

USC School of Cinematic Arts Interactive Media and Games

CTIN404
Units: 2
Spring 2024—Mondays—6:00-7:50pm

Location: SCI L114

Instructor: Heather Desurvire
Office Hours: Arranged upon request
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Student Assistant: Malini Adkins
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IT Help: Interactive Media and Games Dept for Lab related issues.

Course Description

The emerging field of game user research and player experience insight is an important and necessary part of game design.

Game User Research draws on the disciplines of cognitive psychology, human-computer interface design, game design, communications, film studies, education, learning and visual design. As games are becoming more sophisticated in their visual and interactive design, features and cultural impact, the study of how we interact and understand them becomes an essential aspect of our media literacy.

This course addresses concepts, principles, and methods of usability and playability assessment for games. The emphasis will be on understanding the human- player related interaction surrounding game interfaces, game play, mechanics, immersion, among other elements, and translating them into design recommendations.

This understanding is derived via several methods including game heuristics and player research using the scientific method from the social sciences. The class will also address the development of games as both a cultural and aesthetic practice.

- **A hands-on experience of learning principles of player experience**
 - ✓ Learn how to create and evaluate a game for barriers to optimal player experience
 - ✓ Learn how to plan and create a playtesting test, interview, report and presentations for Industry.
 - ✓ Learn industry standard methods and diplomacy
 - ✓ Guest speakers show case studies using methods you are learning
 - ✓ Lab tour of local game company
- **Takeaways**
 - ✓ Arsenal of game research methods you can use
 - ✓ Knowledge of player experience principles giving you insight of what makes a game good or not, and a language for communicating with game team members.
 - ✓

The class will be part lecture, part discussion, mostly experiential learning, and team-based workshops with direct collaboration with the CTIN 484 Intermediate Game Design course; a large part of the class will be focused on problem solving, identifying optimal/poor player experiences, while exploring the reasoning behind these experiences.

Principles and concepts of optimal player experience, enhancing player experiences as well as an overview of game user research methods will be the major basis of the class. The class will include: identifying and describing player needs in combination with the games' goals; user-centered design; user evaluation of interactive media, and game design with the player in mind.

Students form teams on their own, of two or three students, within the first weeks of class. Those who do not find their own partners will be assigned one by the instructor. You are encouraged to look outside of existing friendships to find teammates whose skills counterbalance your own.

Week 4, students are responsible for teaming with a game design team from the Intermediate Game Design course (CTIN 484/489). Their game concepts will be available online and presented in class for students to choose.

A good grade is possible but not guaranteed, and will only occur with regular, consistent and timely attendance, active participation, as well as thoughtfully and intelligently completing assignments and on time.

Instructor Bio: Heather Desurvire, President/Founder of User Behavioristics Research, Inc. is one of the foremost specialists of Usability and Playability whose published work on usability/playability methodology has been used to set standards for usability and game testing now performed in many game studios such as EA, Disney and Blizzard. As a

practitioner, her clients include many of the top game publishers and design studios and interactive media companies, such as Disney, Sega, LucasArts, THQ, Blizzard, Spinmaster, Electronic Arts, Sony Online, BWin, Creative Assembly, Yahoo, United Airlines, MySpace, Fandango.com, the US government, and many more. She recently worked on DreamWeddings.com, BingoBlitz from Caesars Interactive, and SpinMaster's Bricks. She is asked to speak at professional conferences, such as GDC, UPA, and ACM-CHI, as well as has presented workshops for many game design studios and designers to assist them in making better games, such as, LucasArts, UbiSoft, Creative Assembly, and IGT, King, Ludia, Paradox Interactive, and many many more.

She also worked with a productivity company to create a system of Gamification to make work more enjoyable, productive, and add levity. A multitude of games and entertainment sites on all platforms, have benefited from Ms. Desurvire's wealth of knowledge and experience. She also worked with Google game publishers and inclusivity in research. Heather leads a team of interns to help them gain industry experience so they are prepared for this industry. She currently works with AAA game studios in lending them her knowledge and expertise on their latest games.

