



**CTIN 488: Game Design Workshop**

**Units: 4**

**Lecture Time:** Monday 10:00 AM - 11:50 AM (PST)

**Location:** SCI 108

**Lecture Professor:** Richard Lemarchand

**Office:** SCI 201L

**Office Hours by appointment:**

Scheduling link will be given out in class

**Contact Info:** email will be given out in class

**Bio:** <https://www.richardlemarchand.com/about>

**Teaching Assistant: Sammy Chuang**

**Contact Info:** email will be given out in class

**Lab Location:** SCI 206

**Lab Times and Professors:**

Tuesday	1:00-2:50 PM	Robert Nashak
Thursday	10:00-11:50AM	Brian Upton
Thursday	5:00-6:50PM	Matthew Coopilton
Thursday	7:00-8:50 PM	David Goodrich

**Course Description**

This course introduces core skills in game design, including conceptualizing playful systems, prototyping, playtesting, and managing an iterative and playcentric design process to meet specific and meaningful experience goals for players. The overarching themes of the class are:

**Preparation** – Developing a vocabulary of interactive design concepts, including formal, dramatic, and dynamic elements of game, analysis of game systems, focusing on the player experience.

**Process** – Setting experience goals, ideation techniques, brainstorming, prototyping methods, playtesting, playcentric design, specification, and presentation skills.

**Partnership** – Developing a collaborative mindset, communication and listening skills, sharing authorship, inclusive processes, managing yourself and others.

**Practice** – Developing & exercising design and prototyping skills, articulating ideas, initiating projects, teamwork, follow through, giving and taking critique.

The course approaches game design as a participatory and collaborative art form, with the design team’s goal to provide a specific and meaningful experience for the players and to respond quickly and creatively to feedback during the design process. During the semester, the team-based exercises and assignments focus primarily on developing design skills and practicing good design process through the analysis of systems and development of prototypes for games using a playcentric design process.

A central purpose of this course is to introduce you to the playcentric design methodology practiced at USC Games, which encourages designers to focus on a central player experience goal that anchors a successful design process. During the semester, you will engage with various types of design problems, discover your own strengths and areas of interest in design, and develop core design skills upon which to draw in the future.

This class has two components: a lecture and a lab. Every student must register for and attend the main lecture section on Mondays and should also register for and attend one lab section during the week. Lab sections, days and times, are listed above. The lecture topics will provide context and structure for the lab exercises and assignments, so it is important to attend both sessions. The lab sections will be where you are assigned your exercises and projects, do in-class playtesting and critique of your games. There will also be several opportunities to present your work to the main lecture class, and to see the work of your peers from across the lab sections presented.

The lab portion of this class should be thought of as a studio experience, and a large portion of your participation there will focus on in-class discussions, critique, and problem solving for individual projects. As such, it is imperative that you treat the development of your lab projects professionally and bring requested milestones to class on time, ready to playtest or present. Students will be expected to participate actively in all discussions and critique sessions, giving and receiving feedback of the highest quality.

Currently, we are expecting to hold classes in person at the University of Southern California. You should plan on attending all lecture and lab sessions in person, and working on group projects in person, unless you are ill. Students exhibiting any signs of illness should not attend class in person and should contact the professor and lab instructor at the earliest possible notice to plan for the classes and projects you must miss. If possible, accommodations for virtual participation will be made.

Throughout this class, you are encouraged to take risks and to look beyond prior art, in-class examples and common wisdom to explore new and different design ideas. You will be assigned to work in several different teams over the course of the semester, and the quality of your participation within these groups is of great importance – perhaps as important as the final project. Game design is a collaborative discipline and learning to communicate, share workload, learn from and help others excel is a core value in this field and in this program.

#### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

Programming is not required for any projects in this class; however, several technical proficiencies may prove beneficial. Many students will likely use image creation or layout software (like Affinity Photo and Affinity Designer) to create artwork for their prototypes. Students may also organize their designs using common office tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, flow-charting software, or free versions of project management tools like Asana or Trello. Miro.com, a collaborative visual brainstorming and group work tool, may also be useful and is available free to students.

#### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

This course has three required texts, which are available online or from the USC Bookstore.

