



CTIN 532 Intermediate Game Design and Production

Units: 4

Term: Spring 2025

Day and Time: Tue/Fri 9:00-10:50

Location: SCI L114

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<https://discord.gg/egEPzexYmP>

Course Description

Welcome to CTIN-532 and to a new sequence of learning. In this class you are going to pair up into teams of two people and your team will spend the whole fifteen-week semester working in Unity (or another engine, by arrangement with the instructor) to create a single game or interactive digital media project.

This class is a challenging one, but it will also be a lot of fun. If you pay close attention to your classmates and to me, the instructor, and if you summon the courage to communicate with all of us honestly, frequently, without delay, and with compassion, I can almost completely guarantee you a positive, supportive, sane, and enjoyable experience in the class, and one that leads to a valuable learning outcome.

Imagination and design are inexorably interlinked. The dreams we dream at night and by day can lead to the greatest accomplishments in art and literature, science and technology, industry and entertainment. But until we **commit to a decision** and act upon it, we are not designing, only speculating. Even the smallest game or interactive media project requires us to make hundreds or thousands of decisions: some of them major, many of them minor, all of them important.

How can we stay in control of this decision-making process, ensuring that we make good-quality decisions, and that we make the right decisions at the right time? This class aims to show you how.

This is a class you can use to acquire some good new habits!

In some important regards, game design and interaction design are fundamentally different from other processes of media design and creation. The dynamically systemic nature of what you make, coupled with the real-time interaction between your games and your players, introduces vast numbers of unknowns, variables, challenges, and problems into the creative process; these are challenges that painters, filmmakers, novelists, musicians, and poets usually do not have to deal with.

At the same time, game design and interaction design are quite dissimilar from other kinds of engineering processes. They require us sometimes to diverge from any kind of scientific method or wholly rigorous system of progression, and to use our intuition, instincts, and guesswork to realize the products of our imagination.

In this class, we will look at some techniques that you can use to bring your process under better control, and to take away some of the needless risk that can prevent a project from reaching its full potential. You will become more assured of making high-quality work with the limited time and resources that you have available to you, while continuing to find new patterns of interaction, new modes of self-expression, and new types of audience experience.

This is a class that will help you shed some old bad habits!

All of us have bad professional habits that we've picked up here and there because they worked for us in the short term, or at one time, or in a certain context. Many creative people don't think too much about the ways that they plan and manage their work. Creation seems to come naturally; we learn it in childhood or as teenagers, and without even realizing it, we pick up habits to do with the way we organize our work. We pull an all-nighter, "just this once," to meet an important milestone. Suddenly we find ourselves working all night every time a deadline comes around. We work seven days a week during a big project, "just for a couple of weeks," and suddenly realize that we have worked every day of the week for months on end, without a break. Many of us suffer from process blockages - like writer's block - that can sometimes stop us from making any work at all.

When challenged to organize or improve their creative methods, some people use the essentially chaotic nature of creativity as an excuse to avoid taking control of their process. *A lot of creativity is chaotic.* But that chaos can be respected, harnessed, and organized with the right production tools, to create good working habits and the best possible outcome for our projects. On the other hand, bad work habits - especially those that lead to uncontrolled overwork - can take a terrible toll on individuals and on teams, causing physical and psychological health problems, and causing organizations and businesses to permanently fail.

Most of us will struggle with our bad habits and blockages for the whole of our creative lives, and that is perfectly normal and natural. True learning almost always comes with a struggle, so get ready for a few "growing pains." Please use this class in a way that makes sense for you as a unique individual, to get rid of some old habits that aren't serving you well any more, and to pick up some new habits that will help you to become the kind of creative professional you want to be.

This is a class about game production!

This class challenges you to acquire new professional skills around design, production, and implementation, skills that will help you to conceptualize and create your future projects. The processes, attitudes, and techniques that you learn in this class will help you to identify and solve problems that arise as you work. The class will also help you to find new ways to make great games and interactive media while preserving your physical and psychological wellbeing and that of your teammates.