Her latest publication is presented in the book "Evaluating User Experience in Games: Concepts and Methods", published by Springer. She is founding and board member of GDC/IGDA Special interest group, and of the SIG-Game User Research (GUR). She has co-chaired the GDC/IGDA GUR Summit. She co-created the Game User Research workshop at CHI, and FDG which is now a staple of the conferences; she was co-chair of the ACM CHI 2014-2015 for the Game Community working with Northeastern's game department head. She has published over 34 publications in the field.

Learning Objectives

The class covers an overview of research design, setting up and conducting user tests, and how to provide recommendations for positively affecting the game design. Students will be exposed to the industry standard usability assessment methods, including Heuristic Evaluation, and the Think Aloud laboratory method. The class includes guest lecturers currently in the field of game development and playability research.

The team component of the class includes partnering with classmates, and collaborating with the Intermediate Game Design and Development course game design teams (CTIN484/489). Students in 404 are expected to actively participate in all critique sessions, giving positive and critical feedback to the games presented, as well as students' assessment exercises. The assignments mainly focus on the team project associated with the player research and readings. The Midterm is based on the readings, and the final based on a Presentation of the two iterations of the player research performed on the game associated with the 484 course, and how their research effected the game design.

For this team component of the course, students will learn to work in group environments where the goal of each member may or may not be the same. Diplomacy and communication techniques are taught to assist in these endeavors.

By the end of this course, students will be able to write a test plan, an actionable summary report, set up and perform successfully two iterations of user testing, and create a complete Heuristic Evaluation with goals and hypotheses spelled out.

Recommended Preparation: Statistics , Research Design

Course Notes

Students will be using the departments' game usability laboratory, located in the same building as the course. They will be expected to learn to use and administer the laboratory and equipment via the class lab tour and instruction manual (available online).

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

1. *[HOUT] Handbook of Usability Testing: How to Plan, Design, and Conduct Effective Tests, Second Edition*; Rubin, Jeffrey, Wiley Press, 2008 (Available on Amazon.com, and "should" be at the bookstore)

2. Assignments (Handouts and Readings) all on Website

<http://heather3dusc.wixsite.com/uscgameresearch/syllabus-1>

Recommended Reading:

- *The Psychology of Everyday Things*; Norman, Donald, Basic Books,
- *Usability Engineering*; Nielsen, Jakob, Morgan Kaufmann, 1994.
- *What Video Games Have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy*; Gee, James Paul, Macmillan, 2004.
- *Game Usability: Advice from the Experts For Advancing The Player Experience* (2008), Isbister & Schaffer (eds.), Morgan Kaufmann
- *Evaluating User Experience in Games: Concepts and Methods*", (Human-Computer Interaction Series) (9781848829626), (2010), Regina Bernhaupt, (ed.), Springer. 2010 and 2nd edition 2012.
- *Quantifying the User Experience: Practical Statistics for User Research*. Jeff Sauro and James R. Lewis.
- <http://www.usability.gov/>

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Participation & Attendance: Students are expected to participate actively in both the giving and receiving of feedback/information in class.

There will be many opportunities to participate and interact in class.

This is a crucial part of the course, that includes experimenting with ideas, concepts, analyses, and experiential learning.

Base your evaluations on principles and concepts of player experience and game design wherever possible and this will result in a better grade.

You will be evaluated and graded upon your use of these.

Teams and Individual Assignments: All assignments will be turned in as separate individual reports, even when you are working in teams. Your grade is based on your assignment turned in as an individual. Each member of the team will provide a separate report/presentation for grading.

Handouts: Handouts are available on the course website. There are times the SA prints them out for your convenience, however, It is your responsibility to find the Handouts online.

Weekly Assignments and Quizzes: There are from 4 to 6 assignments and/or quizzes given during semester. Each of them is of equal weight toward your assignment grade.

First Iteration Usability Study and Report: The grade for your User Research #1 is the average grade you get from your first test plan, screener, and test report

Second Iteration Usability Study and Report: The grade for your User Research #2 is the average grade you get from your second test plan, screener, and test report.

Final Presentation: The Final presentation grade is based on your GoogleSlide presentation of your two user research sessions, including video of both research iterations. How your research effected the game design.

