

GAM 341 Introduction to Level Design

Instructor: Dr. Bobby Schweizer
Term: Fall 2016
Section: 701
Meeting time: Thursday 5:45–9:00pm
Location: 14EAS (Daley) 505 at Loop Campus

Email: rschweiz@cdm.depaul.edu
(Please prefix all emails with [GAM 341])
Office: Daley 1630
Office Hours: Tu 11:45–1; Wed 2-3
The class schedule can be found on D2L.

Overview

Level design is the art of creating the contexts in which players engage with gameplay. This course explores topics including composition, pacing, puzzles, and storytelling. Along the way you will also learn the duties and challenges of being a level designer.

Using a 2D level editor, students will learn how to structure and teach mechanics and challenges. Using a 3D level editor, students will investigate technical design issues including the construction, texturing, lighting, and scripting of modern game levels. Throughout the term, we will be focusing our attention on how games use space, audio/visual cues, flow and pacing to create player experience.

Please note that this course is 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. You may use freely available examples/assets found in UE4, as our focus is 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.

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 diagramming, greyboxing, designing player interactions and level events.

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

4) Students will develop literacy in domains outside of games including principles from architecture, spatial storytelling, and environment design.

Course Tools

You will need to buy two things for this course: a graph paper notebook and the game *Portal* (\$9.99 on Steam).

We will be using D2L heavily for this course. You should make sure to check the course schedule on D2L at least once a week to see what is upcoming.

At the beginning of the term you will need to access software and hardware in the Gameplay Lab.

Unreal Engine 4.10 (UE4) is required and is available as a free download for Windows, Mac, and Linux. We'll be using Unreal's Blueprint visual scripting system.

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. Playing a level and recording at the same time is very resource intensive, so your home computer or laptop may not be able to handle it. Be prepared to record in one of the campus labs. All videos will be to D2L's new video streaming dropbox.

Work

Assignment Overview

Mario Maker Levels	30
3D Analysis	40
3D Level	50
Tutoring Lab Visit	10
Design Responses	30
Participation	40
Total:	200 points = 100%

Submitting Work

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.

Deadlines: 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.

Neglecting to turn in any major assignment will result in a failing grade for the course.

More than two unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.

Though rewarding, evaluating and critiquing student work is a time-consuming process. *If you submit late work, you may not receive feedback.*

Turning in something that’s mostly-complete on-time is better than totally-complete a week late.

Participation & Attendance: Your participation in class will be measured during discussions, design exercises, and playtests. It is worth 20% of your grade. During discussion, you are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments

Grading Scale (%)

95 – 100	A
91 – 94	A-
88 – 90	B+
85 – 87	B
81 – 84	B-
77 – 80	C+
73 – 76	C
69 – 72	C-
65 – 68	D+
61 – 64	D
0-60	F

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 peer discussion and critique. You can’t participate if you’re not in class! *Absences will count against your participation grade.* 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.

“Ghosting”: For one reason or another, there are always one or two students who just disappear during the course of the term. Multiple consecutive absences are almost impossible to recover from. If you are having difficulty with the work, come talk to me in office hours. If you’re having another issue, come talk to me in office hours. Whatever it is, come talk to me in office hours. Just don’t disappear on me!

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: 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. Everyone will be required to visit him at least once during the 3D half of the term. You can contact Jeremy, see his tutoring schedule, and schedule appointments with him here: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/TutoringProgram.aspx>

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). *Devices are only for note-taking and design activities.* Stay off Facebook. Set your phone ringers to silent. Should you need to answer a call during class, please leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to everyone in the room,

texting/messaging is never allowable in class. And, seriously: don't play games in class. You will be asked to leave.

Writing: Design Responses and level analyses 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: You should email me at least 24 hours before a deadline if you want a timely response.

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

	Topic
Week 1 (Sept 8)	What is Level Design?
Week 2 (Sept 15)	Jumps
(September 20 is the last day to drop classes with no penalty)	
Week 3 (Sept 22)	Combat
Week 4 (Sept 29)	Exploration
Week 5 (Oct 6)	Puzzles
Week 6 (Oct 13)	Competition
Week 7 (Oct 20)	Navigation
(October 25 is the last day to withdraw from AQ2016 classes)	
Week 8 (Oct 27)	Narrative
Week 9 (Nov 3)	Using Space
Week 10 (Nov 10)	Playtesting
FINAL (Nov 17)	