Game Design Workshop – Spring, 2010 Syllabus

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN 488

Instructors:
Jeremy Gibson  Vincent Diamante
(512) 659-8624    (213) 840-0645
jrgibson@cinema.usc.edu  diamante@gmail.com

Student Assistants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lab 1: F 10a–11:50p</th>
<th>Lab 2: F 12–1:50p</th>
<th>Lab 3: Tu 1–2:50p</th>
<th>Lab 4: Tu 3–4:50p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teddy Diefenbach</td>
<td>Asher Vollmer</td>
<td>Colin Windmuller</td>
<td>Ed Lorenceau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(323) 395-3205</td>
<td>(310) 780-4991</td>
<td>(804) 338-8406</td>
<td>(213) 300-6043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:teddy.diefenbach@gmail.com">teddy.diefenbach@gmail.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:avollmer@usc.edu">avollmer@usc.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:windmull@usc.edu">windmull@usc.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:unreal.ed@gmail.com">unreal.ed@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course Description: CTIN 488 is the foundation course for game design education at USC. It is a required course for all students who are majoring or minoring in interactive entertainment and games from the School of Cinematic Arts or Viterbi School of Engineering. The foundation mentioned is constructed from a codified language for games and a set of design methodologies that collectively we call "playcentric design." Think of playcentric design as the USC school of thought for games. It is intended to provide flexible skills and knowledge that will enable you to create playable systems more efficiently and collaborate with others more effectively. Playcentric design strives to enable the student to:

1. **Understand Fundamental Theory** – You will learn about the Formal, Dynamic, and Dramatic elements of games and how the three interrelate.
2. **Learn the Core Development Process** – This process is independent of software tools (which change over time). It includes understanding iterative design, prototyping, playtesting, presentation, and collaboration.
3. **Make Many Games** – Everyone will design many games, hands-on, regardless of technical skills. Class assignments are designed to make good additions to a student’s demo reel. In addition, everyone will gain considerable experience providing critiques and analyzing games as playable systems.

CTIN 488 is designed to provide the foundation of knowledge both for succeeding throughout the game program at USC and for becoming a professional game designer.

Lecture Information: (all students must attend)

*When:* Tuesdays 7p - 9p
*Where:* SCA 110 - REMEMBER NO FOOD OR DRINK IN THIS ROOM!!!

Labs: All labs are in the new XML lab in Zemeckis (RZC 119)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#1 – Fridays 10a – 11:50a</th>
<th>Vincent Diamante</th>
<th>SA: Teddy Diefenbach</th>
<th>Section 18393</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2 – Fridays 12p – 1:50p</td>
<td>Vincent Diamante</td>
<td>SA: Asher Vollmer</td>
<td>Section 18359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 – Tuesdays 1p – 2:50p</td>
<td>Jeremy Gibson</td>
<td>SA: Colin Windmuller</td>
<td>Section 18360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 – Tuesdays 3p – 4:50p</td>
<td>Jeremy Gibson</td>
<td>SA: Ed Lorenceau</td>
<td>Section 10362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Office Hours:

Jeremy Gibson  – Tuesdays, 5-6pm (by appointment) @ SCA 211
Vincent Diamante – Fridays at 9-10am (by appointment)
Student Assistants – By appointment
Pre-requisites: N/A

Required Textbooks: (Both are available in the Book Store)
- Game Design Workshop, Second Edition, by Fullerton and Swain
- The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses, by Jesse Schell

Evaluation of student performance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Design Projects</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Design Projects</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Experiments</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes (3 @ 5% each)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course Outline: (This material is subject to change)

**Week 1 – 1/11: Overview of the Course — You are a Game Designer!**

NO TUESDAY LABS ON 1/11

**Lecture:** Overview of the course. What is a game? Formal and dramatic structures of games. Prototyping, playtesting and iterative design.

**In-Class Assignment:** Bartok (as played by Malcolm Ryan)

**Reading:** GDW: Ch. 1-2 / AGD: xxiii-xxx, Ch. 1, Ch. 3

**Lab:** Up the River: Re-design a simple game system

**Assignments:**
- **Group –** Play Experiment #1 (Due 1/18)
- **Pairs –** Redesign Hopscotch (Due 1/25)

**Week 2 – 1/18: Formal Elements of Games: Objectives, Procedures, Systems and Rules**

PLAY EXPERIMENT #1 DUE

**Lecture:** Discussion of elements that make up the formal structures of game systems. Analysis of game rules from classic games.