*Game Design Workshop, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* by Tracy Fullerton  
<https://a.co/d/6C43Gcp>

*The Rules we Break* by Eric Zimmerman  
<https://a.co/d/51dvqvM>

*Situational Game Design* by Brian Upton  
<https://a.co/d/aGOuG4V>

Students will be required to supply their own materials for paper prototyping and developing physical games. As the needs of specific projects may vary, students should plan to have a small budget for these materials. However, commonly used supplies include:

- Index cards
- Colored markers

- Polyhedral dice
- Construction paper

### Course Website

A copy of this syllabus and some other useful materials are available in the course Google folder:  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WYFZaDIsFNE\\_lt0Kb2mpz-LifEPYqg6C?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WYFZaDIsFNE_lt0Kb2mpz-LifEPYqg6C?usp=sharing)

### Overview of Assignments

#### Analysis & Design Presentation Assignments

- System analysis presentation, due in lab sections week 2
- Up the River design solution presentation, due in lab sections week 7
  - Selected Up the River presentations due in lecture week 8
- Mechanics project design solution presentations, due in lab sections week 11
  - Selected Mechanics project design solution presentations in lecture week 12

#### Design & Prototyping Projects

- Up the River variation v1, due week 5
- Up the River variation v2, due week 6
- Mechanics project v1, due week 9
- Mechanics project v2, due week 10
- Final project v1, due week 12
- Final project v2, due week 13
- Final project v3, due week 14
- Final project v4, due week 15
- Final project presentation video, due at final

### Grading Breakdown

Assignments	%
Participation	10
System analysis presentation	5
Up the River variation v1	10
Up the River variation v2	10
Up the River presentation	5
Mechanics project v1	10
Mechanics project v2	10
Mechanics presentation	5
Final project v1	5
Final project v2	5
Final project v3	5

Final project v4	10
Final project presentation video	10
Total:	100

**Assignment Submission Policy**

All prototype and presentation assignments, including the documentation component of each of the game projects, should be submitted to your lab instructors as per their directions. Prototypes that will be playtested in class must be brought to the lab, ready to be played.

**Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes**

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete grade in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor and the lab instructor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence 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 week-twelve withdrawal deadline.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

**Unauthorized Social Media Use During Class**

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class. This policy is meant to prevent distractions from the course experience, but of course, if you are working with your team during lab hours, you may use email and social media tools to collaborate with them. Use good judgment about this policy!

Also, photography, audio, and video recordings of the presentations and of your peers and the professors is not permitted unless it is part of an assignment, such as your design journals.

**Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies**

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **A Safer Space**

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 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.

Because this class involves presentation and discussion of creative projects that will contain a range of materials, some of which may present difficulties for others in the class, students and groups are encouraged to use content or trigger warnings as part of their presentation as appropriate.

If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the professor or your lab instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructors, you are also welcome to speak with the student advisor for the division, who can either discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

### **Title IX at USC**

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](mailto: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).

### **Course content by class meeting**

Week 1 Topics	Overview of the Class: The Role of the Game Designer and an Introduction to Playcentric Design
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 1: The Role of the Game Designer
Lab	IN CLASS: System analysis exercise  ASSIGNED: System analysis presentation

Week 2 Topics	No Lecture (Martin Luther King Jr. Day)
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 2: The Structure of Games Rules We Break pages 18-30: A Few Ways to Think About Play
Lab	DUE: System analysis presentations & discussion

Week 3 Topics	The Structure of Games: Formal, Dramatic, and Dynamic Elements
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 3: Working with Formal Elements, Chapter 6: Conceptualization
Lab	IN CLASS: Affordances for play discussion & design exercise

Week 4 Topics	Focus on Formal Elements of Games: Mechanics and Structure; Setting Experience Goals: Articulating Clear Emotional Goals; Paper Prototyping
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 7: Prototyping
Lab	IN CLASS: Inclusive brainstorming warm-up talk Play "Yes, And" game Play Up the River - analysis & new experience goal setting  ASSIGNED: Up the River variation assignment

Week 5 Topics	Focus on Dramatic Elements of Games: Developing Emotional Investment for Players; Playtesting & Iterative Design
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 4: Working with Dramatic Elements, Chapter 9: Playtesting
Lab	DUE: Up the River variation with new experience goal IN CLASS: Playtest Up the River variations & give feedback  ASSIGNED: Up the River iterations: evaluating feedback against experience goals

