

Interactive Design and Production I

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN-532

Fall Semester 2017

Professor: Richard Lemarchand

Office: SCI 201 L

Phone: (213) 740-3081

Email: rlemarchand@cinema.usc.edu

Student Assistant: Jung-Ho Sohn

Meeting Information:

Room: SCI L114

Day and Time: Monday 3:00 PM - 5:20 PM, Friday 3:00PM – 5:20PM

Units: 4

Course Website

<http://bit.ly/CTIN-532-2017>

Course Description:

Welcome to CTIN-532, and to the third of your six semesters in the IMGD MFA program. This class is a challenging one, but it should also be a lot of fun. If you pay close attention to your classmates and to me, the instructor, and summon the courage to communicate with all of us honestly, frequently, quickly, and with compassion, I can almost completely guarantee you a positive, supportive, sane, and enjoyable experience in the class, and one that leads to a valuable learning outcome.

Imagination and design are inexorably interlinked. The dreams we dream at night and by day can lead to the greatest accomplishments in art and literature, science and technology, industry and entertainment. But until we **commit to a decision** and act upon it we are not designing, only speculating. Even a small game or interactive media project requires us to make thousands of decisions; some of them major, many of them minor, although it might not always be apparent to us which type of decision is which. How can we stay in control of this decision-making process, ensuring that we make good-quality decisions, and that we don't run out of time to make them? This class aims to show you how.

This is a class in which you can acquire some good new habits

In some important regards, game design and interaction design are fundamentally different from other processes of media design and creation. The real-time interaction between your games and your players introduces vast numbers of unknowns, variables, challenges and problems into the creative process; challenges that painters, filmmakers, novelists, musicians and poets do not usually have to deal with. You have already encountered and begun to cope with these challenges in your first year of study. Now we will look at some new techniques that you can use to get these problems under better control, and to take away some of the needless

risk that can derail otherwise great projects. You will become more assured of making high-quality work with the time and resources that you have available to you, while continuing to find new patterns of interaction, new modes of self-expression and new types of audience experience.

This is a class in which you can shed some old bad habits

Many creative people don't think too much about the ways that they plan and manage their work. Creation seems to come naturally; we learn it in childhood or as teenagers, and without even realizing it, we pick up habits to do with the way we organize our work. We pull an all-nighter, "just this once," to meet an important milestone. Suddenly we find ourselves working all night every time a deadline comes around. We work seven days a week during a big project, "just for a couple of weeks," and suddenly realize that we have worked every day of the week for months on end, without a break. Bad work habits can take a terrible toll on individuals and on teams, causing physical and psychological health problems and causing organizations and businesses to fail.

This is a point in the IMGD MFA program where the coursework becomes more testing, and you are challenged to acquire new professional skills around design, production and implementation that will, in your fourth semester, help you to begin the process of conceptualizing and creating your MFA thesis project. You are all talented game creators, media makers, interaction designers and systems specialists. But all of us have bad professional habits that we've picked up here and there: because they worked for us in the short term, or at one time, or in a certain context. Many of us suffer from process blockages that stop us from making work at all. Most of us will struggle with our bad habits and blockages for the whole of our creative lives—which is perfectly normal and natural. True creativity and learning almost always come with a struggle, so get ready for a few "growing pains." The attitudes and techniques that you learn in this class will help you to identify problems that come up for you as you work, and will help you to find new ways to make great games and interactive media without doing any harm to the physical and psychological wellbeing of you and your teammates.

"...half the job is doing the job, and the other half is finding ways to get along with people and tuning yourself in to the delicacy of the situation."

Walter Murch

What we call "production" in this class is a formal discipline that (when it's working well) is closely related to the discipline of design. Without good production, good design will usually not result in a great game—and vice versa. People working exclusively or predominantly in the discipline of production are called "producers." Production sometimes goes by different names in our various related industries. It is usually called "production" or "project management" in the game industry and interaction design industry, but people doing work related to production might also be called "production coordinator," "project coordinator," "project facilitator" or "scrum master."

Production is often a clear-cut and practical discipline, where measurable and empirically verifiable facts are used to make informed and rational decisions about the course that a project will take. However, production is also a part of the creative process where dry facts and rationality meet the subjective aspects of design, art and audience. A great producer must

acknowledge the importance of the creative vision, values and goals driving a project and learn to reconcile practical constraints of time and money with people's aspirations towards excellence and innovation.

