USC School of Cinematic Arts

Interactive Media and Games Division

Advanced Games Project
CTIN 491
Units: 4
Fall 2015 – Thursdays 3:30 pm – 6:50 pm
Location: SCI 108

Instructor: Danny Bilson
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Course Description

Advanced Games Project comprises the core capstone class where undergraduates from Cinema and Viterbi collaborate on large games projects, working with students from all over USC, including Thorton, Viterbi, Marshall, Annenberg, and Roski.

Students bring their individual talents as designers, programmers, artists, writers, composers, producers, etc. together in cross-disciplinary teams. Faculty and industry mentors are integrated into the process for guidance, and review. The full production course covers two semesters from Fall through Spring.

The selection of projects is made the year prior through a rigorous pitch process. These game productions are staffed by registered class members. Project Leads work closely with instructors and mentors to learn to manage their teams and contribute to large project, while individual team members participate regularly in workshops to learn about their jobs and actively work on challenges they are facing in the development of there games.

Teams learn to regularly work through sprints and defined goals to meet a larger schedule, regularly presenting their work in class for feedback from industry experts, instructors, and other students, while working in a professionally modeled production environment. The class culminates in Demo Day presentations at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters, where students showcase and represent their work to a large community of industry professionals.

Learning Objectives

The main course goal is to learn to work as a team, to develop a fully polished and playable game demo, ready for professional demonstration and evaluation. This demo will encompass a segment of the game which highlights its core design pillars, has polished art and animation, is fun, intuitive and fully playable.

Routine, focused feedback on both process and product from instructors reinforces the project based learning. Lectures and hands on guidance on project management, design and production set the students on the right path. Students working in specific areas will have focused sessions and time with instructors to learn the skills of their position, and trouble shoot problems in development. The class will teach all students a better understanding of roles on larger teams, what each individual does, and how to collaborate as part of a game development process.

Key Milestones and Deliverables (minimum requirements)

First Semester Mid Term- **First playable**, a hands on demonstration of the core mechanic.

First Semester Final- Fall Demo Day. **Alpha build**. Roughly five minutes of gameplay featuring one of the distinct beats or movements of the game flow.

Second Semester Mid Term- **Beta build**. Feature complete, roughly 15 minutes of gameplay which should make up the entire progression of the full demo.

Second Semester Final- Spring Demo Day. **"Gold Master"** Roughly 15 minutes of highly polished gameplay. Entire build should be distributable for publishing.

Prerequisite(s): CTIN 484, CTIN 489
Co-Requisite (s): None
Concurrent Enrollment: None
Recommended Preparation: CTIN 458, CTIN 497

Course Notes: Letter Grade

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Game and Narrative Design Documents

Playable Game Level
Delivered as an executable or application
Must show off and demonstrate the key features of the game
The level must be working software - e.g. not a mockup
The level should include art assets appropriate for your project including: sound music, animation, HUD/GUI

Zipped project on server
We expect your game to be delivered in a zip file and posted on the Interactive server.

Project Properly Organized on Server Directory
We expect proper organization of your project using an online repository, such as Perforce, Git, or SVN

Marketing Deliverables:

Game Poster
We expect each team to produce a marketing-style game poster that tells the story and promotes the game

10 Screenshots: Focusing on different stages or features
Focusing on different stages or features Show off the key features of the game
These shots can be used for your website or personal portfolio.

Gameplay Video - edited, 2-5 minutes in length
We expect you to make a polished video showing off the game, usable to market to festivals, individuals, and others.

Game Website
We expect each team to create a marketing website for your game that incorporates all of the materials described above

All teams must present and demo at USC Games Demo Day

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Weekly Deliverables		50
Midterm Deliverables		15
Final Project		25
Final Presentation		10
TOTAL	0	100

Midterm and Final Project/Presentation evaluation will be based on how well a project realizes the goals the team has set out for itself and the project. Ultimately, this course exists to empower students to bring their vision into the hands of players.

The Weekly Deliverables will be based on the sprint goals set by each team and its leads. The professors will evaluate both the amount of tasks fully completed on time and also the complexity of the tasks.

Because of the unique needs of each project, it is impossible to dictate a structure that applies to each so sternly that we have a mathematical category for attitude, help, efficacy of code, importance within the project, foresight, insight, honesty, friendliness and many other amorphous qualities that are crucial to working within a team but divorced from coding. Much like the professional world, the most important evaluator will be the quality of the experience you help build.

This class is where final-year students are exposed to working on teams needing both technical skill as well as the emotional maturity to work within a collaborative group. CTIN 491 intentionally models the world of professional game development- the post-graduate workplace we are preparing students for.

