

USC School of Cinematic Arts CTWR 410: SPRING 2021

Character Development and Storytelling for Games

4 Units

Contact Info:

- Marianne Krawczyk (Professor): mkrawczy@usc.edu
- Marshall Lee (SA): brianmle@usc.edu

Office hours: By appointment, schedule via email

Class hours: Thursdays 7PM-10PM, Zoom Online

Course Description:

The dramatic potential of games and interactive entertainment is in its infancy today. Popular games offer lavish worlds and 3D environments to explore, and attempt to people them with believable and empathetic characters. There is much room for growth, however, in this aspect of games; much opportunity for serious writers and creative thinkers to build a foundation for the next generation of immersive fiction.

The purpose of this class is to give students an understanding of classic dramaturgy – characterization, motivation, story patterns, structures, styles, genres, etc. Our goal is to learn new ways in which to use these storytelling skills to create emotionally rich characters and worlds for interactive entertainment--in other words, how to convey story through objectives and rewards.

The methods in this class will draw from both the wealth of experience in the Writing Division of the USC School of Cinema Arts, as well as high-level thinkers in the game industry who are charting new ground in this area.

The class will explore two core creative issues facing game fiction writers: developing fiction for existing game mechanics, and inspiring original game mechanics with great fiction.

In addition to this convergence of classic and interactive storytelling methods, the class will occasionally have working interaction with game producers, designers, and writers whose games are pushing the envelope on the development of character and story in

games.

Meeting Information:

The class will meet once a week for three hours. Generally, the first ninety minutes of each week will be spent discussing the topics described below and screening/playing examples from games. The second ninety minutes will be a working session where student assignments are pitched, critiqued and revised with input from the entire class.

Pre-requisites: CTIN 488 is recommended but not required.

Recommended Texts:

- There is no required text, however students will also be called upon to critique fiction from different games currently published.

Evaluation of student performance:

- Class Participation: 10%
- Game Fiction Reviews: 10%
- Assigned Fiction Project 1 (Barks) 5%
- Assigned Fiction Project 2 (Skins) 5%
- Assigned Fiction Project 3 (Fiction to Mechanics) 5%
- Assigned Fiction Project 4 (Mechanics to Fiction) 5%
- Assigned Fiction Project 5 (Mash-Up) 5%
- Original Game Fiction Project: 45% as follows:
 - Character/Factions presentation 5%
 - Game Intro & Ending 10%
 - 1-page treatment + presentation 10%
 - 3-page treatment + presentation 10%
 - Final Power-Point Presentation 20%

Written assignments will be turned in by the start of class, usually one week in advance of the review.

Course content (summarized by class meeting)

Week 1: 1/21

- Who we are and why are we here? - GOD OF WAR
- Assignment: Game Concept Pitch

Week 2: 1/28

- Workshop game concept pitches in class
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: 1-Page of Game Concept + Presentation

Week 3: 2/4

- Review and workshop presentations in class
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Characters/Factions Presentation

Week 4: 2/11

- Present Characters/Factions
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Barks

Week 5: 2/18

- Present Barks
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Skins

Week 6: 2/25

- Present Skins
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: 3-Page of Game Concept + Presentation (1st half)

Week 7: 3/4

- Present 3 pager (1st half)
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: 3-Page of Game Concept + Presentation (2nd half)

Week 8: 3/11

- Present 3 pager (2nd half)
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Fiction-to-Mechanics

Week 9: 3/18

- Review Fiction to Mechanics in class
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Mechanics-to-Fiction

Week 10: 3/25

- Review Mechanics-to-Fiction in class
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Mash-Up

Week 11: 4/1

- Review Mash-Up
- Intro and Endings Lecture
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Intros and Endings

Week 12: 4/8

- Review Intros and Endings
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Final Game Presentations (1st half)

Week 13: 4/15

- Final Game Presentations (1st half)
- Weekly student game review
- Assignment: Final Game Presentations (2nd half)

Week 14: 4/22

- NO CLASSES (Wellness Week)

Week 15: 4/29

- Final Game Presentations (2nd half)
- Weekly student game review

Expectation of Professionalism: All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Internet Policy: Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy: EXPLAIN YOUR POLICY ON LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES.

Writing Division Attendance Policy: Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by 5%. Your grade will be lowered by 5% for every absence after. Two late arrivals equate to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Class Schedule: Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Statement 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 me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is

located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University

Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. 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>.

Support Systems: Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

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.

PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX