



**CTIN 541: Design for Interactive Media**

**Units: 4**

**Meeting Time:** Tuesday 10:00 AM - 12:50 PM (PST)

**Lab time:** Friday 10:00 AM - 12:50 PM (PST)

**Location:** SCI L114

**Professor:** Tracy Fullerton

**Office:** SCI 201M

**Office Hours by appointment:**

Info given in class

**Contact Info:** Info given in class

**Bio:** <http://www.tracyfullerton.com/bio>

**Teaching Assistant: Bernice Wang**

**Contact Info:** Info given in class

**Course Description**

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

**Preparation** – Developing a vocabulary of interactive design concepts, including formal and dramatic elements of interactivity, deep analysis of interactive systems, focusing on the player experience, study of prior art.

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

**Practice** – Developing & exercising skills, initiating projects, follow through, giving and taking critique.

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

The course approaches interactivity as a participatory art form, with the designer’s goal to provide a specific and meaningful experience for the users and to respond quickly and creatively to feedback during the design process. During the semester, the exercises and assignments primarily focus on developing design skills and practicing good design process through the development of prototypes for games, interactive experiences, and narratives using analog and digital methods.

A central purpose of this course is to give students the opportunity to explore various types of design strategies, to discover their own strengths and interests, and to provide them with a wide repertoire of techniques upon which to draw in the future. In addition, the course will introduce students to the “playcentric” design methodology practiced at USC Games, encouraging them to develop a focus on the central user experience that anchors their design process.

This is a studio class and a large part of the class content will focus on in-class discussion, critique, and problem solving for individual projects. As such, it is imperative that students treat the development of their design projects professionally and bring requested milestones to class on time, ready to 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. Students should plan on attending class in person as well as working on group projects in person unless they are ill. Students exhibiting any signs of illness should not attend class in person and should contact the professor and student assistant at the earliest possible notice to plan for the classes and projects they must miss. If possible, accommodations for virtual participation will be made.

Throughout this class, students are encouraged to take risks and to look beyond prior art, in-class examples and common wisdom to explore new and different design ideas. In many cases, students will be assigned to work in partnerships or teams and the quality of students' participation within these groups is of great importance – perhaps as important as the final project. Interactive media in all forms is a collaborative discipline and learning to communicate, share workload, learn from and help others excel is a core value in this field.

### **Prerequisite(s)**

Open to IMGD M.F.A., M.S., and iMAP Ph.D. students (as well as other interested and qualified students, by interview with the instructor).

### **Course Notes**

This class combines elements of a studio production course with theory and lecture. A major component of the course will be the collaborative design and development of three game projects, which will be presented, and play tested in class. Students are expected to participate actively in these group projects and respectfully in the critique of one another's work.

This course will deal with game design and prototyping in both tabletop and digital formats. Tabletop design is used to study fundamental game design concepts, and the practice of using non-digital prototyping techniques will prove useful to the digital design practice, which will be introduced in the final project.

Participating in in-class playtests is a requirement of the class. Designers must provide a working game prototype for the play testers and observe them through a short play session. After the group has played the game, the designers must lead a feedback session, eliciting as much information as possible from their play testers. At the end of the session, the design team as a group must submit a copy of the game description and rules, as well as a playtest evaluation document synthesizing the comments of the play testers and the priority changes for the design team. Both documents will be evaluated as part of the assignment grade. All participants in the group projects will receive the same grade and should strive to contribute equally to the project.

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

Programming is not a core focus of 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. A limited educational license for Miro.com, a collaborative visual brainstorming and group work tool is available to everyone in class for the duration of the semester.

For the final game project, which will be co-created in CTIN 534, where technology proficiency is a component of the class, students will use Unity, Twine, RPG Maker, Ren'Py or a similar digital game framework as selected by the team. Also, all teams will use the USC Games Perforce server for versioning and managing their team's project. Training will be provided for this server. Students who do not have previous experience with any of the mentioned development tools may use Twine for this assignment, which does not require programming, or may partner with students who have technical skills on this assignment. Please communicate with the instructor if you have any questions about the technical requirements for your assignments.

## Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

This course has two required texts, which are available digitally from the USC Library, from online bookstores, or from the USC Bookstore.

*Game Design Workshop, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games* by Tracy Fullerton  
[https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC\\_INST/273cgt/cdi\\_askewsholts\\_vlebooks\\_9781003858423](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781003858423)

*Situational Game Design* by Brian Upton  
[https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC\\_INST/273cgt/cdi\\_askewsholts\\_vlebooks\\_9781003858423](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781003858423)

In addition, there will be several chapters and articles assigned as reading. These will be made available in class or on the course website. For those students interested in further readings on interactive design and game design, the following are recommended additional texts. These are not required to purchase for the class, however you may find these links to the digital copies at the USC Library useful.

