

Syllabus

Class Meeting Time & Location

Tuesday / Thursday 3:10-4:40pm
Classroom CDM 202

Instructor

Mischa Hiessboeck
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Office Hours: Lincoln Park Campus
Loop Campus

Tuesday / Thursday 8:40am-9:40am at STDC 332
Tuesday / Thursday 2:40pm-3:10pm at CDM 430

Important Dates SQ 2016/17

April 7th: Last day to drop classes with no penalty

May 12th: Last day to withdraw from SQ classes

June 6th 2:30pm to 4:45pm: Last day of class

June 17th: SQ 2016/17 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 folder on Dropbox 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. 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
 - csd@depaul.edu

Class Requirements:

IMPORTANT NOTE: In order to stay in this course, you need to obtain IRB certification by Wednesday, April 19th 2017. 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 Wednesday, April 19th, I will ask that you 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	D- = 60
B = 88-81	C- = 70	F = 59 or less

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%

Bonus Assignment: Macbeth Video Game Playtesting: 5%

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: March 28th / March 30th: 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 April 4th, 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: April 4th / April 6th: 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 April 11th, 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: April 11th / April 13th: 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 April 18th, 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 dropbox folder “mechanical ritual playtest”.

Week 4: April 18th / April 20th: 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 April 21st (NOTE that's a Friday!), 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 April 21st to D2L dropbox Folder "Final Project Playtest 1, Prep." so I can give feedback to your questions before you playtest!

Home Assignment 5: Final Project Playtest Report 1, due April 25th, 10%

- Playtest twice before class next week with people outside of class
- Submit playtest report, including your playtest plan to D2L, Dropbox folder "Final Project: Playtest Report 1"

Week 5: April 25th / April 27th: 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 April 28th (NOTE: Friday!), 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 by April 28th to D2L dropbox Folder "Final Project Playtest 2, Prep." so I can give feedback to your questions before you playtest!

Home assignment 7: Final Project Playtest Report 2, due May 2nd, 10%

- Playtest & iterate final project at least before class next week
- Submit playtest report to D2L, dropbox "Final Project: Playtest 2"

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: May 2nd / May 4th: 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 Plan 1, due May 5th (NOTE: this is a FRIDAY!), 4%

- Create and submit playtest plan to D2L dropbox folder “Playtest Plan 1”

Week 7: May 9th / May 11th: Playtest in the Play 4 Change lab

This is the first, big playtest in the Play 4 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 Report 3, due May 16th, 15%

- Write and submit playtest report, including your **revised** playtest plan to D2L dropbox folder “Final Project: Playtest 3”

Week 8: May 16th / May 18th: 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 May 23rd

- 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 May 23rd playtest in Play 4 Change lab

Week 9: May 23rd / May 25th: Final Project 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 Plan 2, due May 26th (NOTE: this is a FRIDAY!!), 4%

- Create and submit playtest plan to D2L dropbox folder “Playtest Plan 2”

Week 10: May 30th / June 1st: Playtest in the Play 4 Change lab

This is the second, big playtest in the Play 4 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 Report 4, due June 6th, 15%

- Playtest report including playtest plan

Home assignment 13: Post Mortem Presentation, due June 6th, 14%

- Prepare reflective ppt presentation on final project and its evaluation through rapid prototyping, playtesting and iteration (instead of final)

Week 11: June 6th: Post Mortem Presentations

Final presentations

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