

**Units: 4 | Fall 2015—Monday—10-11:50AM | <http://ctin-488.tumblr.com/>**

**Location: SCI 108 | Instructor: Jane Pinckard**

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### Course Description

CTIN 488 is the foundational course for game design education at USC. The foundation 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.

**N.B. Laptops, digital tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices with screens are prohibited during lecture. Audio recording is permitted with prior clearance by the instructor. Bring a notebook or paper and a pen or pencil to every class.**

### Learning Objectives

The playcentric design methodology enables the student to:

1. **Understand Fundamental Theory** – You will learn about the Formal, Dynamic, and Dramatic elements of games, how the three relate, and how to analyze designs based on them.
2. **Learn the Core Development Process** – This process is independent of software tools (which change over time). It is a strongly collaborative process centering on iterative design, prototyping, and playtesting.
3. **Make Many Games** – Everyone will design many games, hands-on, regardless of technical skills. Class assignments revolve around putting students in collaborative teams to create games together, teaching fundamental collaboration skills.
4. **Analyze Each Other’s Games** – Students will regularly play and give feedback on one another’s projects, gaining considerable experience providing critiques and analyzing games as playable systems.
5. **Discuss Games in Context** – Students will be given a grounding of the history of games, their relationships to cultures, and how games connect to political, health, and advocacy. Students will learn how to talk about and pitch their projects in the context of games as a whole.
6. **Understand Social and Cultural Impact** – Students learn to consider their projects in a complex social and cultural context, including what kinds of individuals and communities are represented and what point of view the work expresses. This class grounds the student in learning to explore diverse viewpoints, and will discuss racial, religious, gender and sexual orientation issues in the context of games and interactive media.

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.

**Prerequisite(s):** none

**Recommended Preparation:** CTIN 309, CTIN 483.

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

- *Game Design Workshop*, Third Edition, by Tracy Fullerton
- *A Game Design Vocabulary*, by Anna Anthropy and Naomi Clark

The above are available through Amazon, BarnesandNoble.com, and other book sellers.

In addition, other texts will be assigned. These will include linked online readings, in-class handouts, games, videos, and other forms of media.

The course assumes that every student has played and understands a few key games that will be referenced throughout the course. These are:

- Dominion
- Settlers of Catan
- Love Letter
- Scotland Yard
- Pit
- Last Night on Earth
- Mafia/Werewolf
- Dungeons and Dragons
- Ticket to Ride

Most of these games are available to play in the games library, at the front desk in SCA 201.

## Materials:

After week 1, students are expected to bring the following materials to their lab section:

- washable markers
- standard set of dice: D4, D6, D8, D10, D12, D20
- index cards
- clear plastic card holders/sleeves

Most of these materials are available at office supply stores or large drugstores; dice can be found at game stores or online retailers.

We do not use Blackboard in this class. We post lecture slides and other information on the CTIN 488 Tumblr: <http://ctin-488.tumblr.com/>

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

The class is divided into lecture work, which covers theory and fundamental concepts, and lab work, which puts concepts into practice in a hands-on way.

**Pop quizzes and in-class writing:** There will be three to four pop quizzes in lecture, as well as times when I will ask you to participate in an in-class writing exercise.

- Assessment: pass-fail. Designed to measure your reading comprehension and track attendance.

**Midterm Paper:** Students are asked to write a reflection on their individual game project.

- Assessment: Measured by the quality of thoughtful analysis demonstrated in the writing.

**Projects:** Students will complete a number of game design projects that will produce physical board games along with accompanying documentation (design journal, playtest report, and rule sheet).

- Assessment: Measured by the quality and originality of game systems, clarity of presentation (including rulesheet), and the rigor and detail of process documentation.

**Game Analysis Paper:** A two page analysis after playing a new board game.

- Assessment: Measured by the quality of thoughtful analysis demonstrated in the writing as well as the accurate address of formal, dynamic, and dramatic game elements.

**Final Exam:** The final exam is one hour long and divided into a short answer section and an essay question.

- Assessment: Short answers are graded for accuracy, ability to retain concepts covered in lecture and the reading, and completeness. The essay is graded for clarity, depth of insight, strength of argument, and ability to synthesize concepts and readings.

**Final Project:** The final game design project results in the production of final assets suitable for board game printing and publishing.

- Assessment: Measured by the quality and originality of game systems, clarity and polish of presentation (including rulesheet).

**Final Presentation:** During the class final period, groups will give a short presentation on their final project to the entire class.

- Assessment: The presentation will be graded on the quality of presentation materials, personal representation and performance, and to what degree assigned content was covered.

