist or schedule a brief screening and consultation appointment in the following ways:

- To speak directly to a therapist 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, students should call 773-325-CARE (2273) and Press "1" when prompted.
- To schedule a brief screening and consultation (BSC) appointment, students should call 773-325-CARE (2273) during regular business hours and Press "2" when prompted.
- Students can visit go.depaul.edu/ucaps and click the '[Schedule a Consultation](#)' button to use online scheduling for a Brief Screening & Consultation (BSC) appointment. Online scheduling is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. *All BSCs scheduled online are for phone appointments. To schedule an in-person or telehealth BSC, please call 773-325-CARE (2273) and Press "2" when prompted.*

*Services are provided based on student eligibility. For full eligibility details please visit go.depaul.edu/ucaps.

The Writing Center

I strongly recommend you make use of the Writing Center throughout your time at DePaul. The Writing Center provides free peer writing tutoring for DePaul students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Writing Center tutors work with writers at all stages of the writing process, from invention to revision, and they are trained to identify recurring issues in your writing as well as address any specific questions or areas that you want to talk about. Visit www.depaul.edu/writing for more information.

Name & Pronouns

I will gladly address you by the name and pronouns that you indicate. Please advise me of your name and/or your pronouns early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate notes in my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a first name that differs from their legal name, and they may also update their gender and gender pronouns. If a new name is identified, it will display as a “preferred name” in University-related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal necessity. For more information and instructions on how to make these updates, please see the LGBTQIA Resource Center’s [Personal Information Change](#) resources and the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at policies.depaul.edu.

Dean of Students

The [Dean of Students Office \(DOS\)](#) promotes student learning and ethical decision making in an inclusive and validating environment. Utilizing a comprehensive approach to student advocacy that is informed by DePaul’s Catholic, Vincentian, and urban mission, the office collaborates with students, staff, faculty, parents and community partners to support students in reaching their academic and personal success.

The Dean of Students Office is primarily responsible for administering and adjudicating violations of the Code of Student Responsibility at DePaul University. Additionally, the office provides the administrative withdrawal and absence notification process, and can help students identify campus and community resources in times of personal and/or family crises and medical emergencies.

You can contact the Dean of Students Office by calling (773) 325-7290 or emailing deanofstudents@depaul.edu. In cases of emergency, please call the Department of Public Safety at (773) 325-7777.

Sexual & Relationship Violence

As a DePaul community, we share a commitment to take care of one another. Classroom relationships are based on trust and communication. Sometimes, material raised in class may bring up issues for students related to sexual and relationship violence. In other instances, students may reach out to faculty as a source of help and support. It is important for students to know that faculty are required to report information reported to them about experiences with sexual or relationship violence to DePaul’s [Title IX](#) Coordinator. Students should also

know that disclosing experiences with sexual or relationship violence in course assignments or discussion does not constitute a formal report to the University and may not begin the process of DePaul providing a response. Students seeking to report an incident of sexual or relationship violence to DePaul should contact Public Safety (Lincoln Park: 773-325-7777; Loop: 312-362-8400) and/or the Title IX Coordinator (Lincoln Park: 312-362-8970 or titleixcoordinator@depaul.edu).

Students seeking to speak confidentially about issues related to sexual and relationship violence should contact a Survivor Support Advocate in the Office of Health Promotion & Wellness for information and resources (773-325-7129 or hpw@depaul.edu). More information is available at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/hpw/shvp.html>. Students are encouraged to take advantage of these services and to seek help around sexual and relationship violence for themselves as well as their peers who may be in need of support.

Basic Needs

Access to nutritious food and reliable housing are factors that influence many students' ability to succeed in the classroom and beyond. However, students facing food or housing insecurities may be hesitant to call attention to their ongoing struggles. DePaul University is committed to and cares about all students. To help you manage personal challenges and basic needs security, the university offers several resources. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office for support: by calling (773) 325-7290 or emailing deanofstudents@depaul.edu. You can also contact [Elizabeth Ann Seton Food Pantry and Sandwich Kitchen](#) and the [Dax Program](#) (Chicago - Depaul; email: emily.edwards@depaulusa.org; phone: (312) 362-7931 for support. The Center for Access and Attainment has also created [a guide for Food and Housing Resources](#) that you can review.

If you are comfortable doing so, please also let me know about these challenges, so that I can help you access resources.