"We have to do the best we can. This is our sacred human responsibility."

Albert Einstein

USC School of Cinematic Arts CTWR 526: FALL 2022

Advanced Character Development and Storytelling for Games

4 Units

Contact Info:

- Marianne Krawczyk (Professor): mkrawczyk@usc.edu
- SA: TBD

Office hours: By appointment, schedule via email

Class hours: TBD

Meeting Information:

The class will meet once a week for three hours. Generally, the first ninety minutes of each week will be spent discussing the topics described below and screening/playing examples from games. The second ninety minutes will be a working session where student assignments are pitched, critiqued and revised with input from the entire class.

Pre-requisites: CTIN 410

COURSE OVERVIEW:

Students will learn about the various challenges that videos game writers face and how the game writing craft diverges from traditional storytelling to create its own dynamic art form. Students will come to understand how to use the medium to create rich, compelling, and ultimately powerful narrative experiences for the player. Further, this class will offer insight to students about the emerging opportunities available in the games industry for writers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of story-telling required for game writing

- Students will value diverse stories that explore social justice issues and ethical and humanistic themes.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in discussing the aesthetics of game writing.

- Students will demonstrate proficiency in giving and taking notes from the professor and classmates.

- Students will demonstrate the ability to offer constructive criticism and collaborate with others in a writers' group.

- Students will acquire basic understanding of game-story development.

- Students will learn what is expected of a game writer.

- Students will examine challenges and conflicts in writing/story telling for games.

- Students will explore *player agency* and the challenges it presents in game story telling.

- Students will work collaboratively.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Develop a *Narrative Design Document* based on an established narrative chosen from an approved list. This Document will include:

  - Part 1: Story outline that includes:
    - Genre, perspective, player mode, ratings, open world (sandbox)/ linear.
    - Critical Path: Outline of entire story 5-10 pages.

  - Part 2: Character documents:
    - Protagonist and antagonist bios and art.
    - 3 NPCs short bios.
    - 3 Factions of enemy AI.

  - Part 3: Environment *look & feel* pages that deliver on narrative points.
    - Visuals of primary environments. (Concept art)
    - World or primary environment sketch.
    - Map of world
    - Back story for the world – one page.

  - Part 4: Design elements that deliver on narrative points.
    - Mechanics
    - Victory Condition and Loss conditions
    - Feature set

  - Part 5: Sample script pages that include:
    - Opening & Ending scripted moments.
    - Sample barks page.

- The *Narrative Design Document* due at the end of the semester will be delivered in portfolio style during finals week

- Students are responsible for a Green Light Pitch - PowerPoint presentation of your game/story to be presented at end of semester.

- Additional portfolio assignments:

  o Sample level from existing game
  o Skins and accompanying VO lines
  o Barks pages

Required Texts:

One of these or something like this: (Cliff Notes are acceptable)

- Lord of the Flies
- Civil War of Caesar
- Hamlet, Macbeth or The Tempest
- Treasure Island
- Frankenstein
- Any of the Brothers Grimm folktales.

Recommended texts:

- Game Development Essentials: Game Story & Character Development: by Krawczyk, Marianne; Novak, Jeannie

- 1001 Video Games You Must Play Before You Die: General editor: Tony Mott

- *Extra Lives, Why Video Games Matter* by Tom Bissell

METHODS:

Because most game writers will walk into their first game writing job where the story is already somewhat developed, students will choose from a list of literary sources to create a fully realized game story and design document. The class will be segmented into the various components of game writing, and exercises will be given that are similar to what one might find in the story trenches of any development team.

A Syllabus Is An Evolving Document: This syllabus and its contents are subject to revision

GRADING:

15% class participation. Professional and constructive criticism is expected.

10% Part 1: Story outline.

10% Part 2: Character documents:

10% Part 3: Design elements that deliver on narrative points

10% Part 4: Part 4: Environment *look & feel* pages that deliver on narrative points.

10% Part 5: Sample script pages that include:

10% Final revised Narrative Design Doc that includes incorporated notes from instructor and class.

15% GREEN LIGHT PITCH: PowerPoint presentation of your game and game story as a final assignment:

10% Housekeeping - formatting and spelling. Deadlines must be met etc..

ABSOLUTELY NO HAND-WRITTEN WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED OUTSIDE OF IN-CLASS EXERCISES.

DEADLINES COUNT. MISSED DEADLINES WILL RESULT IN YOUR GRADE BEING LOWERED BY A HALF A GRADE POINT. NO NEGOTIATIONS AND NO EXCEPTIONS.

REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance. Miss more than 2 classes – lose a half of point at over all grades.

Participation: Your level of participation in critiquing your fellow students' work will be part of your overall grade

Reading/Gameplay assignments: There will be reading and gaming assignments outside of class. However, you are expected to come to class with your written assignments prepared for discussion.

Writing/presentation: Deadlines are part of your grade. You lose a point for each day the assignment is late.

A word on plagiarism: Don't do it. Not in this class. Not ever.

Class courtesy: Turn off the phones. Refrain from texting. I need you for a few hours a week. I expect you to be here completely.

Please refrain from talking during films unless we are discussing the film.

WEEK 1:

- Instructor introduction
- Student introduction
- Screen The Fifth Element

Assignment:

Using the template provided, create a game out of the 5th Element. Be prepared to present in next class.

WEEK 2:

- Expectations
- Collaboration
- Review syllabus/short lecture
- Present 5th Element games.

