

USC School of Cinematic Arts

Interactive Media & Games Division / USC Games

CTIN 594a - Masters Thesis Part I

Thursdays, 10 am - 1:50 pm (adjustable based on class feedback)

Location: Online Fall 2020

Prerequisites: CTIN-542 and 548

Instructors:

Jane Pinckard

pinckard@usc.edu

Cell:

Office Hours:

Laird Malamed

lairdo@cinema.usc.edu

Cell: 310-903-0886

Offices Hours: By request (and might set up some time if requested for open hours)

IT Help: USC Cinema Creative Computing

Contact Info: creativetech@cinema.usc.edu

Access to campus is currently limited based on staying safer at home. Please work with Collin and the Operations Office should you need facilities or other access.

Course Description

Jane and Laird are excited to welcome you to year 3 of your MFA work and to see your amazing thesis projects develop and flourish.

CTIN-594a Masters Thesis is a studio class designed to provide the framework, guidance and feedback to assist in the development and production of the MFA thesis final project, begun in 542/548. During this 5th semester of the MFA, students will complete the major design and first playable phase of their project.

MFA candidates are expected to finalize their thesis goals, set a schedule, manage a team (if applicable) and produce regular, playable builds for review by their thesis committees, instructors and cohort. Feedback will be provided in a variety of formats from verbal, written to user studies. 594a expects the students to utilize and synthesize all of the ideas, techniques and experiences from their first 4 semesters. By using these skills, they will successfully develop their projects.

Key deliverables during the term include

1. Updated and final thesis idea and pillars
2. Schedule for the fall and spring semesters leading to thesis show in May 2021
3. The establishment and management of a team to assist in production
4. Multiple playable builds of their projects, culminating in a polished first playable/vertical slice or even Alpha.
5. A written introspection about their project at midterm
6. Participation in a virtual winter “show”

The class is almost entirely driven by student work sharing and ample feedback from each other. Attendance is required (unless agreed upon in advance due to urgent requirements). Openness and sharing are key drivers.

Learning Objectives

The key learning objective is how to lead a two semester project, being objective as to its successful and non-successful elements, adjusting as necessary while still retaining the thesis goal.

Being able to receive feedback and distill patterns to drive improvements in key areas.

Being able to give feedback that is objective, example driven and relates to the project goals as a whole. We will be giving feedback on your feedback!

Schedule

Fall 2020 has been reduced to 13 weeks of instruction. Class begins on Thursday, August 20. The final class is Thursday, November 12. We will have our winter show either during the last class session or during the final period assigned to this class. (Between Nov 17 and 24.)

Class attendance is mandatory.

All of us experienced some amount of Spring 2020 as an online experience. None of us have had a full semester, so we are learning together. This is the draft week by week plan, but we will all work together to adjust as needed.

We will further announce deliverables & other HW as we proceed

08/20/20 Week 01: Introductions / The Thesis / Logistics / Student mini-pitch updates

08/21: Recruiting event. More info to follow

08/27/20 Week 02: Check in / Artistic Committee / Class assignment & HW TBA

09/03/20 Week 03: Debrief & Discussion / Critique scheduling / Prior Art HW

09/10/20 Week 04: Critique Session 1 / HW Debrief / Final Artistic Committee Due

09/17/20 Week 05: Critique Session 2

09/24/20 Week 06: Critique Session 3 / Prior Art Review Document due
10/01/20 Week 07: Critique Session 4
10/08/20 Week 08: Self-evaluation mini-paper due / Critique Session 5
10/15/20 Week 09: Critique Session 6
10/22/20 Week 10: Critique Session 7 / Winter Show Prep
10/29/20 Week 11: Critique Session 8 / Winter Show Prep Cont / Artist Statement Due
11/05/20 Week 12: Critique Session 9 / Winter Show Prep Cont
11/12/20 Week 13: Winter Show & Class Wrap up (or Show might be during final sessions).
Thesis paper sections 1 & 2 due

End of semester

Formal Check-ins

In addition - At least once in the semester, each student should schedule a formal check in with Jane and with Laird (separately) to discuss your projects. Anytime between weeks 4 and 10 make the most sense.

You should be meeting with all of your thesis advisors on a regular basis.

Grading

CTIN-594a is a complete/incomplete credit course. You will be given credit for the class (as well as the corresponding 594b in Spring 21) upon the approval of your masters thesis. You will of course receive feedback on your deliverables, project critiques and your ability to give feedback.

(Note that graduate students must maintain a B average (3.0 GPA) as per USC Graduate School requirements which is based on your other coursework. Please see Sam if you are concerned about this requirement.)

Attendance Policy

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students logging in 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.

Excused absences are:

- Illness (with a doctor's verification)
- Family or personal emergency (with verification)

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.

Given the online nature of the class, we recognize the strain of multiple hours per day with VC. As such, if you need a break, please let your instructors know and take it. We will have break time as part of our classes.

We also realize that since we have devices all around us, the distraction is real. We recommend you trying to close down all forms of other comms during class, and silencing alerts from social media, email etc.

Diversity

In making games and interactive media in a professional and ethical way, it is important that you consider diversity and inclusion. 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.

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation. The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

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.