Lab

- Expectation of Class #3, you are expected to pair up with a partner in class to help each of you with some of the logistics involved with user testing for the semester.
 - Please be responsible for getting their cell and email information.
 - If you are not in attendance at Class #1, a partner will be assigned to you.
- There are specific Usability Lab policies that USC IMD is enforcing. Be sure to read the handout that lists what all students in this class are required when in lab.

Participation

Students are given credit for participation. A large portion of class is interactive and requires students to ask questions, engage in class discussions, and be attentive in terms of all aspects of the classroom experience.

Collaboration

- It is vital that throughout the course, you contact your game designer partners from 484 and your 404 course usability partners always by phone.
 - This is not to make things more difficult, but to establish relationships with your designers, and usability partners and mimic the team environments you will find out in the world.
 - Collaboration requires time spent with the person, voice is second to being in person. Having that more intimate contact in person will avoid any confusions, and misconnections. We find it vital to developing a good relationships to use the phone, rather than email or text. Please follow this, as it is part of your requirement in class. Of course, use common sense, since using text and email for location and document sending make sense.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Participation	20	20
Weekly Assignments and Quizzes	20	20
1st Iteration User Research	20	20
2nd Iteration User Research	20	20
Final Presentation	20	20
TOTAL	100	100

Assignment Submission Policy

- Upload all assignments to Google docs- folder. The folder links will be in the website-- Be sure to share the assignment in “editing” mode with Heather Desurvire and the Student Assistant [See top of Syllabus for our Googledoc emails). If this is not done, they may be late, and this will unfortunately not be excused from being late.
- Name the assignments as follows,
 - e.g., <week #> <assignment type> <your name>.doc
 - e.g., “Week 5 Heuristic Evaluation Heather Desurvire”

Assignments and Exercises:

- Readings assigned on day of class, are due day of class.
- **Written Assignments are due on the Saturday at 6pm**; that is, the Saturday before next Monday’s class; unless otherwise explicitly stated by the instructor. *There are no excused late assignments.*
- If you have to miss a class, get the assignment from a class buddy.
- Late Work: If you must miss a class, you are still responsible for turning in your assignment on time (See Table 1 below)
- We often discuss completed assignments in class. Be prepared.
- Assignments turned in late will be graded as follows:

Table 1 . Assignment Grading

Time	Consequence
1. On Time	Normal Grade
2. One minute -two days late	Subtract 25 points; $\frac{1}{4}$ grade
3. Two days+ one minute to one week late	Subtract 50 points, $\frac{1}{2}$ grade
4. One week + one minute to two weeks late	Subtract 1.0, one full grade
5. More than 2 weeks late	No Credit – assignment is given 0

Additional Policies

No Cell Zone

- Cell Phones and electronic devices must be turned off/vibrate. There will be no tolerance of students using their cell phones or electronic devices in class or leaving class temporarily to use their phones. It will be considered a class missed, and the student will be asked to leave for that day. The only exception is if we use the device for classroom demonstration purposes.

No Laptops During Class

- You may not use your laptop during class for anything but zoom. This is to avoid distraction and for students to remain interactive and present with the class itself, rather than focused on their devices. You may take handwritten notes. The only exceptions for using electronic devices in class, is when we are doing online investigations, presentations, game play, and on the website/googledocs as prescribed by the instructor.

Communication

- “Arrangements with me”, what does that mean? This means an agreement with me, either verbally or through email.
 - Leaving me a message or writing an email informing me of your situation does not count as an arrangement. You and I must actually exchange information for the arrangement to be approved.
- If you wish to communicate with me through e-mail or voicemail, please allow 24-48 hours for a response: I will probably get back to

you sooner than that, but it is not always possible.

Saving Work

- Please keep duplicate copies of your work, whether on another electronic device, on the cloud, or paper. Though I may sympathize with stories of spontaneously erasing drives and viruses, I will nonetheless expect you to be able to turn your work on time (see Table 1).

Changes

- There may be changes, additions, or substitutions of assignments/topics as appropriate to our work and pace as a class.

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes:

- The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Acceptable family emergencies and illness is only according to the Interactive Media and Games Division Handbook.
- Students must inform the professor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled.
- Students who choose to not complete assignments will be asked to withdraw from class.
- Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or student assistant before final grades are due.

Attendance Policy:

These guidelines are from the Interactive Media Division and Games handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

- Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory.
- Students arriving late or leaving early will be marked absent from class.
- Lateness is defined as 5 minutes past the beginning of class. It is suggested you arrive early in order to avoid being marked absent.

Guidelines for Absences affecting grading

- Two unexcused absences: lowers you whole grade for the class, 1.0 full grade point.
- Three unexcused absences: lowers your whole grade for the class, 1.5 full grade points.

- Four or more unexcused absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor's discretion).

University Mandated Excused absences are:

- Illness (with a doctor's verification)
- Family or personal emergency (with verification)
- No other excuses will be accepted. I mean and repeat: there are NO other excused absences.

Classroom norms

Students are expected to be attentive during all of class, raise hands and acknowledge understanding or misunderstanding of concepts given during class. Students also are expected to use the scheduled breaks to use facilities and not to eat during class. Only fluids are allowed, and absolutely no cell phone use. If cell phones are shown to be used, the student will be dismissed and considered absent for that day (which can impact their grade). We work to create a fun, enjoyable and productive environment. If everyone cooperates in this way, we will achieve a great experience for all. Thank you for your attention to this.

Zoom etiquette

Students will be using zoom for many classes, but are also required to be in class using zoom. There is not tolerance for students logging on while walking or working from home. Working from home is only allowed when the student is ill and has let the instructor and SA know the day before. Otherwise, attendance is expected.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Creating a policy for the use of AI Generators in your course

[Note to Faculty: Review the considerations and sample options below to include language in your syllabi regarding the use of AI in your courses.

Considerations when crafting a policy for AI/Chat GPT use in your course:

- Does your department, program, or school have an existing policy?
- Under what circumstances is AI use permitted in the course and/or for specific assignments?
- How should students cite or credit AI-generated material? ([USC Libraries AI Generators Citation Guidance](#))
- How will students be held accountable for AI's tendency toward [hallucination](#) (i.e., deceptive data)?
- What are the ethical considerations of using AI in general and in your discipline?
- How can AI be used as an effective learning tool, rather than a content creator for course assignments?

Sample Option A—not permitted

Since creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

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 Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. 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/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Syllabus Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Game Usability-Game Research (Player Experience Insights) CTIN 404, Spring 404, SCI L114 7:00pm-9:00pm

<http://heather3dusc.wix.com/uscgameresearch>

A hands-on experience of learning principles of player experience

- Learn how to create and evaluate a game for barriers to optimal player experience
- Learn how to plan and create a playtesting and user testing, interview, report and present
- Industry ready, learn industry standard methods and diplomacy
- Guest speakers show case studies using methods you are learning
- Lab tour of local game company

Takeaways

- Arsenal of game research methods you can do
- Knowledge of player experience principles giving you insight of what makes a great game
 - **Required Book: Handbook of Usability Testing (HOUT)**
 - **Readings + Handouts + Assignments + Templates are all on this website**

Submit all assignments on GoogleDocs

- Share with Instructor: Player1ubr@gmail.com and SA
- **Make sure the document is "edit" able for all of us**
- All Assignments are due on Saturday evening of that week at 6pm sharp
 - [6pm+1 minute grade goes down (see syllabus for how much)]

Assignment Naming Conventions

CTIN404 2024 Assignment: "<Week of Assignment> <ASSIGNMENT TYPE> <FIRST NAME> <LAST NAME> "

- *Note no underscores*
- Share the assignment with Heather and SA on GoogleDocs
- For example: " Week 1 Heuristic Evaluation Fred Smith"

404 Spring 2020 Weekly Syllabus

All Assignment Instructions and Handouts can be downloaded from the syllabus on the website

Website: <http://Heather3dusc.wix.com/uscgameresearch> ***Spring break does not count as a week!***

Class Dates

Week 1 - Jan 8th

Week 5 - Feb 5

Week 9– March 4

Week 12 - April 1

Week 2 - Jan 15^h HOLIDAY

Week 6 - Feb 12

Spring Break March 11-17

Week 13 - April 8

Week 3 - Jan 22

Week 7 - Feb 19 Holiday

Week 10 – March 18

Week 14 - April 15

Week 4 – January 29

Week 8 - Feb 26

Week 11 - March 25

Week 15 – April 22

AI Generated Content- not permitted

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