

# USC School of Cinematic Arts

## Interactive Media & Games Division / USC Games

CTIN 594a - Masters Thesis Part I 2024

Thursdays, 10 am - 1:50 pm PT

Location: Thesis Room, SCI 306

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

### Instructors:

Martzi Campos

[mccampos@usc.edu](mailto:mccampos@usc.edu)

Cell: 650-452-3848

Office Hours: By appointment

Laird Malamed (remote instructor)

[lairdo@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:lairdo@cinema.usc.edu)

Cell: 310-903-0886

Office Hours: Wednesdays 4:30 - 5:30 (Zoom or in person depending on travel)  
and by appointment at other times.

### Class SA:

Samuel Tang

[tangsamu@usc.edu](mailto:tangsamu@usc.edu)

**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 experiences.

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 CTIN 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. External Committee Member (Sept)
3. Schedule for the fall and spring semesters leading to thesis show in May 2025 including reaching First Playable during the fall (ideally no later than October)
4. The establishment and management of a team to assist in production
5. Multiple playable builds of their projects, culminating in a polished first playable/vertical slice or even Alpha.
6. A written introspection about their project during November
7. Participation in a winter "open house" on Thursday, December 12, 2024
8. 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, Round Robin play sessions, and project critiques 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 partly 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 for 2024-2025:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/92341781924?pwd=UnZCQ1aTOvqVCU6UgPdZKZvhKiZ9TJ.1>

Meeting ID: 923 4178 1924  
Passcode: 712382

### **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 goals.

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 and earning the MFA degree.

1. Completed Thesis Interactive Project (due May 2025)
2. A written paper discussing the thesis and implications from the project (Late March 2025)
3. An Oral Defense presentation to the faculty and students (3rd week of April 2025)
4. Participation in the Spring thesis show (May 2025)
5. Preparing your resumes, websites, portfolios and/or business plans to help you enter the industry
6. Continuous enrollment at USC and other requirements related to being a USC Student in good standing

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 2025 might be required to register and pay for CTIN-594z, the thesis continuation class, to maintain enrollment status.

### **Schedule**

Fall 2024 has 13 sessions due to various breaks (Fall break & Thanksgiving). Class begins on Thursday, August 29. The final class is Thursday, December 5. We will have our winter show on December 12, 2024 during our class period (which is also the finals period for the class).

**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. Please let Martzi, Laird and Sam know if you will be remotely participating. Please ensure you are in attendance for Round Robin sessions.

Week	Date	Class Overview
1	8/29/24	<b>Introductions / The Thesis / Logistics</b> <b>Due in class: Student mini-pitch updates</b>
2	9/5/24	<b>Guest Lecture</b> <b>Legal Talk (Laird)</b> <b>Critiques</b>
2.5	9/6/24	AGP-MFA Team crewing / recruiting event, TBD PDT (details to follow)
3	9/12/24	<b>Guest Lecture</b> <b>Thesis Committees Finalized</b> <b>Critiques</b> <b>(Laird possibly remote)</b>
4	9/19/24	<b>Alum Panel</b> <b>Critiques</b>
5	9/26/24	<b>ROUND ROBIN 1</b>
6	10/3/24	<b>Due: CVs/Resumes</b> <b>Critiques</b>
7	10/10/24	<i>NO CLASS - FALL BREAK</i> <b>Due: Updated Schedule Due</b> <b>Due: Updated Game Macro</b>
8	10/17/24	<b>Critiques</b> <b>(Laird in Japan)</b>
9	10/24/24	<b>ROUND ROBIN 2</b> <b>Due: Upload Playable Builds</b> <b>(Laird remote)</b>
10	10/31/24	<b>Guest Lecture</b> <b>Due: Re-Mini Pitch / Elevator Pitch</b> <b>Critiques</b>

		<b>(Laird remote)</b>
11	11/7/24	<b>ROUND ROBIN 3</b>
12	11/14/24	<b>DUE: User Testing Plan Winter Open House Planning Post Graduation: Getting ready to interview / Share Resumes Critiques</b>
13	11/21/24	<b>Winter Open House Final Logistics Critiques (Laird remote)</b>
14	11/28/24	<i>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK</i>
15	12/5/24	<b>DUE: Fall Introspection Paper Final Winter Open House Planning / Fall Wrap Up</b>
Finals Week	12/12/24	<b>Finals: Winter Open House and wrap up</b>

### **A look ahead:**

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

1/16/25 - First Day of Class

2/6/25 - Thesis Paper Outline

3/6/25 - Thesis Paper Draft Due

4/4/25 -Recommended Thesis Paper Uploaded to Graduate School  
(Must be submitted by May 1, 2025)

4/23-4/25/25 - Thesis Defenses

5/1/25 - Last Day of Class!

Week of 5/12/25 - Thesis Show and USC Games Expo

### **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 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, biweekly or monthly).

### **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 '25) 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 2025. 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 or Erlis if you are concerned about this requirement. Please also double check your unit counts in early Fall 2024 to see if you need 1 or 2 more classes.)

### **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. We will share a form for you to turn in a link and to record your completion timing. (This helps us keep track of your work and to ensure we give you feedback.)

Please share all your work with your thesis advisors.

### **Use of AI Tools**

For your written work, AI tools such as ChatGPT should be used. All written and presentation work, including the thesis paper and the thesis defense should be entirely each students' own work. Students may quote from other sources with proper citation in a manner consistent with research papers - small chunks to illustrate or defend a point. The student may involve their team in the preparation of materials, but all final work should be completed by the student. Discovery of substantial use of AI tools for this work will disqualify the work from consideration for completing the thesis.

As makes sense, AI tools for game development, code generation, art packages etc are permitted and even encouraged where useful to the project completion. Attribution of these tools should be acknowledged in the projects' credits. The cost and any licensing of these tools must be funded by each student.

## **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.

## **Thesis Class Space**

MFA Thesis is unique in that each student has their own desk in SCI 306, the GIL or Marientina's lab. This workspace is anticipated for you to have a place on campus to set up and work, ideally overlapping with others in the cohort to allow for interactions and ad hoc feedback. You are welcome to have team meetings in SCI 306 with the following guidelines:

1. Please share your schedule with the cohort via discord and be respectful with your use of the space, noise level and cleanliness
2. Your team should not use the space without you there unless cleared with the cohort. This use for team work is meant more of an emergency use vs. all the time.
3. Keep things tidy! Make it better than you found it even if it is not your mess.

If you have issues or concerns, please loop in Laird and Martzi.

We will finalize exact desk seating in August 2024.

## **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](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).

## **Academics 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.



Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **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 relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

### **Statement on University Academic and Support Systems**

#### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

#### **Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:**

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

## Support Systems:

### [Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

### [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

### [Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

### [Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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.

### [Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

### [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

### [USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

### [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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

Non-emergency assistance or information.

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

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.

### [Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

## 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.