The most important feature of this class is that it empowers students to work as a team to execute on a collaborative creative vision and have fun in the process.

Important: The faculty of USC IMGD reserves the right to cancel any AGP production due to lack of team performance and reassign the team members to another project.

<u>Assignment Submission Policy</u>
During class, each team must be ready to present the current state of the game when called upon, and individuals on each team must be prepared to discuss his/her work from the previous week.
Some weeks, there will be presentations, which require the teams to be ready to present the game or an aspect of the game or its production process to the class and instructors.
Other assignments are the sprints teams determine for themselves, and area leads are responsible for assigning tasks to their team members as a part of the sprint.
Team members are expected to put in time in the advanced games laboratory to work on their tasks for each sprint.
Team members and leaders are expected to bring the results of sprints and active development problems to the workshop meetings with instructors.

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 my 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: A Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 - Introduction
- Overview of the goals and format of the class
- Re-presentations on projects from each of the team leaders
  Include prototype and pre-production work done over the summer
  Current team list and any holes in the team
- Break up into placement discussions with teams/extra students for open positions

  Reading Assignment:
- Contribution Agreement

  Assignment for next week:
- Finalize teams

Week 2 - Understanding Intellectual Property
- Lecture on Intellectual Property, Copyright and Patents from Dan Nabel
- Questions about Contribution Agreement

  Assignment for next week:
- Producers to organize all signed Contribution Agreements

Week 3 - Discipline Workshops
- Production: Scheduling and Scope
- Design: Game Macros
- Programming: The role of tech on a dev team (building a successful team dynamic), TDD & the big decisions (engine, platform(s), features), scheduling
- Art: Game Art and Communication
- Audio: The role of audio in the design process.
- Narrative: Defining the Narrative Center
- User Research: Usability testing. How to listen to users.

- (See discipline schedules for assignments, readings and discussion topics.)

Week 4 - SCRUM
- Defining a sprint
- Removing obstacles to work
- Pulling together as a team
- Work with mentors to define this week's sprint

  Assignment for next week:
- Results of sprint

Week 5 - Sprint Results
- All teams present goals and results of their sprint to entire class
- Class feedback on progress and direction

Assignments for next week:
Production Schedule

Week 6 - Discipline Workshops
● Production: Milestones – Internal and External
● Design: Feel of the Core Loop
● Programming: Configuration Management, Build Pipeline
● Art: Art Direction and Consistency
● Audio: Audio aesthetics: a general overview of aesthetic expression in game audio design.
● Narrative: Narrative Design Reviews
● User Research: How to make a usability plan.

Week 7 - Critique
● External mentors give critique to all games

Assignment for next week:
● Bring workshop problems to discipline dives

Week 8 - Discipline Workshops
● Production: Clinic with external producing mentors
● Design: Clinic with external design mentors
● Programming: Debugging in Unity
● Art: UI and UX
● Audio: Dynamics mapping & narrative structure.
● Narrative: Fiction, Mechanics and Scope
● User Research: Case studies in user research

Assignment due for next week:
● First playable

Week 9 - Midterm Presentations
● Present first playables to class
● Class feedback on progress and direction

Week 10 - Teambuilding
● Are we making the same game?
● In-class exercises for team-building

Assignments due TBD (need date from SIR Team):
● Defining Demo Day deliverables
Updated one sheet
Screenshots
Poster
Trailer

Week 11 - Discipline Workshops
- Production: Triage
- Design: Killing your babies
- Programming: Hot Topics (1-3 issues from each team)
- Art: Integration of all game art
- Audio: Discussion of sound experimentation with a focus on creating dynamic and variable audio designs.
- Narrative: Narrative Design Review 2
- User Research: Types of user research: usability engineering, field research, big data

Week 12 – User Research Presentations
- Putting the player at the center of the design process
- Presentations by UR leads on all games

Assignment for next week:
- Bring workshop problems to discipline dives

Week 13 - Discipline Workshops
- Production: Presentation practice
- Design: Responding to playtests
- Programming: Dealing with milestones
- Art: Fluidity in gameplay through art
- Audio: Oblique Strategies and creative tips & tricks.
- Narrative: Usability and Narrative Polish
- User Research: Alternative approaches to understanding users

Week 14 – Peer Review
- Playtesting of games in class
- Feedback formally given to all teams (need a method for this).

Assignments due next week:
Semester Design Journal
Demo Day Deliverables (as established)

Week 15 – Practice for Demo Day
- Show "E3 Demo" pitch (should be scripted)

FINALS WEEK - Demo Day
- All students are required to present their work at the USC Games Demo Day event

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-sanctions/. 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 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.htmlprovides 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.