What we call "production" in this class is the same thing as "project management," and as a formal discipline it is closely related to the discipline of design. Without good production, good design will usually not result in a great game - and vice versa. People working exclusively or predominantly in the discipline of production are called "producers." Production sometimes goes by different names in our various related industries. It is usually called "production" or "project management" in the game industry and interaction design industry, but people doing work related to production might also be called "production coordinator," "project coordinator," "project facilitator," "product manager," "Product Owner," or "Scrum Master."

Production is often a clear-cut and practical discipline, where measurable and empirically verifiable facts are used to make informed and rational decisions about the course that a project will take. However, production is also a part of the creative process where facts and rationality meet the subjective aspects of design, art, and audience. A

great producer acknowledges the importance of the creative vision, values, and goals driving a project and learns to reconcile the practical constraints of time and money with creative people's aspirations towards excellence and innovation.

"...half the job is doing the job, and the other half is finding ways to get along with people and tuning yourself into the delicacy of the situation."

- Walter Murch

Producers also need the "soft skills" of communication, leadership, and collaboration. It is not enough to have good strategies to improve a project if your teammates and collaborators are not communicating clearly with each other, or are feeling badly about the project, each other, or you. This is probably the most challenging part of any collaborative creative practice, and this class will give you some practical advice about communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, and how to inspire people to do their very best work. As you develop these soft skills, you will be developing the aspect of your production ability that allows you to reconcile the measurable, objective needs of a project with its artistic, subjective goals.

So, then: this course is partly a digital interactive design and production "boot camp" where you will work in small teams and learn to create short, innovative digital game and interactive media experiences that have a longer development time and meet higher standards of polish than any that you have created so far in your USC Games career.

This is an art and design class!

The class is also an art and design class where you are almost completely free to explore your digital game and interactive media art making and design practice, learning to innovate and hone your craft in experience design, game mechanic design, interaction design, and interface design. Within the bounds of your collaboration with a classmate, and the agreements you reach together, you are free to address new and wide-ranging subject matter, new patterns of gameplay and interaction, and new types of audience experience.

The class is best suited to the creation of short games, which take around **five to ten minutes** to experience. This might seem short, but I am going to hold you to higher standards of production quality than anyone has held you to in our program so far. ***This is a class about creating quality, not quantity.*** We know that you can produce in volume: now I am challenging you to make experiences that are more detailed, layered, nuanced, rich, and polished than any you have made before.

Projects that work well in this class include short-form narrative games, virtual and augmented reality experiences, "alt controller" games with wildly unusual physical interfaces, simple eSports games, art games, "walking simulators," short side-scrolling platform games, hybrid performance art-digital interactive media pieces, networked games, and much else besides.

Teaming up

Teaming up into a pair of people for this class will allow you to focus on developing your collaborative skills throughout the semester. You'll have a chance to look closely at your communication style and the power dynamics that are at play in any collaborative work environment. Sometimes you'll have to take charge and lead; sometimes you'll have to follow and act in service of your teammate. Figuring out how best to communicate, when to lead and when to follow, will be a major part of the learning experience. We'll be on hand to help you with this, in either group or one-on-one office hours meetings.

(Teams in this class work best when they have just two people in them, because then issues of communication and interpersonal dynamics are brought to the fore. In a trio, the dynamics are much more complex, harder for us to help you to problem-solve around, and less useful as a learning experience.)

Students can either pair into teams without the instructor's input or can fill out a skills survey to be paired up by the instructor.

If we have an odd number of people in class, we may create a team of three. We will handle this issue with you if it arises.

Don't worry too much about who you end up working with - every working relationship offers us opportunities for learning, and a few challenges regarding project management and interpersonal skills will make for an even richer learning experience. **The best learning experiences in this class usually come from teams that have not worked together before, are not close friends, or even who do not get along particularly well.**

Please email me if you have any questions or concerns about this teaming up process. You are also encouraged to recruit additional team members from outside the class to help work on your project, although this is not required.