**Reading:** GDW: Ch. 3 & 6 / AGD: Ch. 4, 6, & 10

**Lab:** Conceptualizing and brainstorming game ideas / Playtest Hopscotch games

**Assignments:**
- **Group –** Play Experiment #2 (Due 1/25)
- **Pairs –** Redesign Hopscotch (Due 1/25)

**Week 3 – 1/25: Dynamic Elements of Games: Emergence**

HOPSCOTCH ASSIGNMENT DUE

PLAY EXPERIMENT #2 DUE

**Lecture:** Complexity Theory, Conway's Game of Life, The Sims, Gearheads, SimCity, RollerCoaster Tycoon. Testing your game for functionality, completeness and balance.

**In-Class Assignment:** Emergent Behavior

**Reading:** GDW: Ch. 5 / AGD: Ch. 11

**Lab:** Create teams and brainstorm for Paper Game Project 1

**Assignments:**
- **Group –** Paper Game Project 1 (Due 2/22) – Create 1st Playable
Week 4 – 2/1: Dramatic Elements of Games: Metaphor, Characters, Roles, and Story
Reading: GDW: Ch. 4 / AGD: Ch. 5, 14, & 15
Lab: Playtest 1st playable of PGP1
Assignments: Group – Paper Game Project 1 (Due 2/22)

Week 5 – 2/8: Creating Interesting Choices
QUIZ #1
Lecture: Game theory, Minimax theory, strategy games. Tic-tac-toe, Connect Four, Chess, Warcraft III, many others.
Reading: GDW: Ch. 7 / AGD: Ch. 2, 7
Lab: Playtest 2nd playable of PGP1
Assignments: Group – Paper Game Project 1 (Due 2/22)

Week 6 – 2/15: Managing Resources
In-Class Assignment: Resources
Lab: Playtest 3rd playable of PGP1
Assignments: Group – Paper Game Project 1 – Create Final Turnin

Week 7 – 2/22: Role-Playing Games & Online Communities
PAPER GAME PROJECT 1 DUE
Reading: AGD: Ch. 30 & 31
Lab: Play an example RPG
Assignments: Individual – Role-Playing Game (Due 3/11)

Week 8 – 3/1: Guest Speaker
BOTH VINCE AND JEREMY WILL BE SPEAKING AT GDC THIS WEEK
Lecture: Guest Speaker
Reading: GDW: Ch. 9, & 10 / AGD:
Lab: Play one of your group’s RPGs
Assignments: Individual – Role-Playing Game (Due 3/11)

Week 9 – 3/8: Social Play
QUIZ #2 II RPG ASSIGNMENTS DUE ON FRIDAY OF THIS WEEK
In-Class Assignment: Designing for 4 types of players
Reading: GDW: Ch. 11 / AGD: Ch. 21 & 22
Mid-semester course review
Lab: Play one of your group’s RPGs
Assignments: Individual – Role-Playing Game (Due 3/11)
Group – Paper Game Project 2 (Due 4/12) – Create 1st Playable
Spring Recess – 3/15: No Class

Week 10 – 3/22: Narrative Play
Reading: GDW: Ch. 13 & 16 / AGD: Ch. 28
Lab: Playtest 1st playable of PGP2
Assignments: Group – Play Experiment #3 (Due 3/29)
Group – Paper Game Project 2 (Due 4/12)

Week 11 - 3/29: Puzzle Games
PLAY EXPERIMENT #3 DUE
Lecture: Puzzle Design: Set, Tetris, Smart Games, Hexic, Incredible Machine, Myst.
In-Class Assignment: Puzzle Games
Reading: AGD: Ch. 12
Lab: Playtest 2nd playable of PGP2
Assignments: Group – Paper Game Project 2 (Due 4/12)

Week 12 – 4/5: Guest Speaker
Lecture: Guest Speaker
Lab: Playtest 3rd playable of PGP2
Assignments: Group – Paper Game Project 2 – Create Final Turnin

Week 13 – 4/12: Business of Games / Pitching Games
PAPER GAME PROJECT 2 DUE
Lecture:
A) Business of Games - Game market statistics, publisher/developer relationships, royalties & deal structures.
B) How to Pitch a Game Concept
In-Class Assignment: Quick Pitches – 30-minute Heroes
Reading: GDW: Ch. 15 / AGD: Ch. 27 & 29
Lab: Pick teams for Pitch Project
Assignments: Group – Pitch Project (Due 5/10) – Create 1st Version of Pitch

