

ASCJ 420 - Section 21941R

Dynamics of the Mobile Revolution: Getting Ready to Thrive in an Industry That Doesn't Exist Yet

Instructor: Flint Dille (flintdille@gmail.com)

Day and Time: Thursdays, 2:00-3:50pm

Classroom: ANN L116

Office Hours: By appointment at the Annenberg
Innovation Lab (ASC 104)

This course will function like a think tank focused on how storytellers and media professionals can succeed as **gamification**, **alternate reality**, and **geo-mobile technology** converge into an economic, social, and political agent of harmonization in the post-disruption era—or, more to the point, how to flourish in an increasingly blurred media ecosystem that has been revolutionized by mobile (and other) technologies. It's designed to be a "wow course" that will change the way you think about the world around you, but also equip you with a skill set to engage with a changing cultural, technological, and professional environment.

Together, we'll peer into the future based on trends from today, thinking through ways we can effect a better world. The premise is that the era of constant disruption we're currently in will lead us to a period of "ruption": a period in which we will seek to restore a sense of order, predictability, and progress, and a feeling that life is filled with meaningful decisions and purposeful activities. That is not to say that we will stop surfing the internet and playing immersive games, but we will also be looking for more—a reconnection with the physical world. This re-entry into reality will be enhanced by technology (especially those advances given us by mobile computing), but it will also entail personal and cultural shifts that foster reintegration into a shared physical, tangible space, after a generation of peering at—or getting lost in—screens.

All of this means that this course brings together some **philosophical** and **epistemological** musings; a fair amount of investigation into the relationships between **technology**, **culture**, and **industry**; and a heavy dose of **storytelling** and **media design**. We'll inquire into the very nature of reality (asking, for example, whether it is possible for people to improve reality just by their cognitive interpretations, or "positive thinking"), because our perception and understanding of reality is nearly as important as "real reality"—if indeed there is a "real reality." That said, our investigations into these theoretical aspects of reality will be balanced by hands-on exploration of the pragmatic issues surrounding alternate realities.

Our goal with this course is to create a unique opportunity to not only study the nitty-gritty of alternate reality, gamification, worldbuilding, and (geo-) mobile technology with an instructor living at the heart of this intersection, but also to glimpse into the future—and perhaps shape it in productive ways, preparing ourselves for the changes that lie ahead and for the industries that are on the brink of emergence.

Instructor Biography

Flint Dille has been given many titles throughout his career: Transmediologist, World Builder, ARGonaut, Gamifyer, Narrative Alchemist, and Game Designer, to name a few. He has led the development of multiple storyworlds, served as the showrunner on the original *Transformers* animated series, inspired Dilios in Frank Miller's *300*, and is currently Creative Lead on Niantic's geo-mobile alternate reality game, *Ingress*.

Course Structure

I don't believe that there's any substitute for actually creating a product. When I taught a course on Alternate Reality Games before, I structured it like a startup, where our goal was to actually deliver an ARG by the end of the semester that would exist for three weeks on the internet and one night in reality. This class will be structured a bit more like a think tank, with the goal of publishing a digital book of findings at the end of the semester: a collection of final student papers, framed by the premises of the class, that students can be proud of for years to come. Thus, this class has an actual product attached to it, and student papers aren't viewed merely as things that get grades and are forgotten shortly thereafter, but instead

become part of a meaningful body of work.

Required Texts: Books, Videos, and Games

I will supply weekly readings, viewings and play-tests as appropriate. Some are mentioned in the syllabus, but some of the articles probably haven't been written yet; this is a fast-moving field. It's not the objective of this course to bury students in reading, but students should plan on spending a few hours per week preparing for class. Some of our texts will be spot on the topic, others more orthogonal. For example, we have a book about survival, a book about strategy, and a few other surprises.

Assignments

Contributions to Class Forum on Blackboard (10 Percent)

Students should share short reflections or questions on the materials read for each week's session, which can be used as a springboard for class discussions. These should be posted on the Blackboard discussion forums by 10:00am on the day the class is being held.

