



CSCI 526 - Mobile Games

Units: 4

Spring 2022— *Tuesday 2 - 5:20 PM*

Location: SCI 108

Remote: Zoom link on Blackboard

Discord: <https://discord.gg/kWuQmqw7YQ>

Instructor: Scott Easley

Office: Online

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Course TA: Sasha Volokh

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Office Hours: By Request

Course Grader: Tushar Sharma

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Course Description

Students in this course will work in small teams to build games on mobile devices. The initial half of the course will focus on learning mobile game development tools and how those can be utilized with game development. During the course, students will collaborate with each other through the use of programming, art, design, and production skills. The second half is game polish and expansion.

Working in a professional studio-like atmosphere, students in CSCI 526 will learn the fundamentals of team dynamic as it relates to game design and development, and develop a playable prototype for a social, free-to-play mobile game. In teams, students will take on the roles of Designers, Engineers, Producers, etc to learn both the basics of the roles as well as how they work together in a professional development studio setting. By taking CSCI 526 students learn how to create game pitches, build a design document and present it live in front of an audience. The course culminates with a polished, portfolio-quality vertical slice and professional quality supporting documentation.

Our game veteran instructor will provide key lectures and materials, giving students a chance to learn directly from game studio techniques and make networking connections.

Learning Objectives

Students learn fundamentals of core loops and design in social games; basic technologies for mobile platforms, including working with various, commonly-used APIs; how to perform market research and analysis; how to present a polished pitch; how to create effective design and engineering documentation; how to work on a team with defined roles to collaborate on a project

Course Notes

This course will assign a letter grade.

Students will submit work via Google Drive, Blackboard, and by showing builds to instructors and peers in class.

Students will have access to an educational version of Sensor Tower. Students will work with other development and production tools, as discussed in class.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Handouts, templates, games, and sample documents will be supplied by the instructors when assigned.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Students will create both interactive experiences and documentation. The interactive experiences will be either simple prototypes of core game mechanics or a more polished vertical slice. Assignments will be graded on effort, collaboration, execution as compared to goal, and overall quality.

Documentation may consist of: pitch presentations, design documents, technical specifications, playtesting logs, design journals, and other forms of documentation as assigned. Students will learn professional documentation and presentation techniques. Assignments will be graded on effort, collaboration, execution, and, where applicable, iterative improvement.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade	Due
Prototype deliverables	20	Week 6
Midterm deliverables	25	Week 9
Final Deliverables	25	Week 15
Final Presentation	25	Ongoing
Participation	5	Ongoing
TOTAL	100	

Assignment Submission Policy

Written assignments and prototypes are due at the beginning of class of the assigned week.

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 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.

Excused absences are:

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

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.

Creating an Inclusive Space

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 you will be expected to offer content warnings when appropriate, use students' stated 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 something problematic, 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 welcome to speak with the instructor or the advisor for the division.

Additional Policies

This course emphasizes teamwork, and one of the desired learning outcomes is for students to develop communication and leadership skills. Students are expected to treat each other with respect, listen to each other, and work together towards a shared, collaborative, healthy work culture. Any student found to be disruptive or engaging in behavior that doesn't meet the standards of respectful teamwork may be asked to leave by the instructor.

If you experience any problems with a fellow student regarding their work, please bring up your concerns with the instructor.

PLEASE NOTE:

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

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

****Subject to change****

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 Jan 11	<u>Class Lecture:</u> <u>What to Expect</u> Original mobile game Teams self-selected based on project interest <u>Tech Lecture 1:</u> <u>Project Planning</u> Resources and process	Research: play games in different genres, pay attention to core loops, game features, possible monetization strategies. Think about a game genre you're interested in exploring. What makes them effective? What's the emotional investment?	Homework: Join Discord server Form Teams, Pick 2-3 games and play them daily for a week. List them on your GDD
Week 2 Jan 18	<u>Case Study Lecture:</u> <u>Spurpunk Development</u> A case study of mobile game and its considerations in development.	Name team, choose Captain, fill in roster on schedule page. Team chooses game idea, make one-paragraph GDD post link on main page with drawing.	Due this week: 1) Team chooses game idea, make one-paragraph GDD post link on main page with basic hand-drawing. 2) install Unity Hub, 3) Install Unity 4) Work on introductory Unity tutorials and relevant tutorials to chosen game genre. 5) As a team set up the development tools based on the technical lectures from last week.
Week 3 Jan 25	<u>Design Lecture 1:</u> <u>Game Structure Basics</u> Design Document Overview (Base Mechanic) <u>Tech Lecture 2:</u> <u>Tools and Resources</u> Process to begin development	Start coding to complete prototype by end of Week 5, do tests of publishing to WebGL	Homework: 1) List of basic mechanics in GDD and schedule to complete it on time. 2) All teams on version control, list it in schedule
Week 4 Feb 1	<u>Design Lecture 2:</u> <u>Game Loop vs. Core Loop</u> Making a self-contained video game ecosystem <u>Tech Lecture 3:</u> <u>Game Development</u> Organizing forward development, optimizing through hierarchy of importance for creation	Team document genres and primary features of game; Choose base mechanics and start working on WebGL Prototype.	Homework: Start web GL development for playable prototype

