# GAM 394: Game Development Project I

Fall 2019 Peter McDonald

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Office Hours: Thurs 12:00 PM-1:30 PM

## Overview

Students work in teams to design and develop a videogame that demonstrates their mastery of game design and development. Additionally, students will reflect on ethical decision making and professional ethics in the game industry. This course and its continuation, GAM 395, must be taken consecutively.

## Objectives

By the end of the quarter, you will:

* Experience a full game development production cycle (from concept to asset production) within a collaborative context.
* Learn how to scope a game design idea based on available time, resources, and expertise.
* Gain experience working in cross-functional teams.
* Practice evaluating game design ideas, game prototypes, and demos in order to improve their quality.

## Course Structure

Main Deliverable**.** The main deliverable of the two-quarter course is to design and develop an original, fun, indie game. Capstone I (winter quarter) students will deliver an alpha build of a game, defined as a demo that articulates the core gameplay, art, animation, and audio concept; in Capstone II (spring quarter) students will create a demo build, defined as 1-minute of awesome gameplay experience which includes exemplary animation, art, writing, and audio.

Milestones. Your team’s work each quarter will consist of hitting several different milestones for the project. These represent important steps in the development process that every game needs to pass through. However, due to the differences among the games you will design and who is on your team, each group will pass through these milestones at a different rate. In conversation with me, each team will refine the dates and deliverables of each checkpoint.

Teams. You will be working in teams, usually of 4-5 people, with each person taking on one of five roles with different responsibilities:

*Artist*: imagines the visual style and produces the user interface and assets

*Designer*: responsible for design documents, prototypes, level design, playtests

*Producer*: tracks team progress, sets deadlines, holds onto the big picture

*Programmer*: implements mechanics, troubleshoots, assesses feasibility

*Sound Designer*: find, records, and composes music and sound effects

Team members often fit more than one role (especially the producer), and your team might have some gaps. At the start of the quarter you will set roles and expectations for your team and create a decision making and conflict resolution process. These will be put into a document called the team contract that everyone signs.

Best Practices. In the team contract you will outline the formal expectations that shape your team. Additionally, there are some best practices that will help you get the most out of your capstone experience both as an educational experience and working towards your career in the game industry.

*Time*: To create a polished game in such a short period requires dedicated work from the whole team. Most capstone students spend around 20 hours on their game each week.

*Location*: Working in the same space is crucial for some creative decisions, morale, and troubleshooting. Try to find somewhere at DePaul to work as a team for at least 6 hours each week.

*Requesting Help & Feedback*: It is easy to get myopic about a game you’re working on and miss the sprite for the pixels. Ideally you should be asking for feedback from someone at least twice a day. You should try to vary the people you ask—your classmates are a huge resource, as are your friends and colleagues at DePaul. It is also important to give help to your classmates who ask, because it keeps you flexible and gives you perspective on your own game.

*Constantly Update & Build*: It is important that you remember to upload the work that you’ve done to your group’s project. Each piece of development can have a big impact on other people, and you need to keep the group up to date. Also take the time to make regular builds that you can use to share and playtest.

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| --- | --- |
| A | 100-93 |
| A- | 92-88 |
| B+ | 87-83 |
| B | 82-78 |
| B- | 77-73 |
| C+ | 72-68 |
| C | 67-63 |
| C- | 62-58 |
| D | 57-50 |
| F | 49-0 |

## Assessment

Your grade will be based on the following four elements:

### Participation (10%)

Participation in this class looks a little different than most. It is based on two factors: whether you communicate regularly with your team members and the class through Slack or another tool; and a list of every part of the game you worked on that you’ll keep updated and submit at the end of the quarter.

### **Peer Feedback** (40%)

A major part of your grade comes from how you and your peers evaluate your contributions over the quarter. In the team contract you will decide on a set of shared expectations that will be the criteria for evaluation.

### Milestones (25%)

The milestones over the quarter are meant to keep you on track. Your team will be evaluated on whether it hits its milestones, how many of the deliverables you’ve accomplished, and how well these are integrated into your development process. You will not be assessed on the quality of work for the milestones, only your progress. A list of the expectations for each one is on the following page.

### Alpha Build (25%)

This is your team’s final submission for the Fall quarter. This should be a demo of your game that is playable and demonstrates all of its key elements including core gameplay, menu navigation, art style, and audio design. Every key feature should have a placeholder representation. Additionally, your game design and production documents should lay out a clear path forward for filling in the remaining blanks. I will be evaluating this submission on the quality of each individual part, the cohesion between them, and their relevance to the larger vision of the game.