### Grading Breakdown:

Assignment	Grading	Due
Quizzes and In-class writing	10%	Variable
Mid-term paper	10%	10.12
Projects	30%	Variable
Final Exam	10%	11.16
Final Project	20%	11.16
Final Presentation	10%	12.14
Participation*	10%	N/A

\*Participation includes engagement in both lab and lecture sections.

### Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due by class time unless otherwise specified.

### 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 instructor **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 instructor 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 instructor. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media & Games 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 instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using them.

### **Diversity**

In making games and interactive media in a professional and ethical way, it is important that you consider diversity. When looking at your projects, you should consider who is depicted and how this work will impact others. What kinds of individuals and communities are represented in your work? What point of view does your work express? This class will assist you in learning how to make work that includes diverse viewpoints, and may discuss racial, religious, gender and sexual orientation issues in the context of games and interactive media.

### **Additional Policies**

Add any additional policies that students should be aware of: late assignments, missed classes, attendance expectations, use of technology in the classroom, etc.

# Course Schedule

Lecture	Lab
<b>WEEK 1</b> <b>8.24</b>	
<b>Game Design for All</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overview of the course, introductions.</li> <li>Lecture: Intro to game design. What is a designer? What is playcentric design? Intro to Formal Elements.</li> <li>In-class exercise: Making a game!</li> </ul>	Up the River: Re-design a simple game system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GDW 1, 2 (30 minutes)</li> <li>MDA Paper (30 minutes)</li> </ul> Recommended: Doug Church, <a href="#">Formal Abstract Design Tools</a> .	Assignments: Group – Up the River Mod
<b>WEEK 2</b> <b>8.31</b>	
<b>Elements and the Language of Games</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lecture: Formal Elements, Dramatic Elements, and Dynamic Elements.</li> <li>Discussion: What is MDA and why is it important?</li> <li>In-class exercise: fixing a “broken” mechanic.</li> </ul>	Playtesting / Up the River Mod Final Playtests UP THE RIVER MOD DUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GDW 3, 4 (30 minutes)</li> <li>Anthropy and Clark, 1, 2 (30 minutes)</li> </ul> Recommended: Greg Costikyan, <a href="#">I Have no Words and Must Design: Toward a Critical Vocabulary for Games</a> .	Assignments: Group – Game Project 1
<b>WEEK 3</b> <b>9.7</b>	
<b>Lab Work</b>	
<b>Labor Day, no lecture.</b>	Game Project 1 Playtests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anthropy and Clark, 3, 4 (30 minutes)</li> <li>Watch: Jenova Chen, <a href="#">Blank Canvas: Designing a New Era of Emotional Storytelling through Games</a>.</li> </ul> Recommended: Raph Koster, <a href="#">A Theory of Fun (excerpt)</a> .	Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group – Game Project 1</li> <li>Individual – Game Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>WEEK 4</b> <b>9.14</b>	
<b>Dramatic Elements, Emotions, and Aesthetics</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion: Emotion in games.</li> <li>Lecture: Dramatic elements: Story, premise, narrative, and the aesthetics of play.</li> </ul>	Game Project 1 Final Playtesting GAME PROJECT 1 DUE INDIVIDUAL GAME ANALYSIS DUE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class exercise: Dramatic elements.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW 5 (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Watch: <a href="#">Don Norman video on affordances</a></li> <li>• Watch: Clint Hocking: <a href="#">Dynamics: the State of the Art</a>.</li> </ul>	
Recommended: Review Anthropy and Clark, 1.	Assignments: Individual – Game Project 2
<b>WEEK 5</b> <b>9.21</b>	
<b>Dynamic Elements, Loops, and Emergence</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: Dynamic Elements, Game Loops, and Emergence</li> <li>• In-class exercise: Designing for amplifying and damping loops.</li> <li>• Discussion and exercise: Emergence.</li> </ul>	Playtesting / Workshopping Game Project 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW 9, 10 (30 minutes)</li> <li>• Mattie Brice, <a href="#">Death of the Player</a>. (30 minutes)</li> <li>• Watch: <a href="#">Three ways to Make Your Game more Inclusive</a>.</li> </ul>	
Recommended:	Assignments: Individual – Game Project 2
<b>WEEK 6</b> <b>9.28</b>	
<b>Playcentric Design, Playtesting, and Inclusive Design</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion: What is Playcentric design? What production process do we use to achieve it?</li> <li>• Good playtesting principles.</li> <li>• Lecture and discussion: inclusive design and accessibility.</li> <li>• In-class exercise: player experience goals</li> </ul>	Playtesting / Workshopping Game Project 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anthropy and Clark, 7 (15 minutes)</li> <li>• <a href="#">World of Darkness Core Rulebook, pp. 22-23, pp. 32-35</a>. (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Watch: Johanna Koljonen, <a href="#">Introduction to Nordic LARP</a>.</li> </ul>	
Recommended: Watch: <a href="#">Dave Morris, The Way of Improvisation</a>	Assignments: Individual – Game Project 2
<b>WEEK 7</b> <b>10.5</b>	
<b>RPGs, LARPs, and Narrative Play</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: Games as theater: RPGs, Storytelling, LARPs, Character, and Bleed.</li> <li>• In-class exercise: improv.</li> </ul>	RPG Class Play GAME PROJECT 2 DUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW, 11 (30 minutes)</li> <li>• Bartle, <a href="#">Players who Suit MUDs</a> (30 minutes)</li> </ul>	Assignments: Group – RPG Play Report Individual - Mid-Term Paper

