

# USC School of Cinematic Arts

## **Interactive Media & Games Division / USC Games**

CTIN 594a - Masters Thesis Part I 2023

Thursdays, 10 am - 1:50 pm PT

Location: Thesis Room, SCI 306

Prerequisites: Successful completion of CTIN-542 and CTIN-548

### **Instructors:**

Martzi Campos

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Laird Malamed (remote instructor)

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Office Hours: By appointment

### **Class SA:**

Moss Dooley

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**IT Help:** USC Cinema Creative Computing

**Contact Info:** [creativetech@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:creativetech@cinema.usc.edu)

**Access to campus may require 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 the final year of your USC IMGD work and to see your amazing thesis projects develop and flourish. Thesis Class is a crucial component of your development as interactive arts creators. What you put into the class will enhance your and your cohort's experience.

CTIN-594a Masters Thesis I is a studio class designed to provide the framework, guidance and feedback to assist in the development and production of the thesis final project, begun in 542/548. During this semester, students will complete the major design and first playable (and even Alpha) phase of their projects. They will demonstrate their projects at a faculty open house in December.

Thesis candidates are expected to finalize their thesis goals, set a schedule, finalize their macros, 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 2024
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 during November
6. Participation in a winter "open house" on December 7, 2023
7. Other short assignments as presented in class (such as paperwork or prepping for the winter open house)

The class is a combination of guest visits by faculty specialists and project reviews driven by student work sharing with ample feedback from each other. Attendance is required (unless agreed upon in advance due to urgent requirements). Openness and honesty are key attributes and are crucial in developing students' abilities to work on complex projects in their future careers.

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.)

### **Communication Channels**

Our main communication channels will be in class announcements, Discord, shared documents and email. For very important messages, we'll likely use a combination. Each student is required to keep track of these channels to ensure they have the latest information.

### **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.

Finally, students also develop their ability to deliver feedback to others in honest and respectful manners.

### **Requirements to Successfully Complete The Thesis**

While 594a is part I of the thesis year, students should be aware of the requirements to receive credit for both classes, a requirement of successfully completing the thesis project.

1. Completed Thesis Interactive Project (due May 2024)
2. A written paper discussing the thesis and implications from the project (Late March 2024)
3. An Oral Defense presentation to the faculty and students (April 2024)
4. Participation in the Spring thesis show (May 2024)
5. Preparing your resumes, websites, portfolios and/or business plans to help you enter the industry
6. Continuous enrollment at USC

Note: We anticipate that USC Games Expo will once again be co-hosted along with the Thesis Show. If Expo is separate, thesis projects are not required to participate unless they are also AGP projects.

Students not successfully meeting the above requirements prior to graduation in May 2024 might be required to register and pay for CTIN-594z, the thesis continuation class, to maintain enrollment status.

### **Schedule**

Fall 2023 has 13 sessions due to various breaks (Fall break & Thanksgiving). Class begins on Thursday, August 24. The final class is Thursday, November 30. We will have our winter show on December 7 during our class period.

### **Class attendance is mandatory.**

Unless having an excused absence, class attendance (ideally in person and 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.

Week	Date	Class Overview
1	8/24/23	Introductions / The Thesis / Logistics <b>Due in class: Student mini-pitch updates</b> (Laird in person)
1.5	8/25/23	AGP-MFA Team crewing / recruiting event, TBD PDT (details to follow)
2	8/31/23	<b>Guest Lecture</b> Critiques (Laird in person)
3	9/7/23	<b>Guest Lecture</b> <b>Thesis Committees Finalized</b> Critiques
4	9/14/23	<b>Alum Panel</b> Critiques
5	9/21/23	<b>Guest Lecture</b> Critiques
6	9/28/23	<b>Post Graduation: Getting ready to interview / Share</b> <b>Due: CVs/Resumes</b> Critiques (Laird in person)
7	10/5/23	<b>Due: Updated Game Macro</b> <b>Guest Lecture</b> Critiques
8	10/12/23	<i>NO CLASS - FALL BREAK</i> <b>Due: Updated Schedule Due</b>
9	10/19/23	<b>Round Robin</b> <b>Due: Upload Playable Builds</b> (Laird in person)
10	10/26/23	<b>Due: Re-Mini Pitch / Elevator Pitch</b> Critiques
11	11/2/23	<b>Guest Lecture</b> <b>Winter Open House Planning</b> Critiques
12	11/9/23	<b>DUE: User Testing Plan</b>

		Critiques
13	11/16/23	<b>Winter Open House Final Logistics Round Robin</b>
14	11/23/23	<i>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK</i>
15	11/30/23	<b>DUE: Fall Introspection Paper</b> Final Winter Open House Planning / Fall Wrap Up
Finals Week	12/7/23	Finals: Winter Open House and wrap up (Laird in person)

Guest Speakers (all dates subject to change)

TBD Scott Easley - Managing Art and Artists

TBD David White - Producing Your Project

TBD Matt Whiting - Programming

10/5 Tracy Fullerton - Directing (10 AM)

11/2 Dennis Wixon - The Rite Method of User Testing

The following pitch events are not yet scheduled but are predicted:

AGP/MFA Fall Crew Event (likely Friday, August 25)

Thornton Music School Composer Pitches (likely mid-September)

### **A look ahead:**

#### **Spring Dates and Requirements - all subject to adjustment**

1/11/24 - First Day of Class

2/1/24 - Thesis Paper Outline

3/1/24 - Thesis Paper Draft Due

3/31/24 - Recommended Thesis Paper Uploaded to Graduate School  
(Must be submitted by May 10, 2024)

4/15-4/19/24 - Thesis Defenses

4/25/24 - Last Day of Class!

Week of 5/6/24 - Thesis Show

### **Class Recordings**

The class will be recorded if required by USC and shared in our folders.

We will host a shared Google folder for student work and class information. Class slides will be shared as well.

### **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 thesis after Thesis Show. You will receive feedback on your deliverables, project critiques and your ability to give feedback during class.

Please note that you will not see a grade for 594a or b until May 2024. 594a will show "incomplete" until then. This is expected.

(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.)

### **Homework Assignments**

While the class is credit/no-credit, homework assignments are designed to enhance your thesis experience and prepare for all of the deliverables (project, paper, defense, showing). Written assignments are due in the student folders by class time on the date due. Please email Martzi, Laird and Moss that you have turned in your work along with a link. (This helps us keep track of your work and to ensure we give you feedback.)

Please share all your work with your thesis advisors.

### **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 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.