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| Designing & Producing Video GamesITP 391x (4 Units) | E:\Dropbox\USC\viterbiengineering\Viterbi _ Engineering\Vertical\Vertical_Formal_JPEG\Vert_Formal_Viterbi_CardOnTrans.jpg |

**Spring 2014** Version 131107

### Objective

To educate the student about the jobs of the video game producer (project manager) and designer, and prepare the student for a job in the game industry. On completing the course the student will be able to:

* Write a game design according to accepted industry standards.
* Utilize verbal and written presentation skills to pitch a game concept.
* Write a game budget
* Write weekly production status reports
* Have an understanding of what it means to work in games and
* Know how to successfully apply for a game job.

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| Concepts |

The course consists of a semester-long design of an original video game, side by side with in-depth instruction on the job of the video game producer. Students are walked through an imaginary video game production from concept through pre-production to alpha and beta and post-production to release.

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| Prerequisites |

* **ITP-280**
* Students should furthermore be fluent in the use of Microsoft Word, Excel, Powerpoint, email and Internet.

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| Instructor | Tom Sloper |
| Contacting the Instructor | Email: [sloper@usc.edu](mailto:sloper@usc.edu?subject=ITP391%20-%20) (put ITP391 in the subject line) Office: OHE 412 |
| Office Hours | Listed on Blackboard under Contacts |
| Lab Assistants | None |
| Lecture/Lab | 2 hours, twice a week, for a total of 4 hours |

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| Required Textbooks |

***Course Reader*** (also may be referred to as "course pack"), available at USC bookstore. It's a combined course pack for both ITP230 and ITP391. Title: **"Video Game Quality Assurance, Production, Design"**

Students are also required to stay apprised of video game industry news. Free daily industry newsletter (required reading): **http://www.gamesindustry.biz**

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| Optional Textbooks |

**INTRODUCTION TO GAME DEVELOPMENT**, edited by Steve Rabin; Charles River Media; Second Edition, ISBN-13: 978-1-58450-679-9; ISBN-10: 1-58450-679-2

**SECRETS OF THE GAME BUSINESS**, edited by François Dominic Laramée; Charles River Media; ISBN 1-58450-282-7

**THE GAME PRODUCTION HANDBOOK**, by Heather Chandler; Charles River Media; ISBN 1-58450-416-1

**GAME DESIGN WORKSHOP**, by Tracy Fullerton; Morgan Kaufmann Publishers; Second Edition, ISBN 978-0-240-80974-8

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| Website |

All course material will be on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.usc.edu>).

Also: http://www.sloperama.com/advice.html

### IT Help

Hours of Service: 8AM-9PM; Phone: 213-740-0517; Email: [engrhelp@usc.edu](mailto:engrhelp@usc.edu)

### Exam structure

Midterm exam to be a paper test (T/F, mult. choice, fill-the-blank, essay).

Final: paper test, and present final documents to a panel of game industry professionals.

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| Grading | |
| The following percentage breakdown will be used in determining the grade for the course. | |
| Assignments | 50% |
| Midterm | 15% |
| Final exam and project | 25% |
| Participation | 10% |
| Total | 100% |
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| Grading Scale | |
| The following shows the grading scale to be used to determine the letter grade. | |
| 93% and above | A |
| 90% - 92% | A- |
| 87% - 89% | B+ |
| 83% - 86% | B |
| 80% - 82% | B- |
| 77% - 79% | C+ |
| 73% - 76% | C |
| 70% - 72% | C- |
| 67% - 69% | D+ |
| 65% - 66% | D |
| 64% and below | F |
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| Policies | |

Participation - Students should notify instructor by email in advance if a class will be missed. Students are expected to come to class on time and participate in discussions in each class.

Assignments - Weekly assignments should be delivered online via Blackboard. Barring an extended campuswide Blackboard outage, work submitted via email will not be graded. Assignments are to be in Microsoft Word, Excel, Prezi, or PowerPoint format unless otherwise specified. Assignments are to be presented and critiqued in class, and graded within 2 weeks of due date.

Late Submissions - Assignments turned in late will be reduced by **20%** the first day it's late, and by **50%** the second day. After that deadline, a zero is entered in the grade center. Deadline extensions are granted based on written excuse with specific request, and are granted on a case-by-case basis only; no guarantee that an extension will be granted.

Make-up policies - To make up for a missed exam, the student must provide a satisfactory reason (as determined by the instructor) along with proper documentation. Make-up exams are only allowed under extraordinary circumstances.

### ITP Policies

Classroom Computers - Before logging off a computer, students must ensure that they have emailed or saved projects created during the class or lab session. Any work saved to the computer may be erased after restarting the computer. ITP is not responsible for any work lost.