In-Class Participation and Weekly Assignments (10 Percent)

Although there will be some elements of lecturing in this course, it is designed to include a great deal of active participation, both in terms of short assignments and more organic, emergent discussions. Therefore, the success of the learning experience is dependent upon students' active listening and ready engagement in discussions and exercises.

Peer Review (10 Percent)

One goal of this class is to give students the attitude and skills to thrive in the coming world (and in those industries that don't quite exist yet), so—just as in the real world—a good percentage of success or failure will depend on how well students present in front of others, and how they determine the ways in which limited resources will be allocated. Starting in the second week, a portion of each class will be dedicated to brief student presentations, which will be graded on a curve by the student's fellow classmates. The number of times each student will be required to present will be determined by the

total number of students enrolled in the course.

Midterm Paper (20 Percent, due Feb. 25)

Information about this assignment will be shared in class.

Final Project Draft/Pitch (15 Percent, due Apr. 28)

Students will be expected to deliver a rough draft of their final project, to be presented as a pitch to the class. Although this draft need not be polished, it is expected that the student will have put effort into selecting and presenting materials that will be both relevant and interesting to the class.

Final Project (35 Percent, due date TBD)

Each student will submit a publishable document (2,000-3,000 words) to be included in the class's book of findings.

Class Policies and Resources

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.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.

Course Schedule

Note: The contents of this course schedule, including readings and other assignments, will likely change; please check your USC email account regularly, review updates posted on Blackboard, and confer with your instructor to make sure you're looking at the most current materials.

Week 1 (Jan. 14): Surviving and Flourishing in the Blur

Assignment Due for Class: None

Reading Due for Class: None

Discussion Topic: This class session will serve not only as an introduction to your instructor, overviewing his career in a media environment that has changed radically over the last 30 years, but also as an introduction to the idea of "the blur." The basic principles of life in the blur—which has been ushered in by digital technologies, and specifically by the mobile revolution—are as follows: everything is everywhere, everything is all the time, everything is forever, and everybody has access to everything. We'll set the foundation for the rest of the class and chat about the implications of these ideas—how they'll impact our lives and careers.

In-Class Exercise: TBD

Week 2 (Jan. 21): Reality and Alternate Reality

Assignment Due for Class: Take one aspect of the blur—for instance, "everything is all the time"—and produce a 1-page speculation on either one change that will come from the blur or some sort of counter-principle (e.g., things that can only exist at one particular moment), explaining the relevance of the claims you're making. Students will share their ideas with the class, as well.

Readings Due for Class: Excerpt from Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*; additional material TBD

Discussion Topic: How do we distinguish *reality* from *alternate reality*, *augmented reality*, *virtual reality*, and *mixed*

reality? First we'll define the terms, then we'll get into the philosophy: Is there such a thing as reality? What do you know to be true? Is perception reality? Are we each living in our own alternate reality? Has the media become like a theater projecting images to a captive audience? Why does the world need alternate realities? What's an alternate reality game?

In-Class Exercise: Consider the different parallel realities in Los Angeles right now. Specifically, let's focus on the realities centered on different themes: is everybody really living in the same time period? Especially with our varying media realities, the various architectural realities of the city, and our ability to shape our realities via the things we wear and spend money on, do we all create our own reality?

Week 3 (Jan. 28): Geo-Mobile and Placemaking

Assignment Due for Class: Using the framework from last week's class as a basis, create a fictional character experiencing a different reality than yours in Los Angeles and create a 7-slide presentation (including sound and/or music) about their life—for example, some guy who has a '60s car that he brings to Bob's Big Boy on Fridays, listens to '60s music, and wears '60s clothes.

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: What happens when we superimpose an alternate reality on top of reality? What gives a place meaning? Does it matter if that meaning is "factual"?

In-Class Exercise: We'll go on a miniature field trip around campus to explore the world of Ingress.

Week 4 (Feb. 4): Gamification

Assignments Due for Class: Check out the Niantic Project, jump into the rabbit hole, and answer Dr. Wright's questions—how does the story turn into a game? More questions will be asked in class; extra credit is on the line here! In addition, log into Media Wars and earn at least 200 points.

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: What motivates people to do things? What are their compulsions? What does it mean to gamify something? People like achievements and mastery in games; why not bring that into real life? Why not make real-life things like

school, bargain hunting, and so forth, which are now ad-hoc and essentially badly defined games, into well-defined games?

In-Class Exercise: Think about all the different things in life that are already being gamified. What game-like systems have you experienced today already (e.g., grades, pedometers, etc.)? We'll build on these examples, identifying other areas in life that might benefit from a game layer, and compile a list of things in the real world that could be (or need to be) gamified.

Week 5 (Feb. 11): Gamification 2– When Life Becomes a Game

Assignment Due for Class: Take something that you find distasteful, dull, or otherwise sucky in life (possibly drawing from the list we generated in class) and write a one-page app description of how you would gamify it. Think about things like car finance, paying taxes, complying with a regulation, creating legal documents, or anything else you dread. Be prepared to talk about your ideas and how we might increase engagement with these sorts of life tasks.

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: What would a world of ubiquitous gamification look like? Can economies be based on gamified activities? What about a model of citizenship in which you trade your time, treasures, and talents as a way of paying taxes?

In-Class Exercise: Students will discuss their midterm paper topics in small groups, coming up with a paragraph summary approved by two other students to be turned in at the end of the class period.

Week 6 (Feb. 18): Reality and the Blur

Assignment Due for Class: Bring in an outline for your midterm paper, including a thesis statement, along with a reference list with 2-4 sources.

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: As we advance more deeply into the Information Age, we also find ourselves in a state of increasing blur. Our roles used to be defined. Ages used to be defined. Does a generation gap still exist? How about a gender gap? What old ideas are clogging up progress? We are on a

timeline; life is temporary. Are we going to be owners or renters? Does the blur help us, hurt us, or both?

In-Class Exercise: In what areas of your life do you feel you are "blurred" (perhaps in terms of what role you play, what expectations you have, or what resources are available to you)? How might you bring one or more of these areas into focus? How do you do it? Come up with a simple plan of action that either you can take personally or that could be implemented at an institutional or governmental level to help us navigate blur.

Week 7 (Feb. 25): Social Networks

Assignment Due for Class: Turn in your midterm papers.

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: Networks—especially social networks—are powerful things. How does technology change your personal and professional networks? Who benefits? (We do.) Who is hurt? (Anyone who thrives on controlling information.) Where does this evolution lead us?

In-Class Exercise: Draw the set of paths and connections that got you into this class. For example, how did you find out about this class? More basically, how did you get into USC? Think about the network that got you here; then, consider the network that will follow you once this course is over. Sketch out the network you have right now with the people in this class and the people you're currently working with, and then add the people you want to do projects with in the future. Think about the people you know up the chain that could help you, and who is further down the chain that you could help.

Week 8 (Mar. 3): How Technology Changes Your Perception of Reality

Assignment Due for Class: TBD

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: Instant access to news, people, and entertainment from anywhere on the globe, 24/7, has had—and will continue to have—a profound impact on how we live our lives. What changes? Who wins? Who loses? Who is going to be disrupted, and who is going to be ruptured? In the coming Age of Rupture, how does life get smooth again?

In-Class Exercise: Once we've had enough disruption, we can start to brainstorm on how to solve it—in other words, we can start to think about "ruption." How can technology be harmonized? How can it be made smooth and seamless? Start with the 12 remotes people still need for their home entertainment system, and the friction this causes (e.g., constant recharging). How do we implement a solution? Why doesn't a viable solution exist yet? Who wins and who loses with this disruption?