*The Rules we Break* by Eric Zimmerman  
[https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC\\_INST/273cgt/cdi\\_askewsholts\\_vlebooks\\_9781648962066](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/273cgt/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781648962066)

*Designing Interactions* by Bill Moggridge  
[https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC\\_INST/hs9vaa/alma991019464999703731](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/hs9vaa/alma991019464999703731)

*Rules of Play* by Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman  
[https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC\\_INST/hs9vaa/alma991043480633503731](https://uosc.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01USC_INST/hs9vaa/alma991043480633503731)

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 is available at the course website:  
[www.tracyfullerton.com/541](http://www.tracyfullerton.com/541) (Password: playtest)

## Overview of Assignments

### Written Analysis Assignments

- Simple system analysis 1-page, due week 2
- Board game system analysis 2-3 pages, due week 3

### Design & Prototyping Projects

- Up the River variation, due week 4
- Meaningful play prototype, due week 6
- Narrative play 1<sup>st</sup> prototype, due week 10
- Digital prototype design documents, due week 12
- Digital prototype (co-assigned as 534 final project), testable version due week 15 and final build and post-mortem due at final exam

### Collaboration Assignment

- Skill sharing, due week 13

### **Grading Breakdown**

Participation	5
Simple system analysis	5
Board game system analysis	10
Up the River variation	15
Meaningful play prototype	15
Narrative play prototype	15
Digital prototype design documents	15
Digital prototype playtest & analysis	10
Skill sharing	10
Total:	100

### **Assignment Submission Policy**

All written and digital assignments, including the documentation component of each of the game projects, should be submitted by email to [fullerton@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:fullerton@cinema.usc.edu) by the start of class on the day that they are due. Games that will be playtested in class must be brought to class, ready to be played.

### **Participation**

Students are expected to be present and to participate fully in the lectures, labs, and group assignments. The lectures will include some group games, exercises, and responses to concepts. Attendance at Tuesday lectures is mandatory and concepts and readings from the lectures are expected to be understood as a part of the lab assignments. Participation in lab exercises and group assignments is also mandatory. Students are expected to attend Friday lab days, participate meaningfully in group discussions, playtests, and projects. Outside of class, students must work with their teammates to schedule group working time that allows participation by all team members. This may mean working in person or online, depending on schedule constraints. Please be mindful of the schedules of others and make yourself available to work together in real time as much as possible.

### **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. Students must inform the 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. If you need to record the class

material as part of an accessibility accommodation, it must be done with permission from the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS). Please inform the lecture professor and lab instructor of this accommodation before recording any material.

### **AI Policy**

Since creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills are an important 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 for the creative design, analysis, systemic, and written aspects of your assignments.

The only exception to this policy is in the creation of visual assets for your prototypes – if you are not planning to publish or present your prototype beyond the confines of the classroom, you may use AI tools to generate visual assets, especially if you do not have team members with visual design skills. Keep in mind that AI-generated assets may potentially violate existing copyrights, so they may not be used outside of the class assignment. If you plan to print or self-publish your game, you will need to redesign your assets! Also, you must credit the AI program that you used in your project documentation. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

### **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 instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with the graduate 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:	Overview of the class – introduction to each other, discussion of course goals and themes: preparation, process, practice, and partnership, assign collaboration partners for skill sharing assignment, intro to systems thinking, analysis of simple systems.
Assignments	Analysis Assignment 1: Written analysis of simple system – <b>due week 2</b> Collaboration Assignment: Choose someone from whom to learn a skill, someone to whom to teach a skill (presentation of skills is <b>due week 13</b> )
Readings due Week 2	GDW Chapters 1 – 3 SGD Chapter 1
Lab:	Individual work on simple system analysis. Professor and SA available for assistance and discussion.

Week 2:	Formal, dramatic, and dynamic elements of interactive systems – discuss outcome of simple system analysis, deconstructing Monopoly, Set, Mastermind and Clue, thinking about the player’s mental model of a game, discovering the “play” in a system, assign play groups for board game analysis.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Analysis Assignment 1: Written analysis of simple system Analysis Assignment 2: Board game analysis – <b>due week 3</b>
Readings due Week 3	GDW Chapters 4-6 SGD Chapter 2
Lab:	Play board games, group analysis. Professor and SA available for assistance and discussion.

