GAM 341 Introduction to Level Design

Instructor: Dr. Bobby Schweizer

Term: Winter 2015
Section: 801
Meeting time: M 5:45PM - 9:00PM
Location: 14EAS (Daley) 212 at Loop Campus

Email: rschweiz@cmd.depaul.edu (Please prefix all emails with [GAM 341] to ensure I receive it.)
Office: Daley 205C
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 2:30—4:00

Overview

Level design is the art of creating believable environments, stages, and missions for videogames. This course explores topics including architecture, storytelling, pacing, and puzzles. Using a 3D level editor—Unreal Engine 4 (UE4), students will investigate technical design issues including the construction, texturing, lighting, and scripting of modern game levels. The roles, duties and challenges of the level designer will also be discussed.

Specifically, we will be focusing our attention on how games use space, audio/visual cues, flow and pacing to create activities for players. We'll be using UE4 and its Blueprint visual scripting system to practice basic level design techniques, such as blockouts, scripted events (switches and triggers), the writing of accounting narratives and walkthroughs, and the creation of maps.

Please note that this course in not a course about learning to use UE4, although you will be expected to learn aspects of the engine in order to create levels for the course. All assets used in the course will be from free examples/samples found in UE4, as our focus in not on the creation of innovation art or audio but on the creation of mechanic-driven levels. No prior art or programming experience is required. It is expected that you have taken GAM 245 and thus come to the class with basic game design knowledge.

By the end of this course students should be comfortable working in 3D environments and designing interesting spaces given a set of constraints and mechanics.

Goals: 1) Students will apply previously acquired game design principles and methods in the creation of videogame levels/environments.

2) Students will develop a foundational literacy and confidence in basic level design techniques, including blockouts, player interactions and level events, and the creation of walkthroughs and maps.

3) Students will develop fluency in building levels in a 3D environment.

4) Students will develop literacy with principles from architecture, spatial storytelling, and environment design.

The class schedule can be found on D2L.

Course Tools

Software:

We will be using D2L as the primary CMS for this course.

Unreal Engine 4 (UE4) is required is available as a free download for Windows, Mac, and Linux.

Rather than uploading full levels you will be asked to create short videos of your levels, using UE4's built in tools and the screen recording software OBS-- open broadcasting software (https://obsproject.com/) or some other tool of your choice. All videos will be uploaded either to YouTube or Vimeo, NOT to the D2L Dropbox. That way you can preview your video to make sure that it is working and will save time when reviewing each other's work, since you won't have to download big video files.

Reading and Viewing: Selected readings and videos will be accessible via D2L and the web. Access to these resources is free. Information on assigned reading and viewing is provided in the GAM 341 Course Guide posted on D2L.

Grading

Grading Scale (%)

94 – 100	A
90 – 93	A-
87 – 89	B+
83 – 86	B
80 – 82	B-
77 – 79	C+
73 – 76	C
70 – 72	C-
67 – 69	D+
60 – 66	D
0-59	F

Assignment Overview

Room with a View	10
4-Step Level Design	40
Environmental Puzzles	40
Final Level	55
Design Responses	25
Participation	30
Total:	200 points = 100%

Participation & Attendance: Your participation in class will be measured during discussions, design exercises, and playtests. It is worth 15% of your grade. During discussion, you are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows me to get to know you, which will give me insight into your assignments. Both those who *give help* and those who *ask for help* are considered to be active participants in class.

Being a good game designer means being involved in a community of peers to give and receive feedback and attendance is a significant part of this. You can't participate if you're not in class! If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to make up the work. Lectures are video recorded and posted to D2L. Excused absences must go through the Office of the Dean of Students.

D2L

We are using D2L (http://d2l.depaul.edu) as the supporting learning platform for this course. The syllabus, lesson plan, and assignment descriptions are available through D2L under "Content."

Most assignments will be submitted to dropbox on D2L. Do not submit assignments by email. Assignment due dates are noted on the schedule. Late assignments (except for the final project) will be accepted after the due date with a ½ letter grade penalty per day. The dropbox will remain open for 48 hours after the due date, at which point it will stop accepting submissions and you will need to email me before turning your assignment into the "Late Work" dropbox.

Project Extensions: Sometimes things happen that get in the way of your schoolwork. I would rather you turn something in late than not at all. Thus, I am willing to grant one deadline extension to each student per term, provided you email me at least two days ahead of time and explain your plan to turn the work in.

RESOURCES

Labs: As a student in the class, you have access to the CDM Gaming and computer 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.

Game Tutor: Your resource for help with Blueprints and UE4! Jeremy Crockett is available to help you with Blueprints or other UE4 questions if you need extra support. He is an excellent designer, as well as programmer and I highly encourage you to seek him out. You can contact Jeremy, see his tutoring schedule, and schedule appointments with him here: http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/TutoringProgram.aspx?area=

COURSE POLICIES

Attitude: A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others while someone else is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise, you may be asked to leave the classroom. I will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such issues.

Civil Discourse: DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges

students, both intellectually and personally, to be Socially Responsible Leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. Again, I will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Digital Devices: While class is in session, your attention should not be divided between classroom activities and your laptops, smart phones, iPads, etc. (unless you've been asked to play a game or do research). Set your phone ringers to silent. Should you need to answer a call during class, please leave the room in an undisruptive manner. Out of respect to everyone in the room, texting/messaging is never allowable in class. If you are required to be on call as part of your job, please advise me at the start of the course.

Writing: While this class does not emphasize essay writing, design documents 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 rschweiz@cdm.depaul.edu

COLLEGE POLICIES

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a

requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

Student Rights

To learn about your rights as a student please read DePaul's policies 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. For more information on requesting an Incomplete: http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx.

Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment

Students with Disabilities

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)
> Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.
> Phone number: (312)362-8002
> Fax: (312)362-6544
> TTY: (773)325.7296
> www.studentaffairs.depaul.edu/csd
> csd@depaul.edu

LESSON PLAN

Please note that some of these sessions may change during the course. Always check the schedule on D2L for updates.

Week 1 (Jan 4) - What is Level Design?

Topics: 2D vs 3D, historic gamespaces, composition, characteristics

Week 2 (Jan 11) - Design Patterns

Topics: Fundamentals of designing environments, goal-oriented exploration, 4-Step Level Design

(January 17 is the last day to drop classes with no penalty)

Week 3 (Jan 18)

NO CLASS, assignments due online

Week 4 (Jan 25) - Narrative Environments

Telling stories with architecture, establishing tone

Week 5 (Feb 1) - Wayfinding & Navigation

Topics: Guiding players, communicating with architecture, symbolism

Week 6 (Feb 8) – Interacting with the Environment

Topics: Puzzle mechanics, organization and structuring.

Week 7 (Feb 15) - Embodiment and Mobility

Bodies in space, movement and motion, zoomscapes

(February 21 is the last day to withdraw from WQ2016 classes)

Week 8 (Feb 22) – Spaces Like Games

Videogames and the spaces of the world

Week 9 (Feb 29) - Open World Design

Designing large spaces and loose structures

Week 10 (March 7)

Final Critiques

Week 11

Final Documentation