Open Lab - ITP offers Open Lab use for all students enrolled in ITP classes. These open labs are held beginning the second or third week of classes through the last week of classes.

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| Incomplete and Missing Grades |

Excerpts for this section have been taken from the University Grading Handbook, located at

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/ARR/grades/gradinghandbook/index.html>. Please see the link for more details on this and any other grading concerns.

A grade of Missing Grade (MG) “should only be assigned in unique or unusual situations… for those cases in which a student does not complete work for the course before the semester ends. All missing grades must be resolved by the instructor through the Correction of Grade Process. One calendar year is allowed to resolve a MG. If an MG is not resolved [within] one year the grade is changed to [Unofficial Withdrawal] UW and will be calculated into the grade point average a zero grade points.

A grade of Incomplete (IN) “is assigned when work is no completed because of documented illness or other ‘emergency’ **occurring after the twelfth week** of the semester (or 12th week equivalency for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).”

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| 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.

The use of unauthorized material, communication with fellow students during an examination, attempting to benefit from the work of another student, and similar behavior that defeats the intent of an examination or other class work is unacceptable to the University. It is often difficult to distinguish between a culpable act and inadvertent behavior resulting from the nervous tension accompanying examinations. When the professor determines that a violation has occurred, appropriate action, as determined by the instructor, will be taken.

Although working together is encouraged, all work claimed as yours must in fact be your own effort. Students who plagiarize the work of other students will receive zero points and will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (SJACS).

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/>.

If the instructor, a grader, or a lab assistant suspects you of academic dishonesty, it has to be reported to SJACS. Do not share your lab assignments with other students. Do not submit another student’s work as your own. Do not look at other students’ papers during exams. Do not leave the room during an exam. Do not cheat! As Trojans, we are faithful, scholarly, skillful, courageous, and ambitious.

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| 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 your course instructor (or TA) as early in the semester as possible. If you need accommodations for an exam, the form needs to be given to the instructor at least two weeks before the exam.

DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. Contact info: 213-740-0776 (Phone), 213-740-6948 (TDD only), 213-740-8216 (FAX), [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu), <http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html>.

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| Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis |

In case of emergency, when travel to campus is difficult, if not impossible, USC executive leadership will announce a digital way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of the Blackboard LMS (Learning Management System), teleconferencing, and other technologies. Instructors should be prepared to assign students a “Plan B” project that can be completed ‘at a distance.’ For additional information about maintaining your classes in an emergency, please access: <http://cst.usc.edu/services/emergencyprep.html>

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| Designing and Producing Video GamesITP 391x (4 Units)Course Outline |
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| Precise schedule of events may vary due to holidays, guest speaker availability, etc. |

### Week 1

Introduction

- Introduce instructor and course. Examination of the roles of the game designer and producer in video game production/development.

- Introduce individual design assignment. Introduce group imaginary production; new producer's 1st job is to learn everything possible about the IP. Problem: how to go about it? Introduce weekly status reports.

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter, Sloperama FAQ 14 (http://sloperama.com/advice/lesson14.htm) and Penny Arcade (http://www.penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/so-you-want-to-be-a-game-designer), Sloperama FAQ 42 (http://sloperama.com/advice/lesson42.htm) and Penny Arcade (http://www.penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/so-you-want-to-be-a-producer)

**Assignment:** One-paragraph concept for individual student's original game; go see movie (over weekend); write status report

### Week 2

The New Producer's New Job

- Producer goes to visit IP owner and learn about the game's design direction guidelines. Writes an internal proposal for concept greenlight. Problem: who's on the greenlight committee?

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter (due EVERY class day); Course Pack, chapter 7.2: Game Industry Roles and Economics (industry company types), pages 837-848

**Assignment:** Saw movie over weekend, now collaborate on a 2-page Concept Document including a log line; status report

### Week 3

Greenlight; Hunt for Development Team

- Greenlight committee approves direction. Producer identifies development candidates. Problem: how to identify development candidates?

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter; Course Pack, chapter 7.2: Game Industry Roles (Retail), pp. 849-854

**Assignment:** Create 2-page concept doc for original concept. Collaborate on revising the group's 2-page concept doc if necessary; status report

### Week 4

Vet teams, send bid packages, select developer

- Problems for discussion: what goes into a bid package? How to select developer?

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter as usual; Course Pack chp. 7.3, The Publisher-Developer Relationship, pp. 857-871

**Assignment:** Collaborate on selecting a developer; status report

Design the Main Game Screen for your original concept

### Week 5

**Contracts and early production planning**

- GDDs, TDDs. The 5 phases of the development/production process. The Golden Spike. Why Xmas happens in July. The issues that usually arise in game development contracts. Focus on Concept Phase, Pre-Production Phase.