It's ok to have some initial discussion of the kind of project you'd like to make in class before the semester starts, but please don't begin work on your project in earnest until the semester begins.

What the class holds in store

The first three weeks of the class will be spent in the first of four project phases: this is the ideation phase, where we will create small prototypes and other ideation materials that we will discuss in class. We will then spend the remaining eleven weeks of the semester working through the other three project phases: preproduction, full production, and postproduction. Preproduction will see us committing to a core set of ideas for our project, building a vertical slice, and doing design and scheduling work to plan ahead. During full production we will reach the alpha milestone of the project. The beta milestone will mark the end of full production, and the beginning of postproduction, and the release candidate milestone (the final milestone of the project) will arrive at the end of Week 15.

As I said earlier: within the framework of the class, you have almost total freedom to create any kind of work that could be regarded as a digital game or piece of interactive media. You might find that the biggest challenge you face in exercising this freedom is coming to an agreement with your team partner about what to make. The class is designed to help you make the right decisions about your project at the right times, but **if you ever find yourself having a difficult time reaching agreement with your teammate about your project, immediately talk to me, the instructor, about it.** I recommend that you and your teammate let go of any preconceived ideas you might bring to your project before you start working and follow where your ideation prototypes lead you.

A large part of the course's content will be focused on in-class discussion, group critique and problem solving for each project. It is very important that you treat the development of your design projects professionally. You will be expected to participate actively in the discussions and critique sessions that take place in class, giving and receiving feedback that honors your fellow students with its depth of analysis and respect for their work.

"There is no such thing as a failed experiment, only experiments with unexpected outcomes."

- R. Buckminster Fuller

Ideally, the work you produce in this class will be good enough to be included in your creative portfolio, shown at an internship interview, or submitted to a festival. However, it really doesn't matter if your project doesn't work out well. In fact, I hope that you are going to make some mistakes in this class, so that you can learn from them, and not make them again while you're working on later projects.

In terms of your grade: even if you're not at all happy with the way that your project turns out, you can expect to do well in this class if you apply yourself earnestly to the course, complete the class assignments and meet the required milestones, and do your best to follow the advice I give you along the way.

The set of best practices, tools, and skills that I require you to use this semester are drawn from our instructors' experiences as designers and producers, and from the experiences of other professionals across the worlds of game development, interactive media, software development, and other creative industries and artistic fields. The methods that I'll teach you in this class aren't the only way to design and produce a project, but they will give you a good base of production knowledge to build on and should stand you in good stead for the rest of your time in the USC Games program and in your professional career.

I will go out of my way to provide you with all the support and help that you need while you are in my class. You matter a lot to me, and I will meet with you whenever you need to meet outside class. So please talk to me about any problems you encounter in my class. **When things go wrong for people and projects in CTIN-532, it is usually because people wait too long to come and discuss their problems with me.** Please know that, outside of the professional obligations I have to report any instances of discrimination, sexual assault, or harassment, I will always hold anything you tell me in complete confidence. You will not be "ratting out" your teammates by coming to me to discuss a disagreement or a conflict of personalities. Instead, we'll work together to help you with the communication challenges from which most conflicts arise, always remembering to treat our collaborators with respect and compassion. I will hold office hours every week and will almost always be able to meet with you outside of office hours if necessary, often at short notice.

The games and interactive experiences that you create in this class are going to be delightful, surprising, moving, and challenging. I'm looking forward to seeing what you create in our class, and to accompanying and guiding you on this next stage of your creative journey.

Learning Objectives

You will learn what it means to work "**playcentrically**" and collaboratively in greater depth than before, by working on a single project for a whole semester.

You will design iteratively in an intensive cycle of decision-making, implementation, playtesting, and design revision. You will learn what it means to hold onto the vision of a set of **project goals** while using an iterative design cycle over a longer time than you are used to. These are core learning goals of the USC Games program.

You will learn to tackle bigger challenges of **collaboration** than you have in the past, as you learn to apportion work, take responsibility for your individual and shared tasks, and negotiate with your teammate to solve problems and resolve conflicts. These are core learning goals of the USC Games program.