## Milestones

### Milestone #1: Studio Creation (Due Sept 25th)

* Form a team.
* Discuss goals, roles, expectations, and communication. Submit your studio contract signed by all members.
* Establish accounts on Slack, Github, and Google Drive to share materials.
* Pitch 3 game ideas to the class.
* Write a pitch document for at least one of these ideas.

### Milestone #2: Quick and Dirty Prototypes (Due Oct 7th)

* Based on your pitch, team members develop several prototypes of different parts of your game in conversation with me. Typically these will include:
  + 2 digital prototypes of mechanics
  + 2 physical prototypes of game systems
  + 1 ‘Wizard of Oz’ prototypes for narrative or flow
  + 1 Mood board representing the graphic design and game art style
* Identify an outside expert who can provide your team with feedback, someone who is not affiliated with DePaul.
* Organize a playtest for two of your prototypes, one with another team from our class and one with your outside expert.

### Milestone #3: Game Design Documents (Due Oct 21st)

* Create a Game Design Document that describes all the major elements of your game (see template).
* Create a technical design document (listing features, diagramming organization, and specifying physics, AI, or other game logic).
* Create a production plan outlining steps until the end of Winter quarter.
* Create an Art Bible (provides guidelines and references to style, characters, level of detail, camera position, color palette, environment, and interface).
* ***Note***: all of these are meant to be useful documents that get regularly updated and adjusted as the game changes. They are not meant to be finished for this milestone, but should describe your current thoughts about all the major details.

### Milestone #4: Demo Materials (Nov 6th)

* Create a playable demo of the core gameplay loop, it can consist entirely of placeholder assets.
* Graybox at least one level for your game that a player can move in (you can use a default character controller). This deliverable may look different depending on your game genre and you can discuss the requirement with me.
* Create concept art for major characters and scenes.
* Create examples of finished in-game art assets for any characters, the environment, and the UI.
* Create a musical composition that sets the tone for the game.
* Create a game title and logo.
* Designers present notes on similar games (see worksheet).

### Milestone #5: Alpha Build (Nov 25th)

* Create an alpha build of your game that includes your main mechanics, central art and animations, sound, and an interface.
* Prepare a 10-minute presentation about your game for class about your current progress and next steps. It should include video capture of your game in action.
* Submit a document outlining each team member’s contributions to the project so far.
* Fill out team evaluation forms.
* Update your design and production documents.

## Course Policies

### D2L & Other Tools

We are using D2L (<http://d2l.depaul.edu>) as a platform for this course. All course materials including readings, weekly lecture slides, and class information (syllabus, lesson plan, assignment descriptions) are available through D2L under ‘Contents.’ Other important tools and resources are also available on D2L under the ‘Resources’ folder.

### Participation & Attendance

This course is largely focused on the process of creation rather than the product. Attendance is crucial for giving feedback to your peers, receiving feedback from them, working through technical problems, and learning from each step. You are expected to attend every class. You are allowed up to three absences, excused or unexcused, throughout the quarter. A fourth absence will lower your grade by one whole letter (for example, A- to B-).

### Attitude & Civil Discourse

In this class we will make a commitment towards creating an inclusive and just space for learning and working. A collaborative effort between the students and the teacher is the only way to create a supportive environment. If a class member says that something you have said or shared with the group is offensive, it is important to listen to them. This can be a valuable opportunity for everyone present to better understand our community and the values we hold through further discussion. All class members are encouraged to discuss such instances with the instructor so they can be addressed with greater care in the future.

## 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.

### Tutoring and Tutorials

The College of Computing and Digital Media offers a tutoring center as an additional resource to students. Use the tutoring website to set up an appointment: <https://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Student-Resources/Pages/TutoringProgram.aspx>

DePaul also subscribes to the online tutorial service Lynda.com. For details on how to log in for free with your DePaul credentials, see: <https://offices.depaul.edu/information-services/services/technology-training/Pages/online-training.aspx>

### 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.

### 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>

### Student Rights

You have rights as a student. 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>

### Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns

I will gladly honor your request to address you by the name or gender pronoun of your choice. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need.  For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at <http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

### Students with Disabilities

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

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

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

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see <https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx> for services and contact information.

### 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.

### Important Dates

Students are encouraged to follow the official calendar at: https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx

September 10th, Begin Fall Quarter Classes

September 17th, Last day to add (or swap) classes

September 24th, Last day to drop classes with no penalty

October 29th, Last day to withdraw from Fall classes

November 19th, End of Fall Quarter Classes

November 20th, Fall quarter exams begin

November 26th, End of Fall quarter 2019

December 5th, Fall grades due