DC 441 Storytelling for Video Games

General Course Information

This course examines the writer's role in the game development process and how storytelling conventions like character, conflict, and plot are utilized to enhance gameplay. Emphasis will be placed on building an understanding of game narratives, interactivity, and working with design teams. Students will develop a design document highlighting characters, locations, dialogue scripting, and overall gameplay for an original video game idea. PREREQUISITE(S): DC 101 or DC 201

Fall 2018
Wednesday 5:45 – 9:00 pm, Room 211 at Loop Campus (14 E Jackson)
Final Exam: Wednesday 11/14: 6pm to 8:15pm
Course Management System: D2L https://d2l.depaul.edu
Textbook: no textbook required;
               additional readings available via D2L
               optional textbook: "Writing Interactive Fiction with Twine" by Melissa Ford, (2016)

Software: Twine http://twinery.org (free software)
Drop dates: September 18 (with tuition refund)
               October 23 (no tuition refund)

Instructor Information

Instructor: Michael "Mischa" Hiessboeck
Email: mhiessbo@cdm.depaul.edu
Office hours: M   9:10 am – 10:10 am, 12 pm – 3 pm   Loop Campus, CDM 430
                W   9:10 am – 10:10 am, 12:30 pm – 1:30 pm   Loop Campus, CDM 430
Also available for consultation by appointment

Date of document: September 4, 2018

Learning Outcomes

Course Summary
Writing for video games is a discipline that brings together fiction, dramatic writing and game design. The course will deal with the problematic relationship between storytelling and games. The discussion of theory and analysis of pre-existing games will be complemented with practical assignments, where students will tackle specific writing problems in a creative way. Basic programming knowledge will be useful but not required.

Course Strategies
The goal of the course is encouraging students to bring innovation to video game writing. The foundation of the course is the discussion of pre-existing works, identifying what they have achieved, and what problems arise from the interaction between storytelling and game design. These issues will be addressed

creatively through a series of assignments, where the students will have to propose different practical solutions.

Requirements and Grading

The course is based on analysis, participation and practical assignments. Students will be expected to read the corresponding articles and book chapters and play games in preparation for class discussions, as well as preparation for their assignments and project.

Grades will be based on:
- Class participation and in-class preparedness 20%
- Individual assignments 50%
- Group assignments 30%

Grand total of 100 possible points:

	A = 100-91,	A- = 90,
B+ = 89,	B = 88-81,	B- = 80,
C+ = 79,	C = 78-71,	C- = 70,
D+ = 69,	D = 68-61,	F = 60 or lower

Standards for Achievement:
Grade A:
Student performs in an outstanding way. Student exhibits achievement and craftsmanship in all work. Creative criteria are exceeded and student challenges him/herself in project development. Student exhibits commitment to expanding ideas, vocabulary and performance.

Grade B:
Student performs beyond the requirement of the project. Student exhibits above average progress and craftsmanship. A creative criterion is exceeded. Student exhibits above average interest in expanding idea, vocabulary, and performance.

Grade C:
Criteria of assignment is met, and all requirements are fulfilled. Student shows average quality work and minimum time and effort on projects. Student shows moderate interest.

Grade D:
Student performance is uneven and below average. Requirements for projects are only partially fulfilled. Minimal interest is shown and attendance, participation and involvement are inadequate.

Grade F
Student fails to meet minimum course requirements and shows little interest. Levels of participation and craftsmanship are extremely poor. Student's attendance/presence is inadequate.

Lesson Plan

Week 1 - 09/05
Introduction
Basics of Storytelling, Story arc, Hero's Journey

Assignment 01 (due 09/12): Write a short crime story A1 (450 to 500 words) (3 pts)

Assignment 02 (due 09/19): Analyze "LIFE IS STRANGE, Episode 1: Chrysalis" (2015) (700 to 750 pages) (6 pts)

Reading (due 09/12): Henry Jenkins: Game Design as Narrative Architecture

Week 2 – 09/12
Spatial Storytelling

Assignment 03 (due 09/19): Description of the victim A2 (60 to 70 words), plus 3 hints (each 10 to 25 words) (2 pts)

Assignment 04 (due 09/19): The crime scene A2 (200 to 250 words) (3 pts)

Assignment 05 (due 09/19): Item description A2 (3 items, each 60 to 70 words) (3 pts)

Week 3 – 09/19
Character design

Assignment 06 (due 09/26): Character descriptions of 3 suspects A3 (90 to 100 words for each suspect), plus description of 2 quirks for each of them (10 to 25 words per quirk) (3 pts.)