You will learn a design and production methodology based on the "Method" used at studios like Naughty Dog and Insomniac and which also incorporates attitudes and elements from "Agile development." You will learn to use this methodology to properly **plan, scope, and build a project in a way that reliably results in finished work that has a very high level of quality**, while **minimizing uncontrolled overwork**.

You will learn the meaning and practical application of the following concepts:

- Digital prototyping
- Vertical slice
- Game design macro
- Burndown chart
- Formal playtest
- Alpha milestone
- Beta milestone
- Release Candidate milestone

These are core learning goals of the USC Games program.

You should not come into class expecting to create an expansive story world or a long experience. Instead, you should aim to create a short, **very polished** playable or interactive experience, with a **total play time of between five and ten minutes**.

Prerequisite(s): open to MS students in the Viterbi School of Engineering Computer Science (Games) program, IMGD MFA students, and iMAP PhD students, as well as other interested and qualified students, by interview with the instructor.

Co-Requisite(s): none

Concurrent Enrollment: none

Recommended Preparation: a foundational level of game and/or interactive media design and development education, including an introduction to Unity

Course Notes

The Grading Type of this class is “letter grade.”

Class information will be posted on the course Discord server, rather than on Brightspace. Your grades will be shared with you via email. Copies of lecture slides and key class materials will be posted on the course Google Drive.

University guidelines recommend that students do two hours work outside class for every unit the course is worth. Our class is a four unit class; therefore, **we expect that you will spend at least eight hours each week outside of class working on your project and reading, viewing, or playing the class assignments**.

I am happy for you to spend more than this minimum amount of time working on the assignments I set. However, **uncontrolled overwork in this class - as in our professional lives - is very undesirable**, and I do not expect anyone to do more than twelve hours of classwork each week outside of class. **If you find that you are working on class assignments for more than twelve hours a week outside class, please contact me** to discuss how you can make your workload more manageable.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

For practical projects, it is expected that you will work in Unity. I understand that you may be using Unity for the first time, and I will work with you to make the learning process as easy as possible, and to fit with the assignments required by the class. If you and your partner both want to work in Unreal, that request can almost always be accommodated. If you want to work in another game engine or framework and can present a good argument for doing so (for example, if you wish to develop for a platform or interface that Unity does not support), please let me know, and we'll discuss your situation.

However, **don't worry too much about the skills that you do or don't have at the start of the class**; talk your concerns through with me and I will be able to advise you. I understand that everyone will enter the class with a unique set of digital content creation skills covering 2D art, 3D art, animation, audio design, programming, and version control. While it might be true that the larger the set of skills you have when entering this class, the better prepared for the class you will be, **I will be recommending in class that you design a project that is largely tailored to the existing skills that you and your teammate bring into the class. Great work can be made with any set of skills**. That said, I will also be recommending that you design a project that pushes you outside of your comfort zone in one or two areas, so you should expect to teach yourself some new digital content creation skills while taking this class.

The hardware and software required for use in this class are available in the classroom for those students who do not have access to them at home or on a laptop.

You are expected to bring an updated version of your project to every Friday class meeting, ready to either present it or work on it. If you do not have a laptop, the computers in our meeting room are available for your use, so please bring your project to class on a thumb drive.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The set book for this semester is:

A Playful Production Process: For Game Designers (and Everyone)
By Richard Lemarchand, MIT Press, 2021.

Supplementary materials listed in the syllabus will be available on the web, as handouts in class, or as digital files on the course website.

Specific readings cited below may be subject to change as the semester progresses.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

The class is comprised of a mixture of reading, viewing, written, and practical assignments. Clear and specific time-and-day milestones for each assignment, along with information about how to submit each assignment, will be detailed in the lecture slides.

Your work in this class will be assessed according to these assignments:

Ideation Prototypes

You will submit the prototypes that you make in the first three weeks of class for assessment, along with some accompanying notes in your team's development blog. I'll be hoping to see that you have performed a sequence of earnest and wide-ranging explorations within the bounds of your prototyping ability, in order to be able to create a project goal statement.