<p>Week 5 Feb 8</p>	<p><u>Design Lecture 3:</u> <u>Prototyping Basics</u> Focus only on mechanic for fast development</p> <p><u>Analytics Lecture 1:</u> <u>Sinks and Faucets</u> Creating a monetary economy within a mobile game ecosystem</p>	<p><i>Team PMs will determine and draw two graphs with team onto the GDD of analytics they should be tracking.</i></p>	<p>Homework: Have first 2 graphs designed with PMs in GDD showing visual goal and list what it can determine</p>
<p>Week 6 Feb 15</p>	<p><u>Design Lecture 4:</u> <u>Risk and Reward</u> Giving player strategic choices within ecosystem of the game</p> <p><u>Analytics Lecture 2:</u> <u>Intro to Analytics</u> Why Analytics matter so much to the maturation and improvement of a game.</p>	<p>Watch videos on changing X in Unity for analytics to be different from default dates (Posted on Blackboard)</p> <p><i>Team PMs will review team's data dashboard. Discuss. Is the dashboard the same as the two graph pictures the PMs drew on the GDD? Come up with four more data points for a total of 6 to be tracked at midterms</i></p>	<p>Homework: Greybox GL Prototype is ready in following class</p>
<p>Week 7 Feb 22st</p>	<p><u>Case Study Lecture:</u> <u>Game UI and UX</u> Showing how to guide the player through the whole experience of your game.</p>		<p>Homework: Teams begin to plan for dashboard and analytics into their game.</p>
<p>Week 8 Mar 1</p>	<p><u>Design Lecture 5:</u> <u>Mobile Game Controls</u> Guiding the player as they play, silently and invisibly.</p> <p><u>Analytics Lecture 3:</u> <u>Data Collection</u> How to acquire information about how players are actually playing your game</p>	<p>Greybox Prototype published on WebGL, link on schedule page. Analytics work for WebGL build.</p> <p><i>Team PMs review open GL prototype and discuss the reason for tracking data. Implement the 6 data points to track in game, graphs drawn in GDD.</i></p>	<p>Homework: Unity Dashboards proven to work via web GL build by each team. Entire team's midterm grade will depend on it.</p>
<p>Week 9 Mar 8</p>	<p>No lecture - MIDTERM</p>	<p>MIDTERM (PROTOTYPE) 526 students present (in teams) their games with dashboards, showing the collected. Everyone plays everyone else's games in their team breakout rooms, alongside their corresponding PM team.</p>	<p>Homework: Unwind and enjoy your Spring Break.</p>
<p>Spring Break Mar 15</p>			

Week 10 Mar 22	<u>Design Lecture 5 – Mobile Game Controls</u> How to make sure you have eased player interaction throughout your game.	<i>Teams with PMs Review data from midterms. Discuss with PMs how design may be impacted by the data what things can be implied by the data? Hypothesize causes and brainstorm solutions.</i>	Homework: List all issues inferred by midterm analytics results in tandem with questionnaire onto GDD.
Week 11 Mar 29	<u>Tech Lecture 4: Unity UI</u> How to make sure you have optimized your UI setup in Unity	Choose and list in GDD the analytics-informed improvements the team has time to do as well as other improvements there is not.	Homework: Final conversations with team on evolution of game with analytics – suggestions for future
Week 12 Apr 5	<u>Design Lecture 6 - Prototyping Physics</u> Optimizing game mechanics to have minimal CPU load	Schedule Improvements to the player’s experience in game according to feedback from forms and analytics.	Homework: Scheduled plan for changes/fixes/updates for final presentation
Week 13 Apr 12	<u>Tech Lecture 5: Level Design to XML</u> Level design as a simple data from within Excel	Choose the top 3 or 4 most surprising or difficult analytics to discern their meaning and determine the fix to include in final presentation.	Homework: Prepare analytics feedback from dashboard as part of final presentation.
Week 14 Apr 19	<u>Supplemental Lecture: Getting a Job in Game Industry</u>	Sort out the midterm’s presentation for what will be showcased, the progression of thought, the inclusion of feedback and what the team determined from it, the analytics and meaning, and the results.	Homework: Prepare for Final presentation, sort the various links on team schedule page.
Week 15 Apr 26	Final Project Presentations	CS 526 teams will present final work Students will show the game live <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One or more team emcees - Recap the game idea - Show it at midterm - Show chosen analytics data - Show team decisions on it - Showcase current game - Current & later Improvements - 3-5 minutes max. - Playable link - Up to date GDD 	DUE: Final Presentation Final Publication Final Documentation

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/student/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>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, intimate partner violence, stalking, and harassment are prohibited by the university. You are encouraged to report all incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity/Title IX Office* <http://equity.usc.edu> and/or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://dps.usc.edu>. This is important for the health and safety of the whole USC community. Faculty and staff must report any information regarding an incident to the Title IX Coordinator who will provide outreach and information to the affected party. The sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> fully describes reporting options. Relationship and Sexual Violence Services <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp> provides 24/7 confidential support.

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://ali.usc.edu>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* <http://dsp.usc.edu> 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.