Week 6 Topics	Focus on Dynamic Elements of Games: Loops, Emergence, Economies, and Balance
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 5: Working with Dynamic Elements, Chapter 10: Functionality, Completeness, and Balance Rules We Break pages 66-78: A Few Ways to Think About Systems
Lab	DUE: Up the River iterations IN CLASS: Playtest Up the River iterations & give feedback  ASSIGNED: Up the River final design reports and presentations (1 from each class will be presented in lecture on week 8)

Week 7 Topics	No Lecture (Presidents' Day)
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 11: Fun and Accessibility

Lab	<p>DUE: Up the River final design reports and presentations  IN CLASS: Up the River Solution draft presentations</p> <p>ASSIGNED: Mechanics Project</p>
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Week 8 Topics	Formal User Testing Methods; Using Feedback to Reach Experience Goals / Sean Bouchard guest lecture: Writing Rules: Clarity, Consistency, and the Flow of Knowledge
Readings	Rules We Break pages 130-142: A Few Ways to Think About Design Situational Game Design Chapter: 1 Introduction, Chapter 2: Situations, Constraints, and Moves, Chapter 3: Playfulness
Lab	<p>DUE: Mechanics Project prototypes &amp; formal feedback surveys  IN CLASS: Playtest Mechanics Projects &amp; give feedback, formal surveys</p> <p>ASSIGNED: Mechanics Projects iterations: evaluating feedback against experience goals, evaluating formal data</p>

Week 9 Topics	Selected "Up the River" Design Solution Presentations
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapters 12-13
Lab	<p>DUE: Mechanics Projects iterations  IN CLASS: Mechanics Project prototype iterations &amp; give feedback, formal surveys</p> <p>ASSIGNED: Mechanics Projects final design reports and presentations (1 from each lab class will be presented in lecture on week 12)</p>

**Spring Recess**

Week 10 Topics	Team Structures; Project Management
Readings	No readings issued this week
Lab	Lab instructors' choice: playing games or doing a design exercise

Week 11 Topics	Communicating Your Designs / Prior Art Research & Setting Innovative Goals
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 14
Lab	<p>DUE: Mechanics Projects final design reports  IN CLASS: Mechanics Projects Design Solution draft presentations and Final Project Goal Setting &amp; Team Set-Up / Final Assignment Schedule &amp; Deliverables</p>

	ASSIGNED: Final Projects
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Week 12 Topics	Selected Mechanics Project Design Solution Presentations
Readings	Situational Game Design Chapter: 4 Anticipation, Chapter 5: Goals, Chapter 6: Methods
Lab	DUE: Final Project prototypes & formal feedback surveys IN CLASS: Playtest Final Projects & give feedback, formal surveys NOTE: Friday labs will have an alternate playtest date TBD because of non-instructional day.  ASSIGNED: Final Projects iterations: evaluating feedback against experience goals, evaluating formal data

Week 13 Topics	Focus on Mechanics & Story / Focus on The Arc of Player Experience
Readings	Situational Game Design Chapter: 7 Narrative, Chapter 8: Meaning
Lab	DUE: Final Project iterations IN CLASS: Playtest Final Project prototype iterations & give feedback, formal surveys  ASSIGNED: Final Projects iterations: evaluating feedback against experience goals, evaluating formal data

Week 14 Topics	Guest Speakers to be announced!
Readings	Game Design Workshop Chapter 15-16
Lab	DUE: Final Project iterations IN CLASS: Playtest Final Project prototype iterations & give feedback, formal surveys  ASSIGNED: Final Projects iterations

Week 15 Topics	Summative Lecture: Playcentric Design in Your Process
Readings	No readings issued this week
Lab	DUE: Final project iterations IN CLASS: Playtest Final Project prototype iterations & give feedback, formal surveys  ASSIGNED: Final Design reports, Playtest Survey Data, and Video Presentations

Final	DUE: Videos of Final Project Presentations, Playtest Survey Data, and final design reports due to lab instructors
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## 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](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, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems:

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*  
[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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 Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.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.

*USC Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

*Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)*

[ombuds.usc.edu](http://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.

<p>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACE IN THE SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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