Design for Interactive Media

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN-541

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Course Description:
This course introduces students to core skills in interactive design, including conceptualizing interactive systems, prototyping, playtesting and managing an iterative design process to meet specific and meaningful experience goals for users. The overarching themes of the class are:

**Preparation** – Developing a vocabulary of interactive design concepts and formal elements of interactivity, deep analysis of interactive systems, focusing on the player/user experience, study of prior art.

**Process** - Setting experience goals, ideation techniques, brainstorming, prototyping methods, playtesting, iterative design, specification, presentation.

**Practice** - Developing & exercising skills, initiating projects, follow through, giving and taking critique.

**Partnership** – Developing a collaborative mindset, communication skills, sharing authorship, managing yourself and others.

The course approaches interactivity as a participatory art form, with the designer’s goal to provide a specific and meaningful experience for the users and to respond quickly and creatively to feedback during the design process. During the course of the semester, the exercises and assignments primarily focus on developing low- and non-technical prototypes of interactive concepts, experimenting with games, improvisational theater, fine arts, toys, interactive narrative, and real and virtual play spaces.

A central purpose of this course is to give students the opportunity to explore various types of design strategies, to discover their own strengths and interests, and to provide them with a wide repertoire of techniques upon which to draw in the future. In addition, the course will introduce students to the “playcentric” design methodology practiced in the Interactive Media division, encouraging them to develop a focus on the central user experience that anchors their design process.
This is a studio class and a large part of the class content will focus on in-class discussion, critique and problem solving for individual projects. As such, it is imperative that students treat the development of their design projects professionally and bring requested milestones to class on time, ready to present. Students will be expected to participate actively in all discussions and critique sessions, giving and receiving feedback of the highest quality.

Throughout this class, students are encouraged to take risks and to look beyond prior art, in-class examples and common wisdom to explore new and different design ideas. In many cases, students will be assigned to work in partnerships or teams and the quality of students’ participation within these groups is of great importance – perhaps as important as the final project. Interactive media in all forms is a collaborative discipline and learning to communicate, share workload, learn from and help others excel is a core value in this field.

**Meeting Information:**
Room: SCI L114
Day and Time: Wednesday 1:00 PM - 3:50 PM

**Units:** 2
**Pre-requisites:** Open to IMGD M.F.A. and iMAP Ph.D. students (as well as other interested and qualified students, by interview with the instructor).

**Assignments & Texts:**

**Written Analysis & Ideation Assignments**
- Simple system analysis 1-2 pgs, due week 2
- Board game system analysis 3-5 pgs, due week 3
- System treatment 3-5 pgs, due week 4

**Prototype Projects**
- Up the River variation, due week 5
- Meaningful play prototype, due week 10
- Recombinant narrative prototype, due week 12
- Digital prototype (co-assigned as CTIN-534 final project), versions due weeks 14 and 15

**Collaboration Assignment**
- Skill sharing, due week 13

**Course Texts**
**Required**
- *Game Design Workshop 2nd Edition: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* by Tracy Fullerton
- *Designing Interactions* by Bill Moggridge

**Recommended**
- *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* by Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman
The required texts are available in the USC bookstore or online at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com. Additional readings listed in the syllabus will be available as handouts in class or as digital files on the course website.

Course Website

Evaluation and Grading:

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Course content by class meeting

**Week 1**: Overview of the class – introduction presentations to each other, discussion of course goals and themes: preparation, process, practice and partnership, assign collaboration partners for skill sharing assignment, intro to systems thinking, analysis of simple systems.

Reading: GDW Chapters 1 – 3, Moggridge Foreword, Introduction
Analysis Assignment 1: Written analysis of simple system – due week 2
Collaboration Assignment: Choose someone from whom to learn a skill, someone to whom to teach a skill (presentation of skills is due week 13)

**Week 2**: Formal elements of interactive systems – discuss outcome of simple system analysis, deconstructing Set, Connect 4, looking at more complex interactive systems, discovering the “play” in a system, assign play groups for board game analysis.

Reading: Rules of Play Ironclad essay, GDW Chapter 6
Analysis Assignment 2: Board game analysis – due week 3

**Week 3**: Experience goals and ideation techniques – discuss outcomes of board game analysis, intro to brainstorming techniques, in-class practice, discuss turning ideas into systems.

Reading: GDW Chapter 7, Moggridge Chapter 10 - People and Prototypes
Analysis Assignment 3: System treatment – due week 4
Week 4: Prototyping strategies – discuss outcomes of system treatments, intro to prototyping techniques, asking design questions, getting the most out of prototypes, playing and analyzing Up the River, assign design teams for Up the River variation assignment.

Reading: GDW Chapters 5, 9, Moggridge Chapter 1 – Tim Mott interview
Prototype #1: Up the River variation – due week 5

Week 5: Playtesting and the iterative process -- playtest & critiques of Up the River variations, guest critique.

Reading: GDW Chapter 4, Moggridge Chapter 5 – Will Wright interview

Week 6: Guest Lecture and Workshop. Details TBA.

