

USC School of Cinematic Arts

Interactive Media & Games Division / USC Games

CTIN 594a - Masters Thesis Part I 2022

Thursdays, 10 am - 1:50 pm PT

Location: Thesis Room, SCI 306

Prerequisites: CTIN-542 and CTIN-548

Instructors:

Martzi Campos

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Office Hours: By appointment

Laird Malamed (remote instructor)

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Cell: 310-903-0886

Office Hours: By appointment

Class SA:

Lizby Dingus

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IT Help: USC Cinema Creative Computing

Contact Info: creativetech@cinema.usc.edu

Access to campus requires numerous prerequisites and is subject to changes at any time based on USC and Los Angeles city/county regulations. Everyone's patience and flexibility is appreciated.

Course Description

Martzi and Laird are excited to welcome you to year 3 of your MFA work and to see your amazing thesis projects develop and flourish.

CTIN-594a Masters Thesis is a studio class designed to provide the framework, guidance and feedback to assist in the development and production of the MFA thesis final project, begun in

542/548. During this 5th semester of the MFA, students will complete the major design and first playable phase of their project. They will demonstrate their projects at a faculty open house in December.

MFA candidates are expected to finalize their thesis goals, set a schedule, manage a team (if applicable) and produce regular, playable builds for review by their thesis committees, instructors and cohort. Feedback will be provided in a variety of formats from verbal, written to user studies. 594a expects the students to utilize and synthesize all of the ideas, techniques and experiences from their first 4 semesters. By using these skills, they will successfully develop their projects.

Key deliverables during the term include

1. Updated and final thesis idea and pillars + macro
2. Schedule for the fall and spring semesters leading to thesis show in May 2022
3. The establishment and management of a team to assist in production
4. Multiple playable builds of their projects, culminating in a polished first playable/vertical slice or even Alpha.
5. A written introspection about their project in October
6. Participation in a winter “open house” during finals week
7. Other assignments as presented in class

The class is a combination of guest visits by faculty specialists and project reviews driven by student work sharing and ample feedback from each other. Attendance is required (unless agreed upon in advance due to urgent requirements). Openness and honesty are key drivers.

In addition, students are expected to meet regularly with their USC and external thesis advisors (no less frequently than monthly).

The class is held in person (as USC health guidelines permit) in SCI 306 with Virtual Support. (Laird will be mostly virtual.) Ideally, students should be in class, but each should judge their own comfort and health needs. Please reach out to Martzi and Laird if you have specific situations to discuss. (Zoom information can be found in the shared Google Drive.)

Learning Objectives

The key learning objective is how to lead a two semester project, being objective as to its successful and non-successful elements, adjusting as necessary while still retaining the thesis goal. An additional goal is the ability to communicate about the projects in verbal and written forms whether in short or long updates.

As a reminder, the success MFA degree requires the completion of these elements over the final semester:

1. Completed Thesis Interactive Project (due May 2023)
2. A written paper discussing the thesis and implications from the project (March 2023)
3. An Oral Defense presentation to the faculty and students (April 2023)

4. Participation in the Spring thesis show (May 2023)
5. Completion of all other requirements, in good standing and the minimum GPA as documents by the department and Graduate School
6. Being able to receive feedback and distill patterns to drive improvements in key areas.
7. Being able to give feedback that is objective, example driven and relates to the project goals as a whole. We will be giving feedback on your feedback!
8. Preparing for going into the industry

Note: Participation in USC Games Expo is not a requirement (nor a guarantee) for the 2023 graduating class. Further details to be shared as plans for Expo unfold.

Schedule

Fall 2022 has 13 sessions due to various breaks (Fall, Thanksgiving). Class begins on Thursday, August 25. The final class is Thursday, December 1. We will have our winter show on December 8 during our finals period

Class attendance is mandatory.

Unless having an excused absence, class attendance (ideally in person, virtually if not) is required. The strength of the class is feedback between the cohort members to share experiences, learn from each, and have a safe audience for project reviews.

Note: Guest Speakers Order is Subject to Change

Week	Date	Class Overview
1	8/25/22	Introductions / The Thesis / Logistics / Student mini-pitch updates / Andy Nealan & Matt Whiting and Programing (Laird in person)
1.5	8/26/22	AGP-MFA Team crewing / recruiting event, 6 PM PDT
2	9/1/22	Project Set Up: David White, Production Critiques
3	9/8/22	Thesis Committees Finalized / Scott Easley, Art Pipelines and Prep Critiques
4	9/15/22	Critiques (Martzi out of town) (Laird in person)
5	9/22/22	Dennis Wixon, User Studies Critiques 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM Thornton School Pitches
6	9/29/22	Getting ready to interview / Share CVs/Resumes Jesse Vigil, Audio Design Critiques
7	10/6/22	Updated Game Macro / Tracy Fullerton, Directing

		Critiques
8	10/13/22	Updated Schedule Due / NO CLASS - FALL BREAK
9	10/20/22	Re-Mini Pitch / Elevator Pitch Critiques / Upload Playable Builds
10	10/27/22	Collin Kelly, Thesis Paperwork / Playtest Round Robin (Laird in person)
11	11/3/22	Winter Open House Planning Critiques
12	11/10/22	Critiques
13	11/17/22	Winter Open House Final Logistics Critiques
14	11/24/22	<i>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK</i>
15	12/1/22	Final Winter Open House Planning / Fall Wrap Up
Finals Week	12/8/22	Finals: Winter Open House and wrap up (Laird in person)

The class will be recorded if required by USC.

We will host a shared folder for student work and class information.

Formal Check-ins

In addition - At least once in the semester, each student should schedule a formal check in with both Martzi and with Laird (separately) to discuss your projects. Anytime between weeks 4 and 10 make the most sense.

You should be meeting with all of your thesis advisors on a regular basis (weekly or biweekly).

Grading

CTIN-594a is a complete/incomplete credit course. You will be given credit for the class (as well as the corresponding 594b in Spring '23) upon the approval of your masters thesis. You will receive feedback on your deliverables, project critiques and your ability to give feedback during class.

(Note that graduate students must maintain a B average (3.0 GPA) as per USC Graduate School requirements which is based on your other coursework. Please see Sam if you are concerned about this requirement.)

Attendance Policy

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving (or logging in for Zoom classes) 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.

Excused absences are:

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

We all understand emergencies arise, and breaks will be provided during class to handle the usual deluge of electronic messages. Please inform an instructor or SA of urgent situations.

We recognize the strain of multiple hours per day with VC for those having to use this option. As such, if you need a break, please let your instructors know and take it. We will also have break time as part of our classes.

We also realize that since we have devices all around us, the distraction is real. We recommend you trying to close down all forms of other comms during class, and silencing alerts from social media, email etc.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In making games and interactive media in a professional and ethical way, it is important that you consider diversity and inclusion. 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.

Harassment, sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence, and stalking are not tolerated by the university. All faculty and most staff are considered Responsible Employees by the university and

must forward all information they receive about these types of situations to the Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for assisting students with supportive accommodations, including academic accommodations, as well as investigating these incidents if the reporting student wants an investigation. The Title IX office is also responsible for coordinating supportive measures for transgender and nonbinary students such as faculty notifications, and more. If you need supportive accommodations you may contact the Title IX Coordinator directly (titleix@usc.edu or 213-821-8298) without sharing any personal information with me. If you would like to speak with a confidential counselor, Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) provides 24/7 confidential support for students (213-740-9355 (WELL); press 0 after hours).

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.