Week 3:	Experience goals and intentional design – discuss outcomes of board game analysis, intro to design techniques, in-class design exercise, assign design teams for Up the River variation assignment.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Analysis Assignment 2: Board game analysis Prototype #1: Up the River variation – <b>due week 4</b>
Readings due Week 4	GDW Chapter 7, 9 SDG Chapter 3-5
Special Friday Lecture:	Play testing and the iterative process. For the remainder of the time, work in teams on Up the River variation assignment. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs.

Week 4:	Playtest & critiques of Up the River variations.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Prototype Assignment 1: Up the River variation Playtesting analysis and next steps – <b>due week 5</b>

Readings due Week 5	DeKoven "The Well-Played Game" Forward - Chapter 1 Bogost "Persuasive Games" Sicart "Play Matters" Chapter 1
Lab:	Second set of playtests for Up the River variations.

Week 5:	Meaningful play – expressive elements of interactive systems, levels of engagement, situational game design, communicating ideas through play mechanics, groups and ideation for meaningful play prototype.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Up the River variation playtesting analysis & next steps Prototype #2: Meaningful play – <b>due week 6</b>
Readings due Week 6	GDW Chapters 10-11 SGD Chapter 6
Lab:	Work in teams on meaningful play assignment. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs.

Week 6:	Playtest & critiques of meaningful play prototypes.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Prototyping Assignment #2: Meaningful Play prototype Playtesting analysis and next steps – <b>due week 7</b>
Readings due Week 7	New Games Book, "It Began with WWIV;" "Sustainable Play" in Games and Culture, Fullerton, Pearce, Fron and Morie
Lab:	Second set of playtests for Meaningful Play.

Week 7:	Public play – pervasive games, "big" games, theater games, and improvisation exercises.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Meaningful Play playtesting analysis and next steps
Readings due Week 8	SGD Chapters 7-8 Design is Storytelling Act 1: Action, Narrative Arc, Hero's Journey
Lab:	No lab day – Fall Recess

Week 8:	Narrative play – foundations of storytelling, characters, situations, conflict and the dramatic arc, in-class brainstorming for narrative play prototypes, design groups assigned for prototypes.
Assignments	Prototype #3: Narrative play project paper prototype – due week 10 <b>Mid-term conferences (by appointment)</b>
Readings due Week 9	GDW Chapters 12-13

Lab:	Work in teams on narrative play assignment. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs.
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Week 9:	Team building, planning, communication – discuss agile development, collaboration skills. In-class roleplaying exercises.
Assignments	<b>Mid-term conferences (by appointment)</b>
Readings due Week 10	GDW Chapters 8, 14
Lab:	Work in teams on narrative play assignment. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs.

Week 10:	Playtest & critique of narrative prototypes.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Prototyping Assignment #3: Narrative Play prototype Playtesting analysis and next steps – <b>due week 11</b>
Readings due Week 11	Moggridge Chapter 8 – Hiroshi Ishii interview, Bill Gaver interview Swink, Game Feel Chapter 1, “Defining Game Feel” and Chapter 6, “Input Metrics”
Special Friday Lecture:	Iterating designs, moving from paper to digital prototypes. Assignment: Digital prototype design documents – <b>due week 12</b>

Week 11:	Agency and affordance – designing for a range of player agency, affordances of platforms and controls, in-class play experiments with imagining unique play experiences, discussion of final project goals.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Narrative Play playtesting analysis and next steps
Readings due Week 12	GDW Chapters 15-16
Lab:	Getting set up in Perforce workshop. Work on assignments continued. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs and design docs.

Week 12:	Working as a designer – discussion of areas of opportunity for designers, professionalization, role-playing exercises.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Digital Prototype Design Documents Prototype #4: Digital prototype (co-assigned with 534) – <b>due week 15</b>
Lab:	Work in teams on digital prototypes. Professor and SA available for assistance with designs.



Week 13:	Presentation of skill sharing assignment outcomes.
Lab:	Informal playtesting during lab time.

Week 14:	Introduction to formal playtesting and user research – Guest lecture, Dennis Wixon.
Lab:	University holiday – no lab time

Week 15:	Formal playtesting – usability process, playtest & critique of digital prototypes (534 final projects), discuss post-mortems. Class will be held in Game Innovation Lab SCI 301.
Assignments	<b>Due:</b> Digital prototype for playtesting Formal playtesting analysis and next steps with final prototype build– <b>due at final exam time</b>
Lab:	Additional formal playtests as necessary, team analysis of playtests. Work on personal reflections.

Final Exam: 12/12 11AM	<b>Due:</b> final prototype build, formal playtesting analysis with next steps, and semester reflections.
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## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### **Academic Conduct:**

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, 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. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity 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](#).

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.

### **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](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **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 is comprised 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) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298  
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.

<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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