CTWR 410L Character Design and Storytelling for Games, aka: Narrative Design Workshop
Units: 4.0
Spring 2022 – Lecture Section Thursday 7pm-9pm
Location: SCI 108
Spring 2022 Workshop Sections Thursday 10am-12pm
Locations: SCA 362, SCA 363, SCB 304, SCI 209, TBA

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Course Description
An overview of narrative fundamentals for playful experiences and interactive media. A class that covers the core lessons of designing narratives that are meant to be played and interacted with building out core lessons of storytelling from cinema and other mediums. Featuring guest speakers in the evening lecture section as well as hands-on writing in smaller weekly workshops.

Learning Objectives
Students will learn how to formulate characters, goals, conflicts and fundamental story structures for interactive and immersive narratives.

Prerequisite(s): None.

Co-Requisite(s): None.
Concurrent Enrollment: None.
Recommended Preparation: Experience as a user of interactive media and games.

Course Notes
Letter Grade.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
Screenwriting software, Google Slides, Google Docs all available at no cost.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
None.

Description and Assessment of Assignments
Throughout the semester, students will write characters and situations that build to a core narrative design for a video game or immersive attraction, with an eye towards that project's mechanics and audience, supported by strong fundamental storytelling. Each assignment will get feedback and revisions and development will be ongoing.

Game Review - Each student will present a review of a game narrative once over the course of the semester.
Concept Pitch - A high level concept for a game or attraction
One Page Narrative Overview - A one page overview of the project's narrative including character, conflict, and act beats.
Three Page Narrative Act Summary - Three pages, one covering each act of the story, with more in depth narrative beats, characters and conflicts.
Narrative Design Deck - A full presentation of your narrative design, overviewing central conflict, characters and core mechanics.
Opening and Closing Script -A scripted opening and ending for your project, including dialogue and setting.
Final Presentation - Present your original project to the group for peer review.

Grading Breakdown

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Points	% of Grade
Participation		15
Concept Pitch		5
Game Review		10
One Page Narrative Overview		10
Three Page Narrative Act Overview		10
Narrative Design Deck		15
Open and Close Scripts		10
Final Presentation		25
TOTAL		100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments should be handed in via google drive by midnight the day before lab class.

Grading Timeline

Feedback will be shared within two weeks of a hand in.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Notes	Workshops
Week 1	Intro to Narrative Design for Games, and Concept Pitch Assignment	**Bilson** 2/13/22	
Week 2	Overview of Narrative Design for Games pt 2& Series Structure	**Bilson/Apter** 2/20	DUE: Concept Pitches
Week 3	Screening/Structure and Analysis*	**Beleteche** 2/27	DUE: Game Review, Concept pitches rnd 2
Week 4	Attention, Not Immersion, Level Design	**Lemarchand** 2/3	DUE:One Page Narrative Overview Play Diplomacy*.
Week 5	The Setup – Three Act Structure & Rewriting	**Epps** 2/10	DUE: Game Review, Diplomacy Reports. One Page review rnd 1
Week 6	Open World Narrative Design	**Cantamessa** 2/17	DUE: Game Review, One Page review rnd 2. Begin OIP exercise.
Week 7	Tools not Rules/Writing for Comics and animatics	**Bilson/Kelly** 2/24	DUE: Game Review, Team presentations OIP exercise.
Week 8	Writing Champions for FTP Multiplayer	**Stauffer** 3/3	DUE: Game Review, Openings Demos, 3 page treatment due.
Week 9	Systems, Games, and Stories & Rhythms of Stories	**Lemarchand** 3/10	DUE: Game Review, 3 page treatment review rnd 1
Week 10	Emotion and Mechanics	**Straley** 3/24	DUE: Game Review, 3 page treatment review rnd 2, Begin EIP exercise.
Week 11	Themed Entertainment Narrative	**Kerrison** 3/31	DUE: Game Review, EIP presentations.
Week 12	Character Arc & Anatomy of an Action Sequence	**Epps** 4/7	DUE: Game Review, OIP presentations rnd 1

Week 13	Character Creation and A Writer's Survival Lesson	Krawzyk/Bilson 4/14	DUE: Opening and Closing Scripts. OIP presentations rnd 2
Week 14	Narrative Prototyping and "Edith Finch".	Dallas 4/21	Review of Opening and Closing scripts.
Week 15	SAMPLE PRESENTATIONS	Bilson/Lemarchand/WS FAC/TBD 4/28	Final Deck Review pt 1
FINAL	Course Review and Q and A with Professors.	Bilson/WS FAC/TBD 5/5/22	Final Deck Review pt 2. Refer to the final exam schedule in the USC *Schedule of Classes* at classes.usc.edu.