Producers also need the "soft skills" of leadership and collaboration. It is not enough to have good strategies to improve a project if your teammates and collaborators are holding on to negative emotions about the project, each other, or you. This is probably the most challenging part of any collaborative creative practice, and this class will give you some practical advice about negotiation, conflict resolution, and how to inspire people to do their very best work. As you develop these skills, you will develop the aspect of your production ability that allows you to reconcile the measurable, objective needs of a project with its artistic, subjective goals.

So, then: this course is partly a digital interactive design and production "boot camp" where you will work in small teams and learn to create short, innovative digital game and interactive media experiences that have a longer development time and meet higher standards of polish than any that you have created so far in your IMGD career.

The class is also an art class where you are free to explore your digital game and interactive media design practice, learning to innovate and hone your craft in experience design, game mechanic design, interaction design, and interface design. You are free to address new and wide-ranging subject matter, new patterns of gameplay and interaction, and new types of audience experience.

Teaming up over the summer

You are expected to enter this class having paired up into a team of two people over the summer break (or in the case of one team, one person with an external collaborator). Teaming up for this class will allow you to continue to develop your collaborative skills throughout the semester, focusing on communication and the professional management of interpersonal dynamics as you deal with the tension between control and cooperation in a collaborative work environment. Sometimes you'll have to take charge and lead; sometimes you'll have to follow and act in service of your teammate. Figuring out when to do each thing will be part of the learning experience.

Don't worry if you don't get to pair up with the person who is your "first choice" — every working relationship offers us opportunities for learning, and a few challenges regarding project management and interpersonal skills will make for an even richer learning experience. **The best learning experiences in this class usually come from working with people that you have not worked with before, are not good friends with, and do not get along with particularly well.** Please email me if you have any questions or concerns about teaming up. You are also encouraged to recruit additional team members from outside the class to help work on your project, although this is not required.

It's ok to have some initial discussion of the kind of project you'd like to make in class before the semester starts, but please don't begin work on your project in earnest until the semester begins.

What the class holds in store

The first three weeks of the class will be spent in the first of four project phases: this is the ideation phase, where we will create small prototypes and other ideation materials that we will discuss in class. We will then spend the remaining eleven weeks of the semester working through the other three project phases: preproduction, full production and postproduction. Preproduction will see us committing to a core set of ideas for our project, building a Vertical Slice, and doing design and scheduling work to plan ahead. During full production we will reach the Alpha milestone of the project. The Beta milestone will mark the end of full production, and the beginning of postproduction, and the Gold Master milestone (the final milestone of the project) will arrive on Monday of Week 15.

Within the framework of the class, you have almost total freedom to create any kind of work that could be regarded as a digital game or piece of interactive media. You might find that the biggest challenge you face in exercising this freedom is coming to an agreement with your team partner about what to make. The class is designed to help you make the right decisions about your project at the right times, but **if you ever find yourself having a difficult time reaching agreement with your teammate about your project, immediately talk to me, the instructor, about it.** I recommended that you and your teammate let go of any preconceived ideas you might bring to your project before you start working, and follow where your early prototypes lead you.

A large part of the course's content will be focused on in-class discussion, group critique and problem solving for each project. It is very important that you treat the development of your design projects professionally. You will be expected to participate actively in the discussions and critique sessions that take place in class, giving and receiving feedback that honors your fellow students with its depth of analysis and respect for their work.

"There is no such thing as a failed experiment, only experiments with unexpected outcomes"
R. Buckminster Fuller

Ideally, the work you produce in this class will be good enough to be included in your creative portfolio, shown at an internship interview, or submitted to a festival. However, it really doesn't matter if your project doesn't work out well; in fact I hope that in this class you will make—and learn from—any production mistakes that you are prone to, so that you don't make them during your thesis year. Even if you're not happy with the way your CTIN-532 project turns out, you can expect to do well in this class if you apply yourself earnestly to the course, complete the class assignments and meet the required milestones, do your best to follow the advice I give you along the way, and reflect lucidly in your postpartum essay at the end of the semester about what went well and what could have gone better. The methods taught in this class are not the only way to design and produce a project, but the industry-acknowledged set of best practices, tools and skills we require you to use this semester will hopefully stand you in good stead for the rest of your time in the IMGD and in your professional career.