End of Preproduction Deliverables

The deliverables due at the end of preproduction phase of the project are a game design macro, a burndown chart, and a vertical slice, along with accompanying entries in your team's development blog.

Alpha milestone, Formal playtests, Beta milestone, Release Candidate milestone

At each of these milestones, taking place during full production and at the end of the project, you are required to submit a working build of your project, along with accompanying entries in your team's development blog, and in some cases, some other documentation.

Each of these practical assignments will be assessed according to detailed requirements that will be discussed in class and which are laid out in the assignment documentation. I will evaluate your work in the context of the accompanying entries in your team's development blog that you will provide with each assignment - so even if you struggled with a particular assignment, you can still get a good grade for the assignment if you can reflect clearly about the ways in which you struggled.

Grading Breakdown

For all practical coursework, please note that while high production values in terms of visual, audio and interaction design will contribute to good grades, earnestly attempting to engage with the requirements of each assignment is the most important influence on your grade. The best way to demonstrate that you have taken note of and attempted to meet the requirements for each assignment is by reflecting on your process in the entries in your team's development blog that you will submit with each practical assignment.

Ideation prototypes	15
End of preproduction deliverables	15
Alpha milestone	20
Formal playtests	10
Beta milestone	20
Release Candidate milestone	20
Total:	100

Grading Scale

The grade you earn for each assignment will be derived from my evaluation of your work in the context of the assignment rubric, and will be calculated according to this scale.

Percentage of available points awarded	Corresponding Grade	
0-59	F	Complete absence of evidence of learning.
60-69	D	Little evidence of learning. Poor performance in all aspects of the assignment.
70-72	C-	Work of lower than fair quality. Failing grade for graduate credit
73-76	C	Work of fair quality. Minimum passing grade for graduate credit
77-79	C+	Work of satisfactory quality in most of the assignment, with the remainder being somewhat substandard
80-82	B-	Work of satisfactory quality
83-86	B	Work of good quality
87-89	B+	Work of high quality in all or most aspects of the assignment
90-92	A-	Work of excellent quality in most aspects of the assignment; high quality work in the remainder
93-100	A	Work of excellent quality

Attendance

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an 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.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading

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

Additionally, we may ask you to withdraw if your total absences become excessive.

However, these guidelines may be altered in respect of absences that are for illness, family emergencies, and (with advance notice) commitments related to a scholarship you are receiving, e.g. for a varsity sport or commitments related to your professional practice, such as to attend a festival where you are showing a game or a conference where you are speaking. You must contact us as soon as possible regarding your absence. Generally, we will expect to hear from you before class; in exigent circumstances I would expect to hear from you within 24 hours. If we do not hear from you in a timely fashion, you may forfeit your option to make up what you have missed.

All that said:

- **If you are sick, stay home.** You need to be healthy to learn, and so do your classmates (and instructor).
- We do not distinguish between mental health and physical health. If you cannot complete an assignment on time or come to class because of mental health issues, you must contact us promptly, just as with physical health problems.

Giving Credit

You must provide credit for all art, sound, and other assets that are included in your game and that you didn't make yourself. Ultimately, this should be included in the game executable, as part of a credits page or post-game scroll. During development, you may not have a credits page implemented in your game, so you may instead include credits in a text file that you distribute alongside your executable. (For example, you can add a README.TXT or credits.txt file to the folder that contains your executable and include it in the ZIP folder that you turn in.)

It is normal and good to copy or adapt someone else's code. If you copy 3 or more lines and do not modify them, you must provide credit, both in your credits page or text file, and also in comments that specify the original author and link to the source.

All other assets (images, models, text, audio, etc.) that you use must not only be credited, but also appropriately licensed. You can use assets that fall into the public domain or include a public domain license, an appropriate Creative Commons license, or another license that explicitly permits your usage of the work. Include license information for these assets alongside their credits.

