



Interface Design for Games

Fall 2024

USC School Cinematic Arts, 401L

Instructor: Chevon Hicks

chevonhi@usc.edu

Meeting Information:

SCI Room L113 (3470 McClintock Ave.)

M 6:00-7:50 PM

Units: 2

Course Description:

This course provides an introductory exploration of user interface (UI) design specifically for video games, with no prior experience required. The first half of the course is dedicated to introducing the essential tools used in the industry, with a deep focus on Adobe Illustrator, chosen for its creative flexibility and capability to produce intricate designs. Students will also gain hands-on experience with Adobe Photoshop, Figma and Scenario AI, gradually building their proficiency in these applications.

The second half of the course transitions to the development of a final project, where students will create a portfolio-worthy design of their own. This project allows students to apply the skills they have acquired while also incorporating broader game design concepts.

In addition to practical design work, the course covers the underlying information architecture of games, providing the context needed to make informed layout decisions. While the primary focus is on UI design, key principles of user experience (UX) design will also be discussed and revisited to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how UI fits into the broader game development process.

By the end of the course, students will have a strong foundation in both the theoretical and practical aspects of UI design for video game interfaces, preparing them for further study or professional work in the field of game design.

Pre-requisites:

None. This course provides an introduction to the Adobe Creative Suite, including Illustrator and Photoshop, as well as Figma and Scenario AI, equipping students with the skills to design and create game interfaces using industry-standard tools.

There is an advanced version of this course in the Spring that requires this course as a prerequisite.

Required Course Materials:

While certain course materials are required, please do not let their cost deter you from enrolling. If you have any concerns about affording these materials, contact me directly before making any decisions. We can explore student support options to ensure that financial constraints do not hinder your full participation in the course.

Adobe Creative Cloud

Adobe Creative Cloud is an industry-standard suite of applications critical for professional design work. In this course, we use Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop to equip students with the creative tools necessary for designing and refining game interfaces. These applications provide unmatched flexibility and precision, enabling students to produce detailed, polished visuals that meet the high standards of the gaming industry. The integrated ecosystem of Adobe Creative Cloud ensures a seamless workflow, allowing for efficient development and iteration of designs throughout the course.

You can buy a month-to-month subscription for the duration of the course. See [Adobe's website](#) for the latest pricing (typically \$20@/month).

Scenario.com AI Generator

Scenario.ai is a specialized tool for creating consistent and customizable game assets, such as backgrounds, character designs, and other content. In this course, we leverage Scenario.ai to overcome the limitations of relying on screenshots and copyrighted materials, ensuring all assets are original and tailored to the specific needs of each project. Its flexibility and capabilities enable students to generate high-quality, game-ready visuals that align with their design vision, seamlessly integrating into the game development process.

You will need a **Creator Plan**. See [Scenario's website](#) for the latest pricing (typically \$15/month).

Figma Account

Figma is briefly covered in this course, focusing on its design system capabilities. We touch upon how Figma can be used to manage and create consistent, reusable components like icons, buttons, and other elements that make up the meta UI—the interface surrounding the in-game UI. This helps students understand how to componentize their designs for better portability and shareability, ensuring consistency and facilitating collaboration within game development teams, in line with current industry practices.

A free account should suffice for the needs of this course.

Ideogram.ai

Really good for professional looking logos and branding elements. As a designer, I would normally teach logo design, but since that is not the thrust of this course we can shortcut that process with really good results. Ideogram can also play a crucial role in improving your own designs, i.e. uploading a flat button design and turning it into a slick 3D component.

A free account should suffice for the needs of this course.

Your total costs for this course should be about: \$105-ish for 3 months (sept-nov)

Course Schedule

Week 1 (8/29)

Introduction to Digital Design, Tools, and Workflow for UI Design

- Introduction to Professor Hicks, expectations, assignments, and grading policy.
- Introduction to tools, Adobe Suite, Figma, Scenario.com AI
 - Create a CC Library for this Course
- Previous student work overview, Final Projects
- Types of Game UI - Definition of Terms
- LAB - getting to know the Adobe Illustrator Interface
 - Geometric Shapes (blending)
 - Pen Tool
 - Brushes
- Explanation of Homework - Game Description Document v.1
 - Game must be:
 - character driven
 - have a loose narrative
 - fall neatly into an existing game genre
 - must be a console or PC game

Homework: *Complete Game Description document template v.1 (5 points)*

Week 2 (9/05)

Introduction to Information Architecture - Flow Diagramming

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 1900's -1960's
- Lecture: Understanding Design on a primal level - How to look at Art
- Overview of Information Architecture
- Figma vs. Adobe Illustrator vs. Lucid App: Determining the appropriate tool
- Understanding User Journeys
- LAB - Creating a flowchart through Observation (PS5 Games)
- Explanation of Homework: Create a Flow Diagram for a real world game.

Homework: *Observe a real world video game. You will need to create two flow charts for your game idea for both new and returning user. (5 points)*

Week 3 (9/12)

Information Architecture - Wireframing

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 1960's -1970s
- Review previous student's wireframes - do's and don'ts
- Students select screens from previous flow chart assignment, set up illustrator screens

- LAB - Wireframing in Adobe Illustrator
 - Wireframe a complex video game screen in-class
- Explanation of Homework: Create wireframes based on flow chart screens

Homework: *Observe can create wireframes based on the flow charts you turned in last week. You will need to create a total of four complex wireframe screens, i.e. no start screens. (5 points)*

Week 4 (9/19)

Design Exploration 1 - Manufacturing Inspiration with Mood Boards

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 1970's -1980's
- Mood Boards, examples from previous students
- Blank Canvas Syndrome - Generative AI - Scenario.com
- LAB - Prompting mood boards with Scenario.com
- Explanation of Homework:
 - Create Mood Boards
 - Revise Game Description Document - LOCKED after this point!