I used to say that "this is the class where the training wheels come off," but I realized that's not true. The metaphorical training wheels are still on, and a safety net is in place. I will go out of my way to provide you will all the support and help that you need while you are in my class. You

matter a lot to me, and I whenever possible I will prioritize meeting with you above my other commitments.

I hope you will feel able to come and see me about any problems you face. **When things go wrong for people and projects in CTIN-532, it is usually because people wait too long to come and discuss their problems with me.** Please know that, outside of the professional obligations I have to report any instances of discrimination, sexual assault or harassment, I will always hold anything you tell me in complete confidence. You will not be “ratting out” your teammates by coming to me to discuss a disagreement or a conflict of personalities. Instead, we’ll work together to help you to improve your ability to overcome the communication challenges from which most conflict stems, always remembering to treat our collaborators with respect and compassion. I will hold office hours every week, and will almost always be able to meet with you outside of office hours if necessary.

The interactive experiences and games that you create in this class are going to be delightful, surprising, moving and challenging. I’m looking forward to seeing what you create in our class, and to accompanying and guiding you on this next stage of your creative journey.

— Richard Lemarchand, 11th August, 2017

Learning Objectives

What a student is expected to learn and how these goals fit with the IMGD program and School of Cinematic Arts learning objectives

The course builds on the skills and knowledge introduced in the first year of the IMGD MFA program. You will learn what it means to work “**playcentrically**” and collaboratively in greater depth than before, by working on a single project for a whole semester.

You will design iteratively in an intensive cycle of decision-making, implementation, playtesting and design revision. You will learn what it means to hold onto the vision of a set of **project goals** while using an iterative design cycle over a longer time than you are used to. These are core learning goals of the IMGD MFA program.

You will learn to tackle bigger challenges of **collaboration** than you have in the past, as you learn to apportion work, take responsibility for your individual and shared tasks and negotiate with your teammate to solve problems and resolve conflicts. These are core learning goals of the School of Cinematic Arts.

You will learn a design and production methodology based on the “Method” used at studios like Naughty Dog and Insomniac and which also incorporates attitudes and elements from “Agile development”. You will learn to use this methodology to properly **plan, scope and build** a project in a way that **reliably results in finished work that has a very high level of quality**, while **minimizing uncontrolled overwork**.

You should not come into class expecting to create an expansive story world or a long experience. Instead, you should aim to create a short, **very polished** playable or interactive experience, with a **total play time of between five and fifteen minutes**.

Prerequisite(s): Open to IMGD MFA and iMAP PhD students, as well as other interested and qualified students, by interview with the instructor.

Co-Requisite (s): none

Concurrent Enrollment: none

Recommended Preparation: a foundational level of game and/or interactive media design and development education, including an introduction to Unity.

Continued overleaf...

Course Notes

The Grading Type of this class is “letter grade”.

Class information will be posted on the course website, rather than on Blackboard. Copies of lecture slides will not typically be posted on the course website: students are expected to take their own notes in class, in order to develop your ability to capture and retain information in a professional environment. Key class materials will, however, be made available on the course website, at:

<http://bit.ly/CTIN-532-2017>

University guidelines recommend that students do two hours work outside class for every one hour spent in class. Our class meets for four hours and forty minutes a week; therefore **I expect that you will spend at least nine hours and twenty minutes each week outside of class working on your project and reading, viewing or playing the class assignments.**

I am happy for you to spend more than this minimum amount of time working on the assignments I set. However, uncontrolled overwork in this class—as in our professional lives—is very undesirable, and I do not expect anyone to do more than twelve hours classwork each week outside of class. **If you find that you are working on class assignments for more than twelve hours a week outside class, please contact me** to discuss how you can make your workload more manageable.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

For practical projects, it is expected that you will work in Unity, and so you should enter the class with at least a basic level of technical proficiency in Unity. If you want to work in a framework other than Unity and can present a good argument for doing so (for example, if you wish to develop for a platform or interface that Unity does not support), please let me know.

However, **don't worry too much about the skills that you do or don't have at the start of the class**; talk your concerns through with me and I will be able to advise you. I understand that everyone will enter the class with a unique set of digital content creation skills covering 2D art, 3D art, animation, audio design, programming and version control. While it might be true that the larger the set of skills you have when entering this class, the better prepared for the class you will be, I will be recommending in class that you design a project that is largely tailored to the existing skills that you and your teammate bring into the class. Great work can be made with any set of skills. That said, I will also be recommending that you design a project that pushes you outside of your comfort zone in one or two areas, so you should expect to teach yourself some new digital content creation skills while taking this class.

The hardware and software required for use in this class are available in the course classroom for those students who do not have access to them at home or on a laptop.

You are expected to bring an updated version your project to every class meeting, ready to either present it or work on it. If you do not have a laptop, the computers in our meeting room are available for your use, so please bring your project to class on a thumb drive.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

There is summer reading to do in preparation for this class. The book is:

Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration
by Ed Catmull and Amy Wallace

Please read Part I through Part III, which includes the Introduction and Chapters 1 through Chapter 11 (inclusive). This is roughly the first 75% of the book.

This text is available online at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com.

Supplementary materials listed in the syllabus will be available on the web, as handouts in class or as digital files on the course website. Specific readings cited below may be subject to change as the semester progresses.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

What kind of work is to be done and how should it be completed, i.e. how the learning outcome will be assessed.

The class is comprised of a mixture of reading, viewing, playing, written and practical assignments. Reading assignments, viewing assignments, playing assignments and written assignments will usually be given on Mondays and will be due on the following Monday. The Friday class meeting will be used for regular in-class playtesting and project review sessions, so practical assignments will usually be given on Fridays and will be due on the following Friday. Clear and specific time-and-day milestones for each assignment, along with information about how to submit each assignment, will be listed on the course website.

Your work in this class will be assessed according to eight assignments:

Participation

I will be calling on every class member in almost every class discussion, and will assess your participation in class on the basis of your willingness and ability to participate in our discussions in a constructive and productive way, including your ability to demonstrate that you have prepared for each class by reading, playing and viewing each week's assignments. If you have difficulty participating in group discussions (for example, because of shyness or social anxiety), please let me know and we'll figure out a way for you to participate in class that works for you.

Practical Assignments

Early Prototypes

You will submit the prototypes that you make in the first three weeks of class for assessment, along with some accompanying notes. I'll be hoping to see that you have performed a sequence of earnest and wide-ranging explorations within the bounds of your prototyping ability, in order to be able to create a Project Goal Statement.

End of Preproduction Deliverables

The deliverables due at the end of Preproduction phase of the project are a Project Design Macro, a Burn Down Chart and a Vertical Slice, along with some accompanying notes.

Alpha milestone, Second formal playtest, Beta milestone, Gold Master milestone

At each of these milestones, taking place during production and at the end of the project, you are required to submit a working build of your project, along with some accompanying notes, and in some cases, some other documentation.

Each of these practical assignments will be assessed according to detailed requirements that have been discussed in class and which are laid out in the assignments section of the course website. I will evaluate your work in the context of the notes that you provide with each assignment—so even if you struggled with a particular assignment, you can still get a good grade for the assignment if you can reflect clearly about the ways in which you struggled.

*For all practical coursework, please note that while high production values in terms of visual, audio and interaction design will contribute to good grades, **earnestly attempting to engage with the requirements of each assignment is the most important influence on your grade.** The best way to demonstrate that you have taken note of and attempted to meet the requirements for each assignment is by reflecting on your process in the notes that you will submit with each practical assignment.*

Project postpartum essay

A “postpartum” essay from each individual student will be due in place of a final examination at 4 p.m. on Monday, December 11th, 2017. In this essay you will be asked to reflect on what went well and what could have gone better in the course of creating your project.

This assignment is modeled on the popular style of “post-mortem” GDC lectures and Gamasutra articles, and on the internal end-of-project review processes that happen in most creative studios. Thanks to Anna Anthropy for suggesting “postpartum” as a better name than “post-mortem.” Nothing has died; something has come to life! I will know a lot about how your project ran by the end of the semester, and will assess your essay based on how much self-aware reflection you bring to it—so be honest in your postpartum essay, with me and with yourself!

Assessment and Grading Rubric:

A number of assignment points will be awarded for each assignment, up to the maximum for each assignment shown in the table below.

Participation	15
Early Prototypes	5
End of Preproduction Deliverables	10
Alpha milestone	15
Second formal playtest	10
Beta milestone	15
Gold Master milestone	15
Project postpartum essay	15
Total:	100

Continued overleaf...

The assignment points you earn for each assignment will be derived from my evaluation of your work in the context of the assignment as specified on the class web page, and will be calculated according to this scale, rounded to two decimal places¹:

Percentage of available points awarded	Corresponding Grade	
0	F	Complete absence of evidence of learning.
60	D	Little evidence of learning. Poor performance in all aspects of the assignment.
70	C-	Work of lower than fair quality. Failing grade for graduate credit
73	C	Work of fair quality. Minimum passing grade for graduate credit
77	C+	Work of satisfactory quality in most of the assignment, with the remainder being somewhat substandard
80	B-	Work of satisfactory quality
83	B	Work of good quality
87	B+	Work of high quality in all or most aspects of the assignment
90	A-	Work of excellent quality in most aspects of the assignment; high quality work in the remainder
93	A	Work of excellent quality

Your overall grade for the class will be assigned based on the total number of assignment points you earn in the semester (your “Grading Score”), according to this scale:

Grading Score >=	Grade
0	F
60	D
70	C-
73	C
77	C+
80	B-
83	B
87	B+
90	A-
93	A

¹ These grading guidelines are adapted from the USC Office of Academic Records and Registrar ‘Definitions of Grades and Marks’

<http://www.usc.edu/vh/arr/services/grades/gradinghandbook/gradingpolicies.html>

and from the University of Washington’s Faculty Resource on Grading ‘Sample UW Grading Guidelines’

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/practices/guidelines.html>

Course content by class meeting

Before first class meeting:

Practical Assignment: form into a team of two people

Practical Assignment: create a short “statement of intent” presentation

Reading:

This class syllabus

Creativity, Inc. – Part I through Part III, which includes the Introduction and Chapters 1 through Chapter 11 (inclusive). This is roughly the first 75% of the book.

Week 1 – First week of the Ideation phase

Everyone says hello to the class, and sets out their goals for the semester.

A review of the class syllabus, including a discussion of themes and goals of the course, an outline of the course content and the “ground rules” for the class.

Masterpiece Syndrome and “the blank sheet of paper problem”: an ideation refresher.

Version control and housekeeping 1.

Practical Assignment: Create your first project prototype from a design prompt.

Reading:

Catastrophic Prototyping and Other Stories

by Chaim Gingold

<http://www.levitylab.com/blog/2011/01/catastrophic-prototyping-and-other-stories/>

What Having a “Growth Mindset” Actually Means

by Carol Dweck

<https://hbr.org/2016/01/what-having-a-growth-mindset-actually-means>

Week 2 – Second week of Ideation

Discussion of the reading, including *Creativity, Inc.*

Communication skills: project-focused feedback, openness and honesty, trust and respect.

Version control and housekeeping 2.

The Three Cs: Character, Control, Camera

Novel interfaces and designing for the other fifteen senses.

The power of the list.

Communication skills: dealing with conflict

Repertoire and growth: playing to our strengths and pushing outside our comfort zone.

Practical Assignment: Create a second project prototype from a design prompt.

Reading:

MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research

by Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc, Robert Zubek

<http://www.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf>

MDA by Frank Lantz

<http://gamedesignadvance.com/?p=2995>

Week 3 – Third and final week of Ideation

No class on Monday (Labor Day)

Discussion of the readings.

Experiences, emergence, and systemic richness.

Communication skills: what are our differences, and how will we handle them?
Version control and housekeeping 3.

The Open Work.

Practical Assignment: Create your third project prototype from a design prompt.

Written Assignment: Create a Project Goal Statement

Viewing: Cerny Method talk

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOAW9ioWAvE>

Reading:

Directing Video Games 101: Tips for Creative Leaders (sample)
by Brian Allgeier

Week 4 – Preproduction begins

Project Goals first review.

Discussion of the reading and viewing, including *Creativity, Inc.*

Method: A Model for Game Design and the Agile mentality

Communication skills: accountability.

Against Crunch.

Practical Assignment: Begin work on the Vertical Slice, building on the individual work done so far

Written Assignment: Revise Project Goal Statement

Reading:

[*Modular Building & Concentric Development*](#)

by Richard Lemarchand

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t5b3ZaWHrcMsUpYPa0Kp9W_DzYNShuuxXyAw5x4VAUs/edit?usp=sharing

Week 5 – Reviewing the first week of Preproduction

Discussion of the reading.