***Three hour session*
LECTURE SYLLABUS

WEEK 1
Introduction to Narrative Design for Games pt 1 - An overview on the nature of narrative design and how it is similar and different from traditional storytelling.

WEEK 2
Introduction to Narrative Design for Games pt 2 - An overview on the nature of narrative design and how it is similar and different from traditional storytelling.

Building persistent stories - A discussion of the techniques in extending or serializing stories. Television is used as a primary example.

Q and A at end of both sessions

WEEK 3
Story Analysis- This seminar will focus on the essential storytelling elements found in all powerful and engaging stories. These storytelling elements are universal and transcend culture, place, and time. The attendees will learn what these elements are, and how to recognize them in scripts and films, and other kinds of stories. Professor Belateche will use the film "Back To The Future" to examine how these elements work, how they engage an audience in a story, and how they make a story more emotional. Attendees will learn how to transform their stories into works that engage and resonate emotionally with an audience.
> ***Please note that no photography, video recording or audio recording is allowed in Professor Belateche's sessions, and the use of computers in the sessions is also not permitted. Students are required to take notes by hand.***

WEEK 4
Attention not Immersion and Level Design- We use the words ``immersive'' and "engaging" all the time when we're discussing the things that are most important about great video game experiences and yet, how well do we really understand the concepts that these words point to? Richard Lemarchand, former lead game designer at Naughty Dog, will use this session to try and dispel some of the confusion about how videogames keep us fascinated, by introducing the psychological concept of attention to our ongoing conversation about play and games. Attention—the process of selectively concentrating on one perception or thought, while ignoring other things—has been one of the most widely discussed concepts in the one hundred and fifty

year history of modern psychology, but it is rarely, if ever, mentioned on stage at GDC. What is attention? How does it work? What is its relationship with the overlapping phenomena of entrancement, compulsion and depth in games, and how can we use our awareness of our players' attention to make our games better? By using practical examples from his involvement in the playtesting of the Uncharted games, Richard will describe how you can use metrics data and other methods to get a handle on the elusive subjects of your players' attention, without breaking the bank on elaborate equipment.

WEEK 5 (3hr)
The Setup: 3 Act Structure and Story- The first 40 pages are the most important pages in the screenplay. The Set-Up is where the screenwriter must establish all of the story and character elements that will be developed and complicated in the Second Act and resolved in the Third Act. It is essential for a writer to understand the importance of establishing essential storytelling elements in the first 40 pages. Areas such a characters, relationships, plot, theme, world, rules, wants and needs, as well as the tone and genre are all established in the Set-Up. The Second and Third Acts are all dependent on the Set-Up. A weak Set-Up will yield a weak story.

WEEK 6
Open World Narrative Design- Christian Cantamessa will share his experiences in designing *Red Dead: Redemption* as well as, *Middle Earth: Shadow of Mordor* and *Shadow of War*. He will emphasize the challenges and benefits of open world design, and will present a framework for the creation of an underlying philosophy for successful open world narrative game design, drawing on the concepts of the player's competence, relatedness and autonomy. By examining these psychological concepts, Christian will demonstrate how character-driven stories that draw on the player's ability to direct their own actions can create a rich story world or "narrative space" for the player to explore.

WEEK 7
Tools not Rules- A discussion of narrative tools used to create a great story as well as how to and when to use them.   Also covers writer's survival tools.

Writing for sequences, storyboards and comics- Narrative design for storyboards, animatics and comics requires its own skills in how written words are translated and combined with images.

WEEK 8
Writing Champions- Explores the challenges of writing for free to play multiplayer arena based games. In depth discussion of history and development of Apex Legends.   We will also cover League of Legends and how it is extending its IP.