AI Usage

The use of large language model (LLM) tools such as ChatGPT to complete written assignments and exercises in this class is not permitted. However, these tools are permitted to assist with the creation of game code. Any code generated with the assistance of these tools should include comments indicating how it was generated.

The use of generative AI image generation tools such as Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and DALL-E to create images for presentations, concept visualization, and game assets is permitted, provided assets are identified as such.

If you have any questions about this policy, please consult the instructor.

Fair Use

Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. The Interactive Media & Games Division of USC's School of the Cinematic Arts seeks to apply a reasonable working definition of fair use that will enable students and instructors to develop multimedia projects without seeking authorization for non-commercial, educational uses. In keeping with section 107 of the Copyright Act we recognize

four factors that should be considered when determining whether a use is fair: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. In general, we regard the reproduction of copyrighted works for the purposes of analysis or critique in this class to be covered by the principle of fair use.

All works used as assets in your game under assumed fair use must be credited in your credits page or text file, and the assumption of fair use should be included alongside their credits.

Social Media Use in Class

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

Content Warnings

If you include content in the work that you produce which may cause distress to your fellow students, please tell me (the instructor) before showing the work in class and make a verbal “content warning” immediately before you present the work in class. Also include a written content warning, either at the beginning of a piece of written work or in the dev blog of a project, when you submit the work for grading.

This is not intended to limit the subject matter that you address with your work; it is intended to expand it. This simple approach is intended to create an environment in which you are free to address any subject matter that you wish, no matter how challenging, explicit, or controversial, in a spirit of respect and consideration for your classmates and instructor.

Students who ever feel the need to step outside class during the presentation or discussion of work that warrants a content warning may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see the instructor individually.

The next paragraph contains potentially triggering topics—please feel free to skip ahead.

Content which requires a content warning includes graphic depictions or descriptions of violence, sexual acts, racial, sexual or cultural stereotyping, abuse (especially sexual abuse or torture), self-harming behavior such as suicide, self-inflicted injuries, disordered eating, body shaming, and depictions, especially lengthy or psychologically realistic ones, of the mental state of someone suffering abuse or engaging in self-harming behavior.

If you have any questions about what requires a content warning, relating to story, game mechanics, and interaction patterns, please let me (the class instructor) know.

If you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to material presented in class, either with the class or with us afterwards, we welcome such discussion as an appropriate part of our coursework.

Inclusivity and Diversity

In this class, we make a commitment together to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that you will be expected to offer content warnings when appropriate, use students’ 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 encouraged to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for your program.

In making games and interactive media in a professional and ethical way, it is important that you consider diversity. 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.

Guidelines for Group Critique

Giving and receiving constructive feedback is a key element of critique. Follow these guidelines:

1. Pair your critiques with compliments. Before pointing out something that you think could be improved, point out something that you like or something that you think has exciting potential.
2. Consider suggesting possible solutions. It can be discouraging to simply hear what somebody thinks is “wrong.” Offering ideas for changes or additions that you think might improve your classmates’ work can emotionally and intellectually inspire them.
3. Speak from the “I.” Rather than stating your critique as fact or your suggestions as imperatives, start your sentences with phrases like “I think...” or “I feel...” or “If this were my game, I would...” Many people use the technique popularized by design firm IDEO, and make a statement in the form of “I like... I wish... what if...?”
4. Listen carefully and calmly. Avoid the urge to defend your work, unless you feel like that defense adds something important to the conversation. Thank your colleague for their feedback.

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](#).

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

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

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

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

Course Evaluations

Learning Experience Evaluations will be conducted in the last week of the semester. This will be your opportunity to provide feedback about your learning experience in the class. This feedback helps the instructor determine whether students are having the intended learning experiences for the class. It is important to remember that the learning process is collaborative and requires significant effort from the instructor, individual students, and the class as a whole. Students should provide a thoughtful assessment of their experience, as well as of their own effort, with comments focused on specific aspects of instruction or the course. Comments on personal characteristics of the instructor are not appropriate and will not be considered. For this feedback to be as comprehensive as possible, all students should complete the evaluation.

