USC School of Cinematic Arts

Interactive Media & Games Division

CTIN 190 Introduction to Interactive Entertainment
Units: 4
Fall 2022—Tuesdays 3-5:50 PM
Location: SCA 108

Instructor: Dr. Lyz Renshaw
Office: Virtual
Office Hours: M, Th, F: 2-3 PM
Contact Info: erenshaw@usc.edu

Student Assistants:
Autumn Collins
aacollin@usc.edu
TBD
Varun Peesapati
peesapat@usc.edu
Wednesday: 11 AM-12 PM

Course Description

The rapid rise in the power and accessibility of digital technology has made possible myriad new forms of entertainment, artistic expression, exploitation, and socio-political engagement. Among these new forms, videogames and other kinds of interactive entertainment offer artists and designers unprecedented opportunities to instantiate and engage with playing publics, just as they offer corporations, states, and other actors new ways to profit, control, and dominate. Drawing on voices from game studies, cultural studies, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, game design practice, and tech journalism, this course will explore a range of critical frameworks for understanding and analyzing interactive entertainment, from video games and video game platforms to mobile and social media and beyond. To facilitate this exploration, digital works and practices will be contextualized both within the economic, political, technological, and social landscapes of the present day, and the broader histories of games, interaction design, and play—histories that predate electronic computation by thousands of years and include diverse cultural practices such as dance, music, and ritual.

Learning Objectives

You will emerge from this course with
  - an enhanced understanding of interactive media modalities and their function in cultural evolution and exchange
  - a grounding in media theory in the contexts of games studies and interactive media broadly -
  an awareness of the cultural and historical contexts of computation and digital technologies - an understanding of the principles and contours of game mechanics, aesthetics, and dynamics -
  familiarity with diverse works and practices in interactive entertainment and communication in cinema, games, documentary, and environmental/immersive storytelling
  - critical writing on media theory, cultural studies, and interactive artifacts

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

All required readings for this course are available through the course portal on Blackboard.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

You will engage with the themes of this course through reading, writing, presentations, and participation.

There will be 5 "pop" (surprise) **quizzes (3% each)** during the semester, **accounting for 15% of your final grade.** Each quiz will cover the readings assigned for the week in which the quiz takes place. Keep up with the readings to earn easy marks.

As an assigned group (TBD later in the semester) you will choose a game that will be the focus for your **Pecha Kucha (20%)**. This is a speedy and compact presentation designed to get across many ideas in a short period of time: 20 slides, 20 seconds each, visuals only. Your challenge will be to give us as complete a talk as possible about the game you are presenting on in the time allotted.

There will be **two papers** in this course, worth **20% each**. With the **critical analysis**, you will choose an interactive text and analyze it based on core elements discussed in class. For the **research argument**, you will offer a critical argument and analysis on a subject related to themes and ideas in the course. Both papers will be 1000-1250 words in length and adhere to MLA, APA, or Chicago style.

The **final exam (15%)** will take place during exam week (see USC exam schedule for exact date). The exam will cover concepts and material presented in class lectures and the assigned readings. It will likely involve a mix of short answers, multiple choice, and at least one essay (more on this closer to the date).

Active engagement with ideas, activities, and discussions is imperative for your success in the course. You begin the course with full marks for **participation (10%)**. If you are disruptive in class —talking during lectures, leaving early, arriving late, or disturbing the learning environment for your peers in any way—your participation mark will suffer. Using unapproved screen devices (tablets, laptops, phones) without DSP permission will result in deductions from your participation mark.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Pecha Kucha	200	20%
Quizzes (x5)	150	15%
Paper (x2)	400	40%
Final exam	150	15%
Participation	100	10%
TOTAL	**1000**	**100%**

Assignment Submission Policy
All assignments will be due Wednesday night at 11:59 PM, unless otherwise
stated. Turning in an assignment on Thursday morning at 12:01 AM counts as
a day late.

Grade Scale

Grade	%
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 Deadlines, Incompletes, and Technology Policies
The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the
course are personal illness, religious obligations, 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 minor assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from
the instructor, students will receive a twenty-five percent deduction for the first day, but a zero
after that. For major assignments, students will receive a ten percent deduction on the first
day, twenty-five percent on the second, and full deduction thereafter.