Recommended: Recommended: Raph Koster, <a href="#">A Theory of Fun (excerpt)</a> . (Yes, again!)	
<b>WEEK 8</b> 10.12	<b>“Fun” and Game Aesthetics</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion: What is “fun”?</li> <li>• Lecture: Different approaches to fun. Alternatives to fun.</li> <li>• In-class exercise: designing for different kinds of fun.</li> </ul>	RPG Design Exercise MID-TERM PAPER DUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review GDW 11, especially “Improving Player Choices.” (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Anthropy and Clark, Ch. 6 (15 minutes)</li> </ul>	Assignments: Group – RPG Play Report
<b>WEEK 9</b> 10.19	<b>Meaningful Choices and Decisions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: The anatomy of a choice. Meaningful design decisions.</li> <li>• In-class exercise: practicing building choices.</li> </ul>	Final Project Pitches RPG PLAY REPORT DUE FINAL PROJECT PITCH DUE
Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW: 13, 16 (30 minutes)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Liz England: From Student to Designer Part 2</a> (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Watch: Rami’s talk</li> </ul>	Assignments: Individual - Final Project Pitch
<b>WEEK 10</b> 10.26	<b>Pitching and Professionalism</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: Pitching your Game! (Guest Lecture)</li> <li>• Lecture and discussion: professionalism in the game industry, from networking, interviewing, to working.</li> </ul>	Playtesting / Workshopping Final Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW: 12 (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Watch: <a href="#">Brian Sharp: Concrete Practices to Be a Better Leader (2010)</a></li> </ul>	Assignments: Group – Final Project
<b>WEEK 11</b> 11.02	<b>Putting it All Together: Leadership, Teamwork, Communication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: Designing Rules (Guest Lecture)</li> <li>• Communication and Leadership</li> </ul>	Playtesting / Workshopping Final Project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GDW: 14 (15 minutes)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Daniel Cook, Game Design Logs</a> (15 minutes)</li> <li>• Skim <a href="#">Ant’s Life GDD</a> (15 minutes)</li> </ul>	Assignments: Group – Final Project

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Erin Robinson: 5 Alternatives to a GDD</a> (15 minutes)</li> </ul>	
<b>WEEK 12</b> <b>11.09</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Documentation</b></span>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture and Discussion: Design Documentation Methodologies</li> </ul>	Lab: Playtesting / Workshopping Final Project
Assignment: Create slide for class review.	Assignments: Group – Final Project
<b>WEEK 13</b> <b>11.16</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Full Course Review!</b></span>	
Full course review!!!	Lab: EXAM (1 hr) and Finishing Final Project
Study for exam!	Assignments: Group - Practice Presentations
<b>WEEK 14</b> <b>11.23</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Game Criticism and Analysis</b></span>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: What is criticism? How does it help designers? Tools and resources for better game analysis.</li> <li>• In-class writing: analysis practice.</li> </ul>	Thanksgiving Holiday: NO LAB
Watch: <a href="#">GDC Microtalks</a> .	Assignment: Practice Presentations
<b>WEEK 15</b> <b>11.30</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Where to from here?</b></span>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lecture: Things you can do with game design.</li> <li>• Discussion: how do we improve this class?</li> </ul>	Final Presentation Rehearsal
Please fill out your course evaluations!	Assignments: Group – Final Presentation
<b>Final Presentations: December 14, 8AM</b> <b>Room SCI 108</b>	

### Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

#### Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sa-ctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.



Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* [<http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>].

This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [sarc@usc.edu](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

### **Support Systems**

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* [[http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html)] provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

### **Disruptive Student 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.

### **Syllabus Updates:**

This syllabus is liable to change up to the beginning of class and possibly over the semester. Please check the posted syllabus regularly, and note all changes that are shared by the instructor in class.