WEEK 9
Systems, Games and Story Rhythms- Every art form that unfolds over time, from novels to pop songs to movies, has a rhythm, and games are no exception. But the rhythms of games are more complex than those of "linear" media, because they are influenced by the actions of our players. Game designers must plan the possible rhythms of their games, whether single-player narrative

games, or online multiplayer games, using a variety of techniques. This talk shows some new ways to think about the rhythms of games.

WEEK 10 (to be confirmed)
Emotional Mechanics- An examination in the use of emotions and game mechanics in the world of, *The Last of Us.* hosted by its creative director. In this presentation Bruce Straley will share his thoughts on how he uses game design to elicit emotions from the player, and how he thinks about story while designing a game. He'll dive into his personal experience with stories in video games, his most influential playable story experiences and the takeaways from them, storytelling devices he uses when designing core mechanics, and some general "good practice" design principles.

WEEK 11
Immersive Narrative beyond the Screen- A discussion of narrative design beyond video games with an emphasis on themed entertainment.

WEEK 12
Character Arcs and The Anatomy of an Action Sequence- Action sequences are an important part of movies and games. The lecture will look at how to build effective and informative action sequences. Action sequences are not just about action, but also places to develop character and story. Using examples from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Die Hard*, and *Terminator 2*, we will explore how the masters, such as Steven Spielberg and James Cameron, design memorable action sequences.

WEEK 13
Character Design and Conflict- A discussion of character design for games with the writer of God of War as well as a discussion of tools and the importance of conflict.

WEEK 14
Narrative Prototyping- with the lead designer and creator of *What Remains of Edith Finch.*

WEEK 15
Selected IP presentations from workshops reviewed by entire class

FINAL
Review of key lessons learned and Q and A with lead Professors.

WORKSHOP SYLLABUS

WEEK 2

Introductions: Who we are and why we are here.

How can good writing advance the interactive experience?

- Course overview – objectives, assignments, grading, etc.
- Intro Final Project: Original game I.P. (build the game you want to play the most) PP and Walkthrough.
- What are student game fiction reviews? Assign one student per week.
- Fiction before mechanics or vice versa?
- The X and the Y.
- Student High Concept pitches 1- 3 minutes each.

WEEK 3

- Discussion: Classic characters in games, films, television & literature. What is a character in game space? What is motivation in gamespace? Backstory? How do these impact the creation of game characters?
- Student game review
- Student I.P. pitches round 2- Students update on current thinking on their story ideas.

WEEK 4 (3hrs?)
- Diplomacy: Emergent fiction gameplay experience
- Student IP one page treatment due.

WEEK 5
- Student Game Review
- Diplomacy Reports- student "journalists" report on their Diplomacy stories.
- Notes on 1 page assignment

WEEK 6
- Student Game Review
- In class team exercise: Mechanics to Fiction- teams of two work on an original IP
- Notes on 1 page assignment (to complete)

WEEK 7
- Student Game Review
- Team Presentations: Mechanics to Fiction

WEEK 8
- Student Game Review
- Game opening Demos - Using media, demo examples of great game or immersive narrative openings.
- 3 page treatment for original IP due. One page per act.

WEEK 9
- Student Game Review
- Review and Note 3 page Treatments

WEEK 10
- Student Game Review
- Review and Note 3 page Treatments (to complete)
- Discussion: How great game fiction inspires great game mechanics.
- Assignment: Develop original mechanics from existing fiction.
- In class team exercise: Fiction to Mechanics- pairs of students are given existing IP to develop an original game concept.

WEEK 11
- Student Game Review
- Review Fiction to Mechanics Presentations

WEEK 12
- Student Game Review
- Original IP presentations pt. 1

WEEK 13
- Original IP presentations pt. 2
- Opening and ending script due for student original IP.   5-10 script pages.

WEEK 14

- Review of in game walkthrough or opening scripts.

WEEK 15
- Original IP presentations Rnd 2 pt 1

FINAL
- Original IP presentations Rnd 2 pt 2

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" 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, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710
Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.
https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Acessibility Services - (213) 740-0776
osas.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710
campussupport.usc.edu
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
ombuds.usc.edu
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

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