

USC School of Cinematic Arts

Interactive Media & Games Division

Preparing the Interactive Project aka "Masters Thesis Pre-Production"
CTIN 548

Prerequisite - CTIN 532L / Concurrent registration with CTIN 542

Units: 2

Spring Semester 2018: Thursdays from 11:30 am-2:20pm

Location: SCI L114

Instructors:

Laird Malamed

Office: SCI 201C

Office Hours: Skype as requested, sometimes before or after class on Thursdays

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Carl Schnurr

Office: SCI 201 common area

Office Hours: TBD

Contact Info: schnurr64@hotmail.com 310-736-0953 (cell)

IT Help: USC Cinema Creative Computing

Contact Info: creativetech@cinema.usc.edu

IMGD Technical Director: Dennis Ramirez - dramirez@cinema.usc.edu, office: SCI 201Z

Course Description

Preparing the Interactive Project (PIP) is a 2-unit course taught in conjunction with CTIN-542 Interactive Design and Production II. PIP (and 542) follow on the topics and coursework of CTIN 532L.

By the end of the MFA 4th semester (that is, completing year 2 of the program), candidates for a MFA must be ready to enter the production phase of their year-long thesis project that will be the course-work of the 594a/b sequence. The successful student completing PIP will complete the following:

1. Thesis concept and key pillars
2. Design document covering all disciplines of the thesis project
3. A thorough risk assessment of the project
4. The thesis pitch
5. Production schedule overview with major milestones and deliverables
6. Thesis committee selection

It is also hoped that the student will begin assembling their team (as applicable) and completing various prototypes in CTIN 542 that test and demonstrate their developed thesis idea.

The class is a combination of lectures, in-class discussion and brainstorming sessions and readings about the development process. We also hope to have a few guest lectures to relate their industry experiences after school.

Major assignments are the above documents. Class jointly culminates with the thesis pitch in CTIN 542.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objective is how to concept, design and prepare for the thesis project production. To this aim, the class will focus on the various phases of preproduction including:

1. Concepting and evaluating ideas
2. Developing the project pillars
3. Evaluating risk and planning mitigations
4. Writing the design document

At the end of the class, besides the required deliverables, the student will have a roadmap and schedule to begin work on his or her thesis during the summer break between years 2 and 3. In parallel, the material we will cover is applicable to work you will undertake in industry, starting your company or any other of project work be it personal or professional.

The class builds upon the concepts taught in 532L and expands them to address the year long project focusing on the differences between short projects with small teams and longer form development sequences with possibly larger teams.

In addition, 548 will discuss and offer opportunities to practice key project lead skills. These include the ability to write project documentation, make verbal presentations and lead a creative team.

Working Hours

The standard formula of two hours of work outside class per unit per week is the minimum expectation for hours put into this class. Students are expected to perform at the high levels needed to create a viable thesis project.

Class attendance is mandatory.

Schedule Overview

Specific class-by-class assignments and expectations will be presented the week prior.

The general format of the classwork and flow is:

Week 1 (Jan 11, 2017): Review topics and concepts from CTIN 532L. Approaching the daunting thesis and why not to panic (yet).

Weeks 2-3: Developing the concept and pillars. (Jan 18, 25)

Week 4: What is a Master's Thesis and why do we care? What is right-sized and how big or small do we plan for? How many concepts to develop? Guest Speaker 1 (Feb 1)

Weeks 5-8: Experimentation and project analysis. Working with the prototypes being developed in 542, the class now focuses on evaluating risks and strengths of the students' concepts. Creating the project pillars. (Feb 8, 15, 22, 29)

Weeks 9-10: Risk assessment presentations (straddles Spring Break 2018); in parallel: Art, Sound, Interactivity, Technical and User Test planning and design documents - how to write them (hint: don't do it all yourself). How to make good decisions. Guest Speaker 2 (Mar 8, Mar 22)

No later than Week 11: Final concept and pillars. Developing the pitch and schedule. (Sooner is better depending on student confidence in project) March 29.

Weeks 12-14: Design document writing and in class presentations. Team leadership soft skills (personalities, leading, dealing with conflict). Guest Speaker 3. April 14, 11, 18.

Week 15: The final pitch and planning for the summer. April 25. (Pitches will be scheduled during this week, likely in the sessions for 542 and 548.)

We also expect to have a handful of guest lectures from industry members.

Grading:

Assignment		% of Grade
Final Concept Document & Pillars		20
Risk Assessment Assignment		10
Final Preproduction Documentation & Schedule		30
The Pitch		20
Class Participation & Attendance		20
TOTAL		100

Grades are solid letter grades (no - or + designators):

90-100 = A

75-90 = B

60-75 = C

50-60 = D

Below 60 is an F

Note that graduate students must maintain a B average (3.0 GPA) as per USC Graduate School requirements.

Assignment Submission Policy

Written assignments are due before class (that is 11:29 am on the Thursdays due) via email to Laird and Carl plus a link to the shared document (so notes can be added to the doc). The pitch is due on the specific day as determined closer to the end of the semester. For purposes of planning, assume that needs to be ready by April 22.

Rubrics for all assignments will be given out prior to commencing on the work.

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.

Computers, tablets and phones are not to be used in class unless for taking notes or presenting material. Class participation scores will take attentiveness to fellow students into account.

We all understand emergencies arise, and breaks will be provided during class to handle the usual deluge of electronic messages. Please inform an instructor or SA of urgent situations.

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.

Safer Spaces

In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will issue content warnings as appropriate, use preferred pronouns, and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together. If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for the division, who can discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

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.

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/departments/departments-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.

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.