Week 7: Public play – pervasive games, “big” games, theater games, and improvisation exercises.

Reading: GDW Chapter 8, Moggridge Chapter 8 – Hiroshi Ishii interview, Bill Gaver interview

Week 8: Meaningful play – expressive elements of interactive systems, levels of engagement, serious games, values in play mechanics, Grow-a-Game exercises, ideation for meaningful play prototype.

Reading: DeKoven The Well Played Game, Chapter 1; “Sustainable Play” in Games and Culture, Fullerton, Pearce, Fron and Morie
Prototype #2: Meaningful play – due week 10

Mid-term conferences (by appointment)

Week 9: Creating agency – designing levels of player control, affordances of controls, in-class play experiments with various control types, discussion of progress on meaningful play prototypes.

Reading: GDW Chapters 10, 11, Moggridge Chapter 4 - David Liddle interview, David Kelley interview

Week 10: Design Iteration – setting and reaching user experience goals -- playtest & critique meaningful play prototypes, guest critique.

Reading: Rules of Play Chapter 26 – Games as Narrative Play

Week 11: Narrative play – systems of storytelling, “narrative toys”, recombinant narrative exercises, in-class brainstorming for narrative play prototypes, design groups assigned for prototypes.

Reading: GDW Chapter 8, 13, 14
Prototype #3: Recombinant narrative – due week 12
Week 12: From paper to digital prototypes – playtest & critique of recombinant narrative prototypes, specifications and thoughtful implementation of design.

Reading: GDW Chapter 12
Prototype #4: Digital prototypes (CTIN-534 final projects) – due week 14

Week 13: Team building, planning, communication – discuss agile development, collaboration skills, and presentation of skill sharing assignment outcomes.

Reading: Norman, Emotional Design – Three Teapots

Week 14: Formal playtesting – usability process, playtest & critique of digital prototypes (534 final projects).

Reading: GDW Chapter 16

Week 15: Working as a designer – guest speaker & critique, discussion of areas of opportunity for designers, class wrap-up.

Finals week: Final game builds, playtesting notes and semester post-mortem’s due.

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes:
The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructors before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructors or student assistant before final grades are due.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

Attendance Policy:
Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an unexcused absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructors. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading
• Two unexcused absences: lowers grade one full grade point (for example, from A to B)
• Three unexcused absences: lowers grade two full grade points
• Four or more unexcused absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor’s discretion)
Excused absences are:
- Illness (with a doctor’s verification)
- Family or personal emergency (with verification)

Social media, including text messaging and internet messaging, are excluded from class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using them.

**Disruptive Behavior:**
Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

**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 8:30am - 5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

**Academic Integrity:**
The School of Cinematic Arts 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:**

Richard Lemarchand
An Associate Professor in the Interactive Media and Games Division of the School of Cinematic Arts, Richard Lemarchand is a game designer, a writer, a public speaker and a consultant.

Between 2004 and 2012, Richard was a Lead Game Designer at Naughty Dog in Santa Monica, California. He led the design of all three games in the Uncharted series including Uncharted 3: Drake’s Deception, and Uncharted 2: Among Thieves, winner of ten AIAS Interactive Achievement Awards, five Game Developers Choice Awards, four BAFTAs and over 200 Game of the Year awards.

Richard also worked on Uncharted: Drake’s Fortune, Jak 3 and Jak X: Combat Racing for Naughty Dog, and helped to create the successful game series Gex, Pandemonium and Soul Reaver at Crystal Dynamics in the San Francisco Bay Area. He got his game industry start at MicroProse in the UK, where he co-founded the company’s console
Richard has made storytelling action games the focus of his career, and he is interested in the way that narrative, aesthetics and gameplay work together to hold a player's attention and facilitate the expression of their agency.

A passionate advocate of indie and experimental games, Richard has been involved with the IndieCade International Festival of Independent Games for several years, and was the co-chair of the IndieCade Conference in 2010 and 2012. He regularly speaks in public on the subjects of game design, development, production, philosophy and culture, and organizes the annual GDC Microtalks, a session which celebrates games and play with short talks by diverse speakers. He is also a faculty member of the GDC Experimental Gameplay Sessions.

Richard grew up in a small town in rural England, dreaming of ancient civilizations and outer space. He has a degree in Physics and Philosophy from Oxford University.

Simon Wiscombe
A Researcher and Instructor in the Interactive Media and Games Division of the School of Cinematic Arts, Simon Wiscombe is a game designer, writer, interactive consultant, and artist based in Los Angeles. He has designed, researched, consulted for a number of institutions and companies, ranging from the Cinema School itself to UCLA, Boeing, and BMW. Simon has presented work at a number of festivals and conferences, such as Games for Change, DIY Days, and DiGRA, and his project, Reality Ends Here, won the Impact Award at IndieCade’s International Festival of Independent Games in 2012.

He performs improvisational comedy weekly at The Improv Space in Los Angeles, hailing from the wild expanse of the Silicon Valley suburbs.