CTIN 411 Tabletop Game Mechanics
Seminar
Units: 2.0
Fall 2021 — Wednesday — 5:00-6:50 PM

Location: SCI 108

Instructor: Kyle Ackerman
Office: TBD
Office Hours: TBD
Contact Info: KyleAcke@usc.edu, Class Discord for informal communication, Will respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays.

Teaching Assistant: TBD
Office: TBD
Office Hours: TBD
Contact Info: TBD

IT Help: USC ITS
Contact Info: 213-740-5555, consult@usc.edu

Catalogue Description
Seminar on the design patterns and mechanics of successful tabletop games including trends in gaming content, tools, business and culture.

Course Description
Tabletop gaming has been an important part of the human experience since prehistory, and is experiencing an extended renaissance, blossoming into a multi-billion-dollar industry that now overlaps with the electronic gaming market. Students of game design will find it useful to study the design elements and development of tabletop games, which often pare game mechanics to design fundamentals, and integrate these elements in their own endeavors. General education students will gain a basic literacy in and appreciation of tabletop games and the vocabulary and understanding to discuss the mechanics and styles of tabletop play in a meaningful fashion.

This course explores the design of tabletop games, including all manner of games that are primarily non-digital in nature. Using traditional, popular and successful tabletop games as case studies, we will build a shared vocabulary of mechanics and use that to discuss the elements and design patterns that make up successful games in the tabletop space.

Learning Objectives
Upon completion of this course, students will be familiar with a wide range of tabletop games and the vocabulary and mechanics critical to discussing their design. Using mechanics as the primary gateway to understanding play loops, students will be able to analyze these games using thematic, mechanical and experiential perspectives. Students will be able to articulate the elements of tabletop games and perform comparative analysis of tabletop games in both presentations and written papers.
Prerequisite(s): none
Co-Prerequisite(s): none
Concurrent Enrollment: none
Recommended Preparation: none

Course Notes
Syllabus is posted on Blackboard and the class shared Google Drive. Group and individual assignments should be submitted to the shared Google Drive per the Assignment Submission Policy below. As a COVID-safe supplement to physical gameplay and analysis, proficiency in Tabletop Simulator is required.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
Students must have access to Tabletop Simulator available through Steampowered.com. Students must also be able to collaborate on visual presentations through a platform such as Google Slides, and post presentations to the shared Google Drive.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
Students are not required to purchase any books for this course, but must have access to the Tabletop Simulator software. Tabletop games, comprised of play materials and documentation, will be used for group and individual assignments. Physical game copies of certain games may be checked out from the USC Games Front Desk (SCI 201). Digital games can be explored using Tabletop Simulator and the associated Steam Workshop.

Optional readings may be distributed as hyperlinks, and students may explore other platforms for the digital play of tabletop games, including sites such as BoardGameArena.com, Tabletopia, and dedicated apps.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Assignment 1 – 4: Group Game Analysis Presentation
Students will work in groups to contribute to a presentation about a game the group has learned, studied, and played during the preceding week. Presentations will be made during class sessions, and should be brief (5-7 minutes). These presentations should include basic information about the game considered (such as mechanics, genre, theme, and core play loops). Each individual member of the group should present a specific topic such as a mechanic, thematic integration, player dynamics, or affordances. As the semester progresses, presentations should rely on vocabulary introduced in previous class sessions. All members of the group should participate in the presentation.

Assignment 5: Licensed Game Pitch
Students will work in groups to pitch a game based on an intellectual property the group chooses (approved by the instructor) that has not been previously adapted as a tabletop game. The pitch should focus on how the design would be approached, specifically in terms of which mechanics would be used to adapt the property and themes. This does not need to be a complete, tested game design, but rather a conceptual pitch on mechanics that would be suited to a particular IP.

Assignment 6: Comparative Analysis Paper
For this assignment, each student will propose a pair of games that will be approved by the instructor. The student will then write an individual 3-5 page comparative analysis paper comparing and contrasting the two games. The analysis should include concepts such as theme, complexity, and player experience, but focus primarily on how each game builds upon its component mechanics to create the final player experience.
**Participation:**
Participation is an important component of the course, and students are expected to participate enthusiastically in lectures, student presentations and critique.

**Grading Breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Tool (assignments)</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Game Analysis I</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Game Analysis II</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Game Analysis III</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Game Analysis IV</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Licensed Game Pitch</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis Paper</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**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**
All written and digital assignments should be submitted to the shared class drive:
(Must sign in with USC Account to access shared Google Drive)

**Additional Policies**
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 instructors 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 instructors or student assistant before final grades are due. Incompletes are only available after the withdrawal deadline.

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 absence from class. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media & Games Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for unexcused absences affecting grading
Two absences: lowers grade one full grade point (e.g. from A to B)
Three absences: lowers grade two full grade points
Four or more absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor’s discretion)

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topics/Daily Activities</th>
<th>Readings/Preparation</th>
<th>Deliverables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Tabletop Prehistory and Folk Games</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Ameritrash” Games</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #1</td>
<td>Game Analysis #1 Due (Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eurogames</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Input and Output Randomness</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #2</td>
<td>Game Analysis #2 Due (Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social Games</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Victory and Set Collection</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #3</td>
<td>Game Analysis #3 Due (Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Area Control</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Puzzle and Deduction</td>
<td>Group Game Analysis #4</td>
<td>Game Analysis #4 Due (Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Auctions and Drafting</td>
<td>Prepare team and property for mechanic pitch</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Thanksgiving Break</td>
<td>Prepare team and property for mechanic pitch</td>
<td>Team and Property for Licensed Game Pitch Due (before break)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Actions and Exceptions</td>
<td>Prepare licensed game mechanic pitch</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Construction, Placement &amp; Dexterity</td>
<td>Identify games for comparative analysis</td>
<td>Licensed Game Pitch Due (Group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Cooperation, Deceit, and Betrayal</td>
<td>Identify games for comparative analysis</td>
<td>Submit Games for Comparative Analysis Paper (Individual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
<td>Comparative game analysis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Express</td>
<td>Comparative game analysis</td>
<td>Comparative Analysis Paper Due (Individual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL</td>
<td>Culmination Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Refer to the final exam schedule in the USC Schedule of Classes at classes.usc.edu.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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 Accessibility 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