Homework: *Create 5 slides of Mood Boards using Google Slides - must submit a PDF for homework, Separately, make any necessary changes to your Game Description Document (5 points)*

Week 5 (9/26)

Design Exploration 2 - Discovering the Hidden Design Canon

- History of User Interface Design: 1980's -1990's
- Review of previous week's homework
- What is a Design Canon? What are your design anchors?
- Exploration: Extracting Creative from Your Moodboards
 - Color.adobe.com
 - Isolating Elements
 - Illustrator
 - Scenario.com
 - Photoshop
 - Recreating Elements
 - Illustrator
 - Refining Elements
 - Remixing elements in Ideogram
- LAB - Creating progress bars in Adobe Illustrator
- Explanation of Homework: Create progress bars and modify with Generative AI

Homework: *Create three progress bars in Adobe Illustrator. Refine the designs in Ideogram. Show BOTH versions in your homework submission PDF. (5 points)*

Week 6 (10/3)

Design Exploration 3 - Establishing a Design System

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 1990s - 2000s
- What is a UI Kit?
 - Setting this up in Adobe Illustrator
 - What classifications to include
 - Typography
 - Figma for Icons and basics
- Choosing a foundational design system in Figma for the basics
- LAB - Customizing Icons in Illustrator, componentizing in Figma (challenges)
- Turn in classwork: UI Kit v1

Classwork: *Set up and populate your UI kit with a design system and share your PDF at the end of class - no homework over the break (5 points)*

Week 7 (10/10): FALL RECESS

Week 8 (10/17)

Building the foundation for your Final Project

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 2000s - 2010s
- Using Adobe InDesign (template) for Final Presentation
- LAB - Working with the provided InDesign Template
 - Designer's Paradox - The design of the document vs the design assignment
 - Typography (fonts.adobe.com)
- LAB - Building your game world with Generative AI (scenario.com)
 - identify screen backgrounds for wireframes
 - prompting techniques for consistency
 - character design
 - Retouching/Fixing with Photoshop's Generative AI
- Discussion - Pacing yourself Part 1 - only 6 weeks remaining!
- Explanation of Homework - submit a PDF of InDesign template progress

Homework: *Populate your Indesign File with work-to-date (5 points)*

Week 9 (10/24)

Best Practices - Establishing a Sustainable Workflow

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 2010s - 2020s

- LAB - Best Practices for Files
 - Effective use of CC Library Assets
 - Layering in Illustrator
 - Artboards vs Individual files
 - Populating the template
 - Playground file (messy, fun)
- LAB - Enhancing UI components with Photoshop FX
 - Hands-on instruction on how to create designs in the following styles
 - Neumorphism
 - Skeumorphism
 - Glassmorphism
 - Hand Drawn
 - Low Poly / 8-bit
- Discussion - Pacing Yourself Part 2
 - Defining your own scope
 - Inventory of Items / Time left to execute
- Explanation of Homework

Homework: *Send in classwork Sketches as well as 2 hour progress on your final project (5 points)*

Week 10 (10/31)

Simple Prototyping In Figma

- Review of previous week's homework
- History of User Interface Design: 2020s and Beyond (AR/VR/XR/??)
- LAB - Prototyping in Figma
 - Preparing CC Library Files
 - Setting up your Figma boards
 - Have A Plan of Attack
- Explanation of Homework

Homework: *Spend two additional hours on your prototype then share your Figma via link. (5 points)*

Week 11 (11/07)

Simple UI Animations in Adobe After Effects

- Review of previous week's homework
- LAB - Animating with Adobe After Effects
 - Movement
 - Opacity
 - Particle Effects
 - Exporting with Adobe Media Encoder

Homework: Submit your in-class work for today's Labs as well as two hours progress on your final assignment document (5 points)

Week 12 (11/14)

Final Project Design Pass 1

- Review of previous week's homework
- LAB - Common Elements Part 1
 - Mini Map Designs with Brushes in Illustrator
 - Item Carousels (revolvers)
 - Dialogue Boxes
- Explanation of Homework

Homework: Submit your in-class work for today's Labs as well as two hours progress on your final assignment document (5 points)

Week 13 (11/21)

Final Project Design Pass 2

- Review of previous week's homework
- LAB - Common Elements 2
 - Reticle
 -
 - Dialogue Boxes
- Explanation of Homework

Classwork:: Submit your in-class work for today's Labs (5 points)

Week 14 (11/28): THANKSGIVING RECESS

Week 15 (12/05)

Final Project Design Pass 3

- GUEST SPEAKER TBD
- Finalize designs IN CLASS

Classwork: We'll spend the last session finalizing our projects. (40 points)

Please note: The syllabus and assignments are subject to change, especially to accommodate guest speakers' schedules. Further updates will be communicated in class and via email.

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 professor before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or teaching assistant before final grades are due.

Attendance Policy:

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving late or leaving early will be marked absent from class. The class begins at 6:00, please plan to arrive 10 minutes early. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading

- Two unexcused absences: lowers grade one full grade point
- Three unexcused absences: lowers grade two full grade points
- Four or more unexcused absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor's discretion)

Excused absences are:

- Illness (with a doctor's verification)
- Family or personal emergency (with verification)

Note for students with disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am 5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity:

The School of Cinematic Arts expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from USC students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade band be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult "SCAMPUS" and/or confer with the instructor.

Assignments Breakdown

Assignments are to be uploaded to their respective assignment container on BlackBoard. All assignments, with the exception of the final project, are due at or before the beginning of class at 6:30pm.

The final project will be due at the end of the final class. Students can use class time to work on their final project, but should use all other class time to follow along and participate in the many labs that will be conducted throughout the semester.