Experiments in Interactivity II – Spring, 2015 Syllabus

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN 544

Class Meetings
Tuesday 5:30-8:20pm, SCI L114

Instructor
Margaret Moser, mmoser@cinema.usc.edu

Course Description
This course further develops the design and production skills developed in Experiments I (CTIN534). While Experiments I focuses on aesthetic fundamentals of interactive media and storytelling, this course focuses on developing a practical understanding of the digital medium itself, looking at and experimenting with a variety of digital forms. The goals are to enable informed exploration of aesthetic possibilities and acquire a set of useful prototyping tools.

Class content will include
- lectures, readings and discussions examining the idea of digital interaction from different academic and creative perspectives
- demonstrations, lab exercises and assignments covering both concepts and specific technologies, such as cloud computing and DIY hardware interfaces, that offer interesting affordances for interactive experiences.

Students will create a series of simple, conceptual projects in the first few weeks of class, followed by a short individual project developing one or more of these ideas. The final project will last several weeks, with opportunities for intermediate feedback. All work is individual.

Office Hours
Monday 2-4pm, Wednesday 2-4pm or by appointment; my office is SCI 201.

Evaluation
This class is intended to be a supportive environment focused on experimentation. This process necessarily involves a risk of failure, in concept, in execution or both. Accordingly, work is evaluated based on the effort you put into developing the idea, and how well you explore it through creative prototyping. The best possible outcome for most assignments will be an interesting failure. Longer projects are expected to be proportionately more interesting failures.

The components of the course grade are:
- Class participation and in-class exercises: 10%
- Assignments: 30%
- Project 1: 30%
- Project 2: 30%

Course Outline
This course is designed to be adapted to the skills and goals of its students, and this outline reflects that.

Week 1 – Week 7: Concepts and Tools
Throughout the course we will examine ideas about computing and human-computer interaction,
and do walkthrough projects with existing and emerging technologies. Students will complete weekly projects and conceptual challenges.

**Week 8 – Week 9: Project 1**

Week 8 is the week of GDC. Class will likely be replaced with a set of video lectures. The first project will be presented in class on Tuesday, March 10.

**Week 10 – Week 15: Project 2**

We will resume walkthrough projects and discussions during class time. In Week 13 there will be an intermediate check-in on the final projects. The final project will be presented on the last day of class, with documentation due on the day of the final.

**Absence Policy**

Students are expected to attend every class. We will generally only visit each technology/topic once. Two missed classes without excuse as well as three times being late for class without excuse will reduce the grade.

**Missing an Exam, Incompletes**

The grading of this course is based mainly on the projects that are completed and presented throughout the course of the class (see the grading section of this syllabus). There are no particular mid-term or final exams but the presentation of the projects on the scheduled dates plays the same role and is mandatory. The only acceptable excuses for missing a presentation or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illnesses or a family emergency.

Incompletes may only be given after the twelfth week of classes. Students must inform the professor before the project presentation and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

**Content Warnings**

This course is intended to support your creative explorations in code. You are encouraged to make things that interest you, including addressing difficult and controversial topics if you desire. If you choose to make something thematically adventurous (see next paragraph), and you include content in your work which may cause distress to your fellow students, please make a verbal ‘content warning’ immediately before you present the work in class, and include a written content warning in the readme file of a project, when you submit the work for grading.

Content which requires a content warning includes graphic depictions or descriptions of violence, sexual acts, abuse (especially sexual abuse or torture), self-harming behavior such as suicide, self-inflicted injuries or disordered eating, eating-disordered behavior or body shaming, and depictions of the mental state of someone suffering abuse or engaging in self-harming behavior.

Students who ever feel the need to step outside class during the presentation or discussion of work that warrants a content warning may always do so without academic penalty. (You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss.)

If you have any questions about what warrants a content warning, or if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to material presented in class, I welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.
Note for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to an SA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/.

For this class, you are encouraged to copy and modify code from online sources and from class demonstration projects. You are also welcome to work together, although you must each present a project that is your own work. If you use more than 3 lines of code from an external source without modifying it, you must provide a link to the source as a comment next to the copied code. You may use any code presented in class without attribution.

If you use any assets (images, textures, sounds, etc.) that are not your own work, you must name and link to the source, either within the work or in a separate credits text file delivered with the project.

Instructor Bio

Margaret Moser is an Assistant Professor of Practice at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, where she lectures on game design, digital prototyping, innovative mobile experiences, and experimental interfaces.

Margaret’s work has been shown at Come Out & Play, Games4Change, and the Babycastles guerrilla game gallery in Brooklyn. She has built web-based games at MTV Networks, lectured on Agile production methods for small teams, and served as lead producer of two commercial iPad applications.

Margaret holds an MFA in Design and Technology from Parsons. Her research interests include persuasive games related to environmental issues, alternative and non-screen interfaces, and formal structures for interactive narratives. She splits her spare time between finding weird new games to play and the quest for the perfect taco.