Week 9 (Mar. 10): Franchises and Transmedia Storytelling

Assignment Due for Class: Write a short (1-page) breakdown of a technological disruption and how it might be rupted.

Reading Due for Class: Excerpt from Houston Howard, *Make Your Story Really Stinkin' Big: How To Go From Concept To Franchise And Make Your Story Last For Generations*

Discussion Topic: Transmedia franchises are the lifeblood of the entertainment industry. Although they come in several forms, they are (generally speaking) intellectual properties that can be sequeled, spun-off, combined, transported to other media, and finally rebooted. We'll talk about both the obvious franchises and the less obvious ones.

In-Class Exercise: TBD

Week 10 (Mar. 17): NO CLASS – SPRING RECESS

Week 11 (Mar. 24): The Five Rings—Strategies for Success in the Blur

Assignment Due for Class: Turn in a 1,000-word franchise breakdown.

Reading Due for Class: Excerpt from John A. Warden III and Leland A. Russell, *Winning in FastTime: Harness the Competitive Advantage of Prometheus in Business and Life*

Discussion Topic: To succeed, you must first figure out how everything is structured. According to military strategist John Warden

(<http://www.venturist.com/Elements%20of%20Strategy.htm>), in order to influence any system you must first influence the leadership, then the essential systems, then the infrastructure, and then the population. Break anything down

in that way, and you can understand the system and how to change it. In other words, once you can deconstruct the universe, and once you can figure out the system, you can influence it to ensure your desired outcomes (in this case, how to flourish in the blur).

In-Class Exercise: TBD

Week 12 (Mar. 31): Golden Ages and How to Make Them

Assignment Due for Class: TBD

Reading Due for Class: Excerpt from Frans Johansson, *The Medici Effect: Breakthrough Insights at the Intersection of Ideas, Concepts, and Cultures*

Discussion Topic: The high concept in this class is the overall notion of a Golden Age, starting with the Renaissance. How do you create this in your own life? What comes out of each of these Golden Ages? What are the elements of creating a Golden Age? Why do they end?

In-Class Exercise: TBD

Week 13 (Apr. 7): Alternate Blurred Realities

Assignment Due for Class: Turn in a 1,000-word analysis of a Gold, Silver or Bronze Age, based on the "Five Rings" template. How did it begin? What fuelled it? Who was involved? Where did it happen? When did it end? Note that students may be called at random to walk the rest of the class through their ideas.

Reading Due for Class: Excerpt from Dave McGowan, *Inside the LC: The Strange but Mostly True Story of Laurel Canyon and the Birth of the Hippie Generation*, Part IV (skipping the Black Dahlia section), found at [http://www.whale.to/b/inside_the_lc1.html#Part IV](http://www.whale.to/b/inside_the_lc1.html#Part_IV)

Discussion Topic: Where does reality end and fantasy begin?

In-Class Exercise: Students will briefly introduce their final paper topics to solicit feedback, with the idea that they will refine their ideas in response to this discussion as they prepare for the final class presentations.

Week 14 (Apr. 14): Your Alternate Reality, You as a Transmedia

Object, and You as a Franchise

Assignment Due for Class: TBD

Reading Due for Class: TBD

Discussion Topic: Stand back, look at all we've been talking about, and apply it to yourself. What is your alternate reality? What is your "baseball card," and what are the baseball cards of those around you? What is your team/network/entourage/squad? What is your brand? What is your ethos? How does it all fit together? What are your Five Rings?

In-Class Exercise: We'll design our own "baseball cards" based on the concepts we've discussed.

Week 15 (Apr. 21): Workshopping Final Projects

Assignment Due for Class: Students will bring in their final project draft for peer review and workshopping.

Week 16 (Apr. 28): Final Presentations

Assignment Due for Class: Each student will be given a few minutes to "sell" their contribution to the class publication in a pitch, which will be graded by the instructor as well as the student's classmates.

Final Project Due Date TBD