Concentric Development: in design, everything matters.

Project Goals second review.

Rhythmic structures in systems, stories and games; the Project Design Macro.

Scoping a project by making a list.

Communication skills: dealing with conflict.

Version control and housekeeping 4.

Practical Assignment: Continue work on the Vertical Slice

Written Assignment: First draft of Project Design Macro

Reading: *Stretching Sound to Help the Mind See* by Walter Murch

Viewing: *Is your game 'juicy' enough?* by Martin Jonasson and Petri Purho

<http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/178938/>

Week 6 – Reviewing the second week of Preproduction

A discussion of the sound design readings and *Is your game 'juicy' enough?*

Class review of first draft Project Design Macros.

Are our projects meeting our Project Goals?

Burn Down Chart in-class workshop.

The importance of grounded fictions.

Written Assignment: Burn Down Chart and second draft of Project Design Macro
Practical Assignment: Complete work on the Vertical Slice
No reading this week because of the upcoming major milestone.

Week 7 – Preproduction ends: full Production begins

First Stand Up Meeting - checking project scope.
Vertical Slice in-class reviews.
Communication skills: empowering others, so that their passion can flourish.
IndieCade visit.

Reading: TBD
Practical Assignment: Move project 25% of the way to Alpha

Week 8 – Reviewing the first week of Production

Discussion of the reading, including *Creativity, Inc.*
Being 'feature complete' at Alpha – when will we be done scoping?
'Stubbing in' content.
Creating metrics tools.

Practical Assignment: Move project 50% of the way to Alpha and prepare a stable build for the first formal playtest
No reading this week, to allow you to focus on work on your games.

Mid-term conferences (by appointment)

Week 9 – Reviewing the second week of Production

Nine types of testing.
Preparing for a formal playtest.

Practical Assignment: Move project 75% of the way to Alpha and implement metrics system
Reading: TBD

Week 10 – First formal playtest

Discussion of the reading.
Formal playtest session.
Testing metrics tools.
Playtest decompression session.
Checking back to our Project Goals.
How to stay enthused when your project gets old

Practical Assignment: Move project 100% of the way to Alpha and finalize metrics system
No reading this week because of the upcoming major milestone.

Week 11 – The Alpha milestone

Projects are feature complete!
In-class review of Alpha builds.

Game balance.
Being 'content complete' – planning to the Beta milestone.

Practical Assignment: Add the first half of the project's remaining content and prepare a stable build for the second formal playtest
No reading this week because of the upcoming major milestone.

Week 12 – Second formal playtest

Playtest session with "Kleenex" playtesters using metrics data-gathering tools.
Frame rate check.
Whether to leave anything for after Beta.

Practical Assignment: Add the second half of the project's remaining content and prepare a stable version for the Beta milestone
No reading this week because of the upcoming major milestone.

Week 13 – The Beta milestone

Projects are content complete!
In-class review of Beta builds.
Reviewing the results of the second formal playtest and analyzing metrics data.
Audio mixing.
Test planning and bug fixing.

Practical Assignment: Content polishing and bug fixing
Reading: to be determined, based on class feedback.

Week 14 – Post-production

Post-production workshop: final project balancing, audio mix and frame rate check.

Practical Assignment: achieving Gold Master
No reading this week because of the upcoming major milestone.

Week 15 – Gold Master

Presentation of completed projects to class visitors.
Class feedback session.

Written Assignment (due 4 p.m. on Monday, December 11th, 2017):
Project postpartum essay, including reflections on five ways in which your project went well and five ways in which it could have gone better, and a conclusion about how your design practice has evolved this semester.

World Building Resources

Students interested in world building as a discipline should refer to the USC School of Cinematic Arts World Building Resources document (link below), created in 2014 by the SCA World Building Committee, which includes a comprehensive list of the many USC classes that are either specifically focused on world building (such as IML-599) or which include aspects of world building, and many of which are available to IMGD MFA students as electives.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dF0luZlfr3RRBImY4BK5DfWDX2-i-5YJnBT4zCnzVtA/edit?usp=sharing>

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)

Additionally, I may ask you to withdraw if your total absences become excessive, even if they are excused.

The only excused absences are for illness, family emergencies, and (with advance notice) commitments related to a scholarship you are receiving, e.g. for a varsity sport or commitments related to your professional practice, such as to attend a festival where you are showing a game or a conference where you are speaking. You must contact me as soon as possible regarding your absence. Generally I will expect to hear from you before class; in exigent circumstances I would expect to hear from you within 24 hours. If I do not hear from you in a timely fashion you may forfeit your option to make up what you have missed.

All that said:

1. **If you are sick, stay home.** You need to be healthy to learn, and so do your classmates (and instructors).
2. I do not distinguish between mental health and physical health. If you cannot complete an assignment on time or come to class because of mental health issues, you must contact me promptly, just as with physical health problems. See the Support Systems section below for additional information.

Social Media Use in Class

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

Video and Audio Recording in Class

Video and audio recording during class meetings is not permitted, except by prior arrangement with the instructor and the class members.

Content Warnings

If you include content in the work that you produce which may cause distress to your fellow students, please tell me (the instructor) before showing the work in class, and make a verbal “content warning” immediately before you present the work in class. Also include a written content warning, either at the beginning of a piece of written work or in the readme file of a project, when you submit the work for grading.

This is not intended to limit the subject matter that you address with your work: it is intended to expand it. This simple approach is intended to create an environment in which you are free to address any subject matter that you wish, no matter how challenging, explicit or controversial, in a spirit of respect and consideration for your classmates and instructors.

Students who ever feel the need to step outside class during the presentation or discussion of work that warrants a content warning may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually.

Content which requires a content warning includes graphic depictions or descriptions of violence, sexual acts, racial, sexual or cultural stereotyping, abuse (especially sexual abuse or torture), self-harming behavior such as suicide, self-inflicted injuries or disordered eating, eating-disordered behavior or body shaming, and depictions, especially lengthy or psychologically realistic ones, of the mental state of someone suffering abuse or engaging in self-harming behavior.

If you have any questions about what warrants a content warning, including visual, auditory or tactile depictions, textual or verbal descriptions, and meaning embodied in game mechanics and interaction patterns, please let me (the class instructor) know.

If you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to material presented in class, either with the class or with me afterwards, I welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.

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 may 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.

Fair Use

Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. The Interactive Media & Games Division of USC's School of the Cinematic Arts seeks to apply a reasonable working definition of fair use that will enable students and instructors to develop multimedia projects without seeking authorization for non-commercial, educational uses. In keeping with section 107 of the Copyright Act we recognize four factors that should be considered when determining whether a use is fair: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. In general, we regard the reproduction of copyrighted works for the purposes of analysis or critique in this class to be covered by the principle of fair use.

Citation Guidelines

Where appropriate, all projects will need to include academically appropriate citations in the form of a Works Cited section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The Works Cited is either included in the project or as a separate document, as appropriate to your project. The style we use is APA 5th edition and you may refer to these guidelines:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

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.

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.

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.

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.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.

The university provides extensive support for students facing everything from normal exam stress to insomnia to personal crises. Among the many services:

- The Wellness Lounge in room 203 of the Engemann Student Health Center offers not only drop-in consultation but fresh fruit, chocolate and massage chairs.
- The Office of Wellness Health and Promotion (owhp@usc.edu or 213-740-4777) runs daily Happy Hours featuring yoga, weekly visiting therapy dogs, and more.
- Student Counseling Services (213-740-7711, 24 hours, or walk-in on the third floor of Engemann) offers an enormous array of resources, from one-time crisis support to weekly Stress Fitness workshops, for students facing all types of challenges.

Instructor Biography

Richard Lemarchand is a game designer, an educator, a writer, a public speaker and a consultant, and works as an Associate Professor in the Interactive Media & Games Division of the School of Cinematic Arts. In 2015 he was appointed Associate Chair of the Interactive Media & Games Division.

Between 2004 and 2012, Richard was a Lead Game Designer at Naughty Dog in Santa Monica, California. He led the design of all three PlayStation 3 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 game division. 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, 2012 and 2015. 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 a former faculty member of the GDC Experimental Gameplay Sessions.

Richard now teaches game design, development and production in the USC Games program, and is working on a series of experimental game design research projects as part of the USC Game Innovation Lab. His most recent game, *The Meadow*, a virtual reality art installation game co-created with Martzi Campos, was selected as a finalist in the 2015 IndieCade International Festival of Independent Games.

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