Syllabus Updates

This syllabus is liable to change up to the beginning of class and possibly over the semester. Please check the posted syllabus regularly and note all changes that are shared by the instructor in class.

Course Schedule

This course is organized into four phases, which mirrors the four project phases outlined in *A Playful Production Process*: Ideation, Preproduction, Full Production, and Postproduction.

Phase 1: Ideation | Weeks 1-3

During the **ideation** phase you'll use various blue sky thinking techniques (such as brainstorming, mindmapping, and automatism) to generate ideas for your project this semester. A prototype is due each week to help you explore ideas for your game. This is the most open phase of development where you have freedom to explore

creative and innovative ideas. By the end of ideation your team will have a set of **project goals** that will guide you through the rest of development.

Week 1 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Course overview and class expectations ● Ideation, brainstorming, and prototyping ● Team Character Sheets ● Time Commitment Calculations 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-Semester Assignment
Week 1 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication skills: fundamentals ● Preparing for a playtest ● How to run a successful playtest ● Communication skills: feedback 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● W01 - Team Character Sheets ● W01 - Time Commitment Calculations ● W01 - Brainstorm Exercise ● Reading: <i>PPP</i> Chapters 1-4 ● Reading: Catastrophic Prototyping and Other Stories by Chaim Gingold
Week 2 - Tuesday	
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day No Class	
Week 2 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Three Cs ● Playtest session 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● W02 - Prototype 1 - Hypothesis ● W02 - Team Dev Log W02 ● Reading: <i>PPP</i> Chapters 5, 6, 12
Week 3 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wellness, self-care, and thriving ● Project goals ● Playtest session 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● W03 - Prototype 2 - The Cheap Version ● W03 - Ideas Spreadsheet ● Reading: <i>PPP</i> Chapter 7

Week 3 - Friday

In Class:

- Guest lecture: Gina Zdanowicz
- Method and Agile
- The Vertical Slice

Due:

- [W03 - Project Goals Statement \(Draft\)](#)
- [W03 - Team Dev Log W03](#)
- Reading: *PPP* Chapters 8, 9
- Watch: [Method](#) by Mark Cerny
- Watch: [Sound Design and Collaboration](#) by Gina Zdanowicz

Phase 2: Preproduction | Weeks 4-6

Preproduction is the most important phase of game development. This is where you'll take the project goals generated during ideation to narrow your focus, answer tough questions, and create several deliverables that will guide you through the rest of development.

At the end of preproduction, you'll have a **vertical slice** (with a beautiful corner) that demonstrates what kind of game you're making and what it will look like; you'll have a **game design macro** that provides a 10,000 foot view of your project from start to finish; and you'll have a schedule in the form of a **burndown chart** to help you track your progress through the rest of development.

Week 4 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Shifting gears to preproduction
- Berklee Audio Guidelines
- Playtest session

Due:

- [W04 - Prototype 3 - What Remains](#)
- Reading: *PPP* Chapters 10, 11, 13

Week 4 - Friday

In Class:

- Game Design Macro
- Concentric development
- Perforce

Due:

- [W04 - Project Goals Statement \(Revised\)](#)
- [W04 - Berklee Audio Guideline](#)
- [W04 - Team Dev Log #3](#)

Week 5 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Perforce
- Story structures
- Unity: scenes, coroutines
- Burndown Chart

Due:

- Reading: *PPP* Chapters 17, 18

Week 5 - Friday

In Class:

- Milestones and Braintrusts
- Burndown chart workshop
- Macro reviews
- Juice and sound

Due:

- [W05 - Game Design Macro \(Draft\)](#)
- [W05 - Burndown Chart \(Draft\)](#)
- [W05 - Team Dev Log #4](#)
- Reading: *PPP* Chapters 14, 19, 21
- Watch: [Juice it or lose it](#)

Week 6 - Tuesday

Presidents' Day

No Class

Week 6 - Friday

In Class:

- Review burndown charts
- Review macros w professor
- Playtest session

Due:

- [W06 - Vertical Slice](#)
- [W06 - Burndown Chart \(Revised\)](#)
- [W06 - Game Design Macro \(Revised\)](#)
- [W06 - Team Dev Log #5](#)

Phase 3: Full Production | Weeks 7-12

Full production is the longest phase of development; it's where you will execute on your schedule generated during preproduction. You will achieve two milestones: the **alpha milestone** ("feature complete" and "sequence complete") and the **beta milestone** ("content complete"). Along the way, you'll run two **formal playtests** and collect **metrics** from your game to measure how successful your game is at reaching your project goals.

Week 7 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- Braintrust - VS presentations (part 1)

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- [W07 - Vertical Slice Braintrust Presentation](#)
- Reading: *PPP* Chapter 22

Week 7 - Friday

In Class:

- Shifting gears to full production
- Alpha milestone
- Braintrust - VS presentations (part 2)

Due:

- [W07 - Team Dev Log #6](#)

Week 8 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- Metrics
- Sustainable development
- Portfolios

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- Watch: [No More Heroes](#)
- Reading: *PPP* Chapters 26, 27, 28
- Reading: [It's Not Just Standing Up](#)

Week 8 - Friday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- Playtest session

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- [W08 - Pre-Alpha b1](#)
- [W08 - Audio Asset Tracking Sheet](#)
- [W08 - Team Dev Log #7](#)

Week 9 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- Types of testing
- Stubbing content

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- Reading: *PPP* Chapter 23, 24, 25, 29

Week 9 - Friday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- Unity fundamentals: custom editors
- Bug tracking
- Playtest session

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- [W09 - Pre-Alpha b2](#) with metrics integration
- [W09 - Team Dev Log #8](#)

SPRING BREAK

Week 10 - Tuesday

In Class:

- Standup meeting
- The beta milestone
- Preparing for the formal playtest

Due:

- Update burndown chart
- Playtest script
- Playtest questionnaire
- Invite a playtester
- Reading: *PPP* Chapter 31, 34

Week 10 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal playtest (alpha) 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> W10 - Alpha Milestone W10 - Team Dev Log #9
Week 11 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Braintrust - alpha presentations (part 1) 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> W11 - Alpha Milestone Braintrust Presentation W11 - Alpha Milestone Playthrough Video
Week 11 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standup meeting Braintrust - alpha presentations (part 2) 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update burndown chart W11 - Team Dev Log #10
Week 12 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standup meeting Trailers 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update burndown chart Playtest script Playtest questionnaire Formal playtest data analysis
Week 12 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standup meeting Introducing the metrics presentation assignment Playtest session 	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update burndown chart Invite a playtester W12 - Beta Milestone W12 - Team Dev Log #11

Phase 4: Postproduction | Weeks 13-15

Postproduction is the phase of development where you tie up loose ends, fix bugs, add polish, and stabilize your game. An important part of every project is to reflect on what you learned, what you'd do differently, and plan for

the future. At the end of postproduction, you will have a **release candidate** - a version of your game that is ready to publish or submit to festivals.

Week 13 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal playtest (beta)	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Playtest build
Week 13 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shifting gears one last time• The Release Candidate• Braintrust - beta presentations (part 1)	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• W13 - Beta Milestone Braintrust Presentation• W13 - Beta Milestone Playthrough Video• Questionnaire data entry• W13 - Team Dev Log #12
Week 14 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Braintrust - beta presentations (part 2)	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading: <i>PPP</i> Chapters 32, 33
Week 14 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data presentations• Trailer workshop	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data Presentation• Draft trailer• W14 - Team Dev Log #13
Week 15 - Tuesday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class reflection and postpartum discussion• Looking toward the future• Overflow presentations	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading: <i>PPP</i> Chapter 36
Week 15 - Friday	
In Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Release candidate presentations	Due: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• W15 - Release Candidate• W15 - Final Presentation• Final trailer• W15 - Team Dev Log #14

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

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. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at 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

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