**Reading:** The Call of Duty Contract - http://www.gamasutra.com/features/ 20070112/spark\_01.shtml

**Assignment:** Write 1st Playable milestone description; status report

### Week 6

**Budgets. Graphics approval cycles. Politics of waiting.**

- Tracking the creation of assets. Politics that occur during the long wait for First Playable.

**Reading:** Latest Salary Survey on GameCareerGuide.com; Course Pack, Chapter 7.3, The Publisher-Developer Relationship, pp. 872-876

**Assignment:** Budget for your original concept; status report

### Week 7

**First Playable! + Quiz**

- Receiving and reviewing the First Playable build. Red flag spotting. Politics that occur when First Playable arrives. The Production Phase, in depth.

- Submitting build for platform holder concept approval.

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter as always; Course Pack, Chapter 7.1, Production, pp. 791-808

**Assignment:** Quiz; status report

### Week 8

**Flying to developer's location. Conducting developer meetings.**

Discussion problem: how do you set this up, what arrangements do you make, how do you conduct it?

**Reading:**

**Assignment:** Story elements for your original concept; status report

### Week 9 - Midterm

Exact date of midterm may vary but probably occurs during week 9, before Spring Break. Midterm consists of multiple-choice quiz and a couple of written questions.

- Show First Playable to stakeholders. Meet with the IP owner to discuss overall direction. Get greenlight committee consensus. Production tracking without micromanaging.

**Reading:** http://www.screenwriting.info; http://www.etbscreenwriting.com/

**Assignment:** A story cutscene for your original concept; status report

### Week 10

**The job of the Game Designer**

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter

**Assignment:** Controls design for your original concept; status report

### Week 11

**Nearing the end of Production phase; Alpha, Beta, Marketing**

- Working with Marketing. Game's final title, box & docs, demos, screen shots, interviews.

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter; Course Pack, Chapter 7.1, Production, pp. 808-823

**Assignment:** Write Gameplay Walkthru for your original concept, describing a key moment of gameplay in excruciating detail; status report

### Note:

**Guest speakers** may join class at any time during semester, (to be determined, and at instructor's discretion)

- Topic depends on guest speaker

- May cause some shuffling of topics from one week to another

### Week 12

**Quality Assurance (Q.A.)**

- The Producer / Quality Assurance working relationship.

**Reading:** http://www.alixgames.co.uk/post/999610807/how-to-be-a-games-tester and http://www.penny-arcade.com/patv/episode/playtesting and Sloperama FAQ 5: http://sloperama.com/advice/lesson5.htm

**Assignment:** Write 5 bugs in Bugzilla (http://itpbugzilla.usc.edu - login details on Blackboard); Write Audio Design for your original game; status report

### Week 13

**Down To The Wire; Aftermarket**

- Working with Operations and the platform holder. Platform holder certification/approval. BOM meetings. Winding down the QA process.

- Discussion problem: QA Lead refuses to release game because of some B bugs. What do you do?

- The producer's work isn't finished when the game is released. Customer support, sequels, localizations, ports. The cost of patching.

**Reading:** Guy Kawasaki's 10-20-30 rule ; GamesIndustry International newsletter; Course Pack, Chapter 7.1, Production, pp. 823-835

**Assignment:** Collaborative design (1 page). Each student must present ideas for the other students' designs. Each student must accept some ideas for his/her design.

### Week 14

**Producing internally; Producing a social service; Producing volunteer/student games**

- Working with, and overseeing, diverse personnel (skill sets, genders, races, national origins).

- Social games are never "finished"

- Motivating and managing a herd of cats

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter

**Assignment:** Powerpoint presentation for your original concept

Bring your résumé. And portfolio if applicable. Status report.

### Week 15

**Final Review + Filling any gaps - The Real World**

- Getting a job in the game industry. Mock job interviews. Freelancing.

- How to apply for a job in the industry; mock job interviews; review any student papers if desired; discuss any industry topics desired; make up for material not covered due to guest speakers

- Review of material covered during semester; wrap-up of imaginary production.

**Reading:** GamesIndustry International newsletter

**Assignment:** Rough paper draft of your final document; all parts assembled into one whole, with section numbers. Bring your résumé. And portfolio if applicable. Status report.

### FINALS WEEK

Final Presentation 2:00 PM May 12, 2014\*

Present final documents to a panel of game industry professionals

• Verbal elevator pitch from memory

• Powerpoint presentation

• Hand in final documents, digital and good-looking hard copy (not a rough draft)

\* Per http://www.usc.edu/academics/classes/term\_20141/finals.html