Week 14 – 4/19: Concept through Delivery
PLAY EXPERIMENT #3 DUE
Lecture: Concept through Delivery - Discussion of teams, process and documentation. Design and planning documents from actual products will be distributed.
Lab: Pitch Project – Present 1st version of pitches
Assignments: Group – Pitch Project (Due 5/10) – Create 2nd Version of Pitch

Week 15 – 4/26: Final Lecture & Dress Rehearsal
QUIZ #3
Lecture: Final Lecture
Lab: Pitch Project – Present 2nd version of pitches
Study Days – 5/3: No Class
IT IS VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED THAT YOU PRACTICE YOUR PRESENTATION SEVERAL TIMES DURING THIS WEEK!!!

Final Exam – 5/10: Project Pitches for Guest Judges
PITCH PROJECT DUE – PRESENT IN CLASS TO INDUSTRY JUDGES
Final Exam Time: Present pitches to guest judges

Design Assignment Playtest / Critique Requirements:
Participating in in-class play tests is a requirement of the class. During each play test session, the class will break into four groups. Designers must quickly and clearly explain their game system to the play testers and lead them through a 25-minute play session.

After the group has played the game, the designers must lead a critique of their own game, eliciting as much feedback as possible from their play testers. At the end of the session, the designers must submit:
A) A copy of the game description and rules
B) A critique document from the comments of the play testers. Both of these documents will be evaluated as part of the assignment grade.

In-Class Design Exercises:
The In-Class Design exercises will consist of short, focused assignments that can be completed and playtested during the lab time. These exercises will give students hands-on experience with core concepts in game design, including breaking and balancing systems, changing game variables and system scope, designing for meaningful choice, brainstorming, conceptualization, and responding to player feedback.

Course Website:
Available on USC Blackboard.

Play Experiments:
As part of this class each student will conduct four play experiments. Play Experiments are done in groups of 3-5 using the 488 collection of board games. Each Play Experiment will be discussed by the class. The deliverable for each experiment will be a photo essay that shows the students playing the game and breaks down the formal, dramatic, and dynamic elements. Each student will be responsible for completing the four experiments across 15 weeks of the class.

Missing an Exam / Incompletes:
The only acceptable excuses for missing an exam or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the exam 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 or teaching assistant before final grades are due.

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 us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30a - 5:00p Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.
**Academic Integrity:**
The School of Cinema-Television expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from USC students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade band be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult “SCAMPUS” and/or confer with the instructor.

**Instructor Bios:**

**JEREMY GIBSON**
Most recently, Jeremy was a faculty member at the Masters of Digital Media Program at Great Northern Way Campus in Vancouver, BC and an Associate Producer and Designer at Electronic Arts / Pogo.com, where he designed and produced the game Crazy Cakes. He served as President of Digital Mercenaries, Inc. from 2001-2003 and is currently the Vice President of Airship Studios Corp. In addition to his recent teaching, he has also created and taught game design and new media courses for Texas State University in San Marcos, Austin Community College, and the University of Texas at Austin.

Jeremy Gibson received a Masters of Entertainment Technology from Carnegie Mellon University and a B.S. in Radio, Television, and Film from the University of Texas at Austin. While at Carnegie Mellon, his team of students created the multiplayer game Skyrates, that won the Silver Gleemax Award for Strategic Gaming at the 2008 Independent Games Festival and the Best Simulation Game of 2008 from JayIsGames.com. He has worked as a lead programmer and prototyper for companies such as frog design and Human Code and, while in graduate school, worked as an intern for both Walt Disney Imagineering and the Spore team at Maxis.

**VINCENT DIAMANTE**
Vincent Diamante is a music composer, video game design consultant, writer, and artist living in Los Angeles. As a musician, he has provided sound effects and music for projects ranging from mobile versions of Castlevania and Metal Gear to original console games. He recently garnered BAFTA and AIAS nominations for both best music and best sound design for ThatGameCompany's Flower for PS3. In addition to working as a freelance musician, Vincent also works as a video game production and design consultant, using his experience games journalist to help individual game productions. He continues to work as a contributing editor, technical writer, and photographer for publications ranging from Game Developer Magazine and Wired to Fox News.

Vincent holds a BM in Electroacoustic Media from USC's Thornton School of Music and an MFA in Interactive Media from the USC School of Cinematic Arts.