Assignment 07 (due 09/26): 3 loglines for 3 different games (presentation, 5 minutes) (1 pt.)

Assignment 08 (due 09/26): Re-write short story A1 (50 words) (1 pt.)

Week 4 – 09/26
Dialogue & Branching Story Line

Assignment 09 (due 10/03): Dialogue tree ("node") with victim A2 (via TWINE) (2 pts.)

Assignment 10 (due 10/03): Pitch story outline X (presentation, 5-10 minutes) (1 pt.)

Assignment 11 (due 10/03): Re-write short story A1 (140 characters) (1 pt.)

Week 5 – 10/03
Dialogue & Branching Story Line (cont.)
Voting for best story outlines
Team building

Assignment 12 (due 10/10): Dialogue tree ("waterfall") with one suspect A4 (via TWINE) (3 pts.)

Assignment 13 (due 10/10): Rewrite short story A1 (6 words) (1 pt.)

Assignment 14 (due 10/10): Short Crime Story B1 (200 to 250 words) (3 pts.)

Project assignment 01 (due 10/10): Title page of your Game Design Document (including logline, target platform, target group, story outline) (1 page)

Week 6 – 10/10
Game Design Document
Game mechanics

Assignment 15 (due 10/17): Character description of 3 suspects B2 (40 to 50 words for each suspect), plus description of 2 quirks for each of them (8 to 15 words per quirk) (3 pts.)

Assignment 16 (due 10/17): Describe game mechanics (lock picking and crafting) from the game FALLOUT NEW VEGAS (each 100 to 125 words) (2 pts.)

Project assignment 02 (due 10/17): Game mechanics, world map (including diagram)

Week 7 – 10/17
Mission briefing & quest design
Play testing in class

Assignment 17 (due 10/24): Item description B3 (3 items, each 40 to 50 words) (3 pts)

Assignment 18 (due 10/24): Description of the victim B3 (40 to 50 words), plus 3 hints (each 8 to 15 words) (2 pts)

Project assignment 03 (due 10/24): Create an interactive storyline (via TWINE)

Week 8 – 10/24
Transmedia

Assignment 19 (due 11/07): You choose between A4 and B4. Put everything together. (via TWINE) (6 pts.)

Project assignment 04 (due 11/07): transfer your game (details in class) and prepare a presentation

Week 9 – 10/31
Project assignment 05: Presentation of Project assignment 04

Week 10 – 11/07
Play testing of assignment 19 in class (bring your own computer)

Week 11 – 11/14
ATTENTION: 6pm-8:15pm
Group presentations

Project assignment 05: present your game in class (15 - 20 minutes) (6 pts)

Resources
As DePaul student, you have access to the CDM Gaming labs (see http://defrag.depaul.edu/labs/lab-policies for details). If you're working on an assignment, you have priority for using the lab hardware and software. Student ID is required to use the labs.

For your assignments, you need access to following games:

Life is Strange, chapter 1 (available at the gaming lab on the 5th floor) (PS4) or for free at the PS4 store
Fallout: New Vegas (available at the gaming lab on the 5th floor) (Xbox 360)

Policies

Changes to Syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly 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 https://offices.depaul.edu/academic-affairs/faculty-resources/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/student-faqs.aspx. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

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: cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment.

Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential.
To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.
Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.
Phone number: (312)362-8002
Fax: (312)362-6544
TTY: (773)325.7296

Attendance

Students are expected to attend each class and to remain for the duration. Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student. The overall grade for participation drops one-third after the first absence. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course.

Class Discussion

Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the reading to participate in class discussion.

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 when the instructor 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 a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student 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. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Cell Phones/On Call

If you bring a cell phone to class, it must be off or set to a silent mode. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undisruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and the professor, texting 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.