Extensions (besides acceptable excuses) will be provided on an NQA (no questions asked)
basis. Students can use one NQA extension for a major assignment and one for a minor (no
combining). Students must inform the professor of this request prior to the due date.

Laptops, digital tablets, cell phones, and other electronic devices with screens are prohibited during lectures, except by permission through DSP. Audio recording is permitted with prior clearance by the instructor. Bring a notebook or paper and a pen or pencil to every class.

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 a More Inclusive Space

In this class, we make a commitment to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will issue content warnings as appropriate 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. Alternatively, if you find something said in class to be offensive, focus on the impact of the statement instead of assuming intention or assigning blame to the speaker. We're human and we make mistakes, and part of learning and education is to be gracious about pointing out errors.

If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructors. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructors, you are also welcome to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for the division. If the issue is about diversity and inclusion, you may speak with the faculty liaison to the SCA Council on Diversity and Inclusion [http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm] or the advisors who can discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

Course Schedule: Weekly Breakdown

Week 1: August 23rd
Topic: Introduction/Syllabus Overview

Week 2: August 30th
Topic: History of Interactive Media (Part One)
Prepare: Ivory, James. "A Brief History of Video Games."*The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games* Rachel Kowart, ed. Routledge, 2016.

Week 3: September 6th
Topic: History of Interactive Media (Part Two)
Prepare: Crogan, Patrick. "Indie Dreams: Video Games, Creative Economy, and the Hyperindustrial Epoch." *Games and Culture*, vol. 13, no. 7, Nov. 2018, pp. 671–689

Week 4: September 13th
Topic: Criticality
Prepare: Flanagan, Mary. *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. MIT Press, 2009: 1-10.

Week 5: September 20th
Topic: Gamic Action
Prepare: Galloway, Alexander R. "Gamic Action: Four Moments." *Essays On Algorithmic Culture*. University Of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Week 6: September 27nd
Topic: Genre
Prepare: Wolf, Mark. "Genre and the Video Game." *The Medium of the Video Game.*University of Texas Press, 2002.

Week 7: October 4th
Topic: Narrative
Prepare: Jenkins, Henry. "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan, eds. MIT Press, 2006.

Week 8: October 11th
Topic: Identity
Prepare: Shaw, Adrienne. "Do You Identify as a Gamer? Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Gamer Identity." *New Media & Society*. 14.1 (2012): 28–44.

Week 9: October 18th
Topic: Materiality
Prepare: Maxwell, Richard and Toby Miller. "'Warm and Stuffy' The Ecological Impact of Electronic Games." *The Video Game Industry: Formation, Present State, and Future*. Routledge, 2012.
Deliverables: Critical Analysis Due

Week 10: October 25th
Topic: Labor & Surveillance
Prepare: Walker, Austin. "Watching Us Play: Postures and Platforms of Live Streaming." Surveillance & Society. 12.3 (2014): 437-442.

Week 11: November 1st
Topic: Transmedia
Prepare: Jenkins, Henry. "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: The Matrix and *Transmedia Storytelling*." *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. NYU Press, 2006.
Deliverables: Group Contract Due

Week 12: November 8th
Topic: Altered Reality
Prepare: Harvey, Kerric. "'Walk-In Documentary': New paradigms for game-based interactive storytelling and experiential conflict mediation." Studies in Documentary Film. 6.2 (2012): 189-202.
Deliverables: Pecha Kucha (Draft) Due

Week 13: November 15th
Topic: Interactive Media
Prepare: McSweeney, Terrence and Stuart Joy. "Change Your Past, Your Present, Your Future? Interactive Narratives and Trauma in *Bandersnatch*." *Through the Black Mirror Deconstructing the Side Effects of the Digital Age.*Palgrave, 2018.

Week 14: November 22nd
Topic: Pecha Kuchas
Deliverables: Pecha Kucha Due; Research Argument Due

Week 15: November 29th
Topic: Final Exam Review
Deliverables: Reflection Due*

Final Exam: December 13th, 2-4 PM

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Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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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 Standardshttps://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.

The Writing Center

From the website, https://dornsife.usc.edu/writingcenter/: The Writing Center offers free services to all USC students in the form of individual consultations and small-group workshops. Our goal is to contribute to the development of better writers, not just better products, and to assist with the skills and processes of critical thinking, drafting, and revising that lead to clearly expressed positions, coherent arguments, and persuasive reasoning.