Assignment: Part 1: Start thinking about a literary sources you would like to create a game and story around.   See recommended list above.

Assignment: Part 2:

- *Play a console game with a strong story. The game can be one you have already played (and finished) or a new one but complete the game if possible.*

- *Be prepared to discuss the story, world, characters and the emotional connection, you as the player felt to the game, characters and environment.* ***In short, tell the class why you cared about this game and story. If you did not care, explain why. Create a short slide presentation of no more than 5 slides.***

WEEK 3:

Lecture-ish: genres, perspective, player mode, ratings, open world (sandbox)/linear. Player agency. Story challenges of linear games. Challenges of sandbox games as both relate to player agency. Critical path.

Present:

- Rest of 5th Element game presentation.
- Your findings to the class on the game you played.

Assignment: Part 1:

- *Choose the literary source on which to base your game and be prepared to summarize the story of the source material.*

- *Decide genre, perspective, player mode, ratings, open world (sandbox)/ linear. Keep in mind that he source material is only a guideline.*

- *BLUE SKY PHASE: Be prepared to discuss how you will change the source material to suit the game and narrative experience you want to create.   Keep in mind that the source material is only a guideline. Be as creative as you wish.* **Create a short slide presentation of no more than 5 slides.**

Assignment: Part 2: Competitive analysis:

- Choose 3 game titles currently on the market that could be considered competitors of your game. Describe each of these titles and discuss why your game can attract the same audience and establish a competitive edge over the other titles. *Create a short slide presentation of no more than 3 slides.*

WEEK 4:

Lecture-ish: Story in games.

Play: Play through (or watch) opening level of a game – Uncharted or other…

Present: Your game story, as you know it so far. *Genre, perspective, player mode, ratings, open world (sandbox)/ linear. Keep in mind that he source material is only a guideline. Include* competitive analysis in this presentation.

In class workshop: *If time, play twine story*

Assignment: Part 1: Part 1 of Narrative Design Doc: Story.

- *3 paragraph high level story – 1 page*
- *Story level break down – 5 pages*

Assignment: Part 2:

- *Using Twine, create a short text story using Hamlet beats*

  http://twinery.org/

WEEK 5:

Play: Play through opening level of a game, start game, *Brothers*

  o Twine story
  o   Story outlines: both in a word doc and presented in PP slides. Keep in mind that the source material is only a guideline. ??

WEEK 6:

Play: Play through opening level of a game, *Brothers*

Lecture-ish: Character development:

- o Twine story
- o Story outlines:

Assignment: Part 1:

Part 2 Narrative Design Docs:

- *Main Characters: One page bio for Protagonist (player/s) and Antagonist and what they want.*
- *Idle animation for the Player Character – even if it's First Person. (What your character does when not being played)*
- *Ancillary character development: Write one-paragraph bios for 3 NPCs and 3 enemy factions.*
- Include PP slides of what you imagine the characters to look like.

Assignment: Part 2:

Create a skin for one of your characters.

For those who did not present story this past week, have it ready to go for next along with the character slides.

WEEK 7:

Play: Play through opening level of Bioshock Infinite

Present: Characters bios, PP slides

WEEK 8:

Fall Break

WEEK 9:

Play: Play through opening level of a game

Lecture-ish: Environments: discussion of environments and how they tell story.

Assignment: Part 1:

- *Part 3 Narrative Design Doc:*

- *Visuals of primary environments. (Concept art)*
- *World or primary environment sketch.*
- *Map of world.*
- *Back story for the world – one page/ 1-2 slides.*

WEEK 10:

Lecture-ish: *Design and Conflict: (Mechanics as conflict),* Victory Condition and Loss conditions – emotional stakes for the player.

View: Prototypes and look at maps of prototypes -

Assignment Part 1: Narrative Design Doc – 4 - design:

Game:

- Mechanics: Core, Primary, Secondary

Assignment: part 2:

Feature set:

- Come up with 5 unique features that set your game apart from any other game on the market.

Assignment part 3:

Read Door Article

http://www.lizengland.com/blog/2014/04/the-door-problem/

WEEK 11:

Present: Design slides

Lecture: Dialog: openings and ending

Assignment: Part 5 Narrative Design Doc:

- *Write and opening and an ending scene for your game*
- *Sample barks page.*
- *Skins assignment part 2: VO lines*
- *Write a level of the story game you played earlier in the course.*

Assignment: Mashup:

Collaboration: *Work in groups outside of class. Use a portion of each student's* NDD to create a new NDD presentation. *Be prepared to present in next class.*

WEEK 12:

Present: Mash-ups.

Collaboration: Twist

 Present: Openings and Endings and if time, barks.

Assignment:

Putting it all together. Work on NDD revisions:

WEEK 13:

Final presentations – Group 1

WEEK 14:

Thanksgiving Holiday

WEEK 15:

Final presentations – Group 2

WEEK 16:

Potential catch up of PP final presentations.

 Revised Narrative Design Doc due.

Expectation of Professionalism: All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Internet Policy: Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy: EXPLAIN YOUR POLICY ON LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES.

Writing Division Attendance Policy: Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by 5%. Your grade will be lowered by 5% for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Class Schedule: Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is

located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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/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.

Support Systems: Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on-call Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255 Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/

Sexual Assault Resource Center For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: http://sarc.usc.edu/

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086 Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.

https://equity.usc.edu/

Bias Assessment Response and Support Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. http://dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710 Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/

Diversity at USC Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. https://diversity.usc.edu/

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, http://emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to the USC community. http://dps.usc.edu

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.

PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCT