

USC Games

Advanced Games Project

CTIN 291
CTIN 493L
CSCI 491BL
CSCI 529B
Units: 2

Spring Semester 2021: Thursdays from 2:00pm-5:30pm

Location: THE EGG Building, 746 West Adams, Los Angeles, CA 90089

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Course Description

Advanced Games Project comprises the core capstone class where undergraduates from Cinema and Viterbi collaborate on large games projects, working with students from all over USC, including Thornton, Marshall, Annenberg, and Roski.

Students bring their individual talents as designers, programmers, artists, writers, composers, producers, etc. together in cross-disciplinary teams. Faculty and industry mentors are integrated into the process for guidance, and review. The full production course covers two semesters from Fall through Spring.

The selection of projects is made the year prior through a rigorous pitch process. These game productions are staffed by registered class members. Project Leads work closely with instructors and mentors to learn to manage their teams and contribute to a large project, while individual team members participate regularly in workshops to learn about their jobs and actively work on challenges they are facing in the development of their games.

Teams learn to work through sprints and defined goals to meet a larger schedule, regularly presenting their work in class for feedback from industry experts, instructors, and other students, while working in a professionally modeled production environment. The class culminates in a Demo Day presentation at the end of the Spring semester, where students showcase and represent their work to a large community of industry professionals.

Learning Objectives

The main course goal is to learn to work as a team, to develop a fully polished and playable game demo, ready for professional demonstration and evaluation. This demo will encompass a segment of the game which highlights its core design pillars, has polished art and animation, is fun, intuitive and fully playable.

Routine, focused feedback on both process and product from instructors reinforces the project-based learning. Lectures and hands on guidance on project management, design and production set the students on the right path. Students working in specific areas will have focused sessions with instructors to learn the skills of their position and troubleshoot problems in development. The class will teach all students a better understanding of roles on larger teams, what each individual does, and how to collaborate as part of a game development process.

Working Hours

The standard formula of two hours of work outside class per unit per week is the minimum expectation for hours put into an AGP project. Students are expected to perform at the high levels needed to build quality interactive experiences. Dedication to the team and its shared goals is expected.

Key Milestones and Deliverables (minimum requirements)

Second Semester - Alpha build. All features and mechanics are represented. All parts of the project can be demonstrated in one playthrough. Must have footprint and core functionality of final build for May USC Games Expo.

Second Semester - Beta build. Feature complete, roughly 15 minutes of gameplay which should make up the entire progression of the full demo.

Second Semester Final- USC Games Expo. **“Gold Master”** Highly polished gameplay demo. Entire build should be distributable for publishing.

Prerequisite(s): CTIN 484, CTIN 489

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: CTIN 458, CTIN 497

Course Notes: Letter Grade

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Game and Narrative Design Documents

Game Design “Depository” of documents (due as needed by project, should be shared with team + instructors)

Playable Game Level

Delivered as an executable or application

Must show off and demonstrate the key features of the game

The level must be working software - e.g. not a mockup

The level should include art assets appropriate for your project including: sound, music, animation, HUD/GUI

Zipped project on server

We expect your game to be delivered in a zip file and posted on the Interactive server.

Project Properly Organized on Server Directory

We expect proper organization of your project using an online repository, such as Perforce, Git, or SVN

Marketing Deliverables:

Game Poster

We expect each team to produce a marketing-style game poster that tells the story and promotes the game

10 Screenshots: Focusing on different stages or features

Focusing on different stages or features Show off the key features of the game. These shots can be used for your website or personal portfolio.

Gameplay Video - edited, 2-5 minutes in length

We expect you to make a polished video showing off the game, usable to market to festivals, individuals, and others.

Game Website

We expect each team to create a marketing website for your game that incorporates all of the materials described above.

Product Demo Day and PR Plan

All teams must create and execute a PR plan 30 days prior and running up to Demo Day. All teams must present final code at USC Games Demo Day.

Grading

At the end of the semester, each game is given a grade based on its final product quality as reviewed by faculty. The individual student grades are determined by the score of their game, modified by each student's weekly performance on their teams work sheets. If a student has two blue or "excellent" weeks in a semester and no substandard weeks they would receive a half a grade improvement. If a student had two or more substandard, red or yellow marked weeks, they would receive a half a grade reduction.

Midterm and Final Project/Presentation evaluation will be based on how well a project realizes the goals the team has set out for itself and the project. Ultimately, this course exists to empower students to bring their vision into the hands of players.

The Weekly Deliverables will be based on the sprint goals set by each team and its leads. The professors will evaluate both the number of tasks fully completed on time and the complexity of the tasks.

Because of the unique needs of each project, it is impossible to dictate a structure that applies to each so sternly that we have a mathematical category for attitude, help, efficacy of code, importance within the project, foresight, insight, honesty, friendliness, and many other amorphous qualities that are crucial to working within a team but divorced from coding. Much like the professional world, the most important evaluator will be the quality of the experience you help build.

This class is where final-year students are exposed to working on teams needing both technical skill as well as the emotional maturity to work within a collaborative group. This course intentionally models the world of professional game development - the post-graduate workplace we are preparing students for.

The most important feature of this class is that it empowers students to work as a team to execute on a collaborative creative vision and have fun in the process.

Important: The faculty of USCGames reserves the right to cancel any AGP production due to lack of team performance and reassign the team members to another project.

Assignment Submission Policy

During weekly class, each team must be ready to present the current state of the game when called upon, and individuals on each team must be prepared to discuss his/her work from the previous week. Some weeks, there will be presentations, which require the teams to be ready to present the game or an aspect of the game or its production process to the class and instructors. Other assignments are the sprints teams determine for themselves, and area leads are responsible for assigning tasks to their team members as a part of the sprint. Team members are expected to put in time in the advanced games laboratory to work on their tasks for each sprint. Team members and leaders are expected to bring the results of sprints and active development problems to the workshop meetings with instructors.

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.

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.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Note: Game producer will be responsible for logging faculty feedback as well as team responses to the previous week's feedback.

Week 1 (1/21/2021) - First Semester Postmortem

- Teams will meet with faculty in separate breakout sessions.
- Each team will present their takeaways from the first semester.
- Each team will report on how they are using those learnings to inform planning for the second semester.
- Postmortem will include key learnings - what went right and what went wrong

Week 2 (1/28/2021) - Back on Schedule

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet review.

Week 3 (2/4/2021) - Alpha

- Teams will present their Alpha code for review,

Week 4 (2/11/2021) - Discipline Workshops

- Getting to Beta.
- Issues and answers.
- Marketing Kickoff

Week 5 (2/18/2021) - Build Review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet review.

Week 6 (2/25/2021) - Build Review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet review
- Marketing Meeting

Week 7 (3/4/2021) - Build Review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet review
- Marketing breakout

Week 8 (3/11/2021) - Build Review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet review.
- Bug prioritization

Week 9 (3/18/2021) - Road to Beta Midterm Presentations

- Present Pre-Beta build to class for review.
- Class and professional feedback on progress and direction
- Marketing Key Art materials due.

Week 10 (3/25/2021) - Discipline Workshops

- Getting to Beta

Week 11 (4/1/2021) - Build play throughs and review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet and review.

Week 12 (4/8/2021) - Build play throughs and review

- Teams will demo latest code iteration for faculty.
- Team member worksheet and review.

Week 13 (4/15/2021) - Beta presentations

- Faculty will play polished demos for final code feedback.
- Design: Responding to playtests
- Team member worksheet review.
- Updated bug count

Week 14 (4/22/2021) - Wellness Day

- No Class
- No Meetings
- No Assignments

Week 15 (4/29/2021) - Demo Day Demo

- All teams present "stage demo" in EGG 108 for review.
- Final marketing assets due
- Usability report going into final.
- Bug count

FINAL WEEK (5/9/2020) - USC Games Expo *Gold Master*

- All students are required to present their work at the USC Games Expo Demo Day event
- Faculty preshow walk through for grades

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.

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.