Advanced Games Business

USC School of Cinematic Arts

CTIN 468 Instructor: Ed Zobrist

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Course Description:

The course will be in person unless indicated otherwise. This course assumes a basic familiarity of business and, hopefully but not as a requirement, the student has previously taken any introductory business course at USC. Students considering this course MUST have some familiarity with interactive entertainment and anyone who does not play games is not encouraged to take this class. Anyone who is interested in a career in games or entertainment, including those will focus on the creative or technical aspects of the industry, will benefit from this course. This course focuses on the business practices and thinking within the interactive entertainment industry and all materials and examples will come from the interactive entertainment industry. We and our guests will explore how the game industry has evolved, the current landscape, and future opportunities. We'll look at the spectrum from small indie games to large AAA games. The business of mobile, PC/Mac, console, VR/AR games and more will be examined.

A fundamental principle is how you think about a situation is more important that what you do. This class does not require memorization and there will be no tests. There will be extensive use of expert guest speakers who will share their thinking on the biggest developments in the game industry. We will explore how business influences game development and de-mystify the decision-making process. Taking this course will show you how to conduct yourself at a game company. You will participate in a manner similar to the professionals you aspire to emulate, with a focus on knowledge gathering, analysis and expressing proactive views in a group setting that will compel your peers to adopt your proposals.

Ed Zobrist has extensive experience in the game industry as an entrepreneur, General Manager, consumer marketing executive, game designer/producer. He was been involved with hit products totaling >$30B in sales including Fortnite (led the marketing/publishing launch at Epic Games), The Simpsons Hit & Run

video game (marketing), TipTop from PopCap (producer/designer) and He-Man: Masters of the Universe toys (marketing, animated series episode writer).

Student Feedback

"The guest speakers were amazing and I've applied so much of their advice into my professional life and it landed me an internship."

"This was a great and very informative class!! By far one of the favorites I've taken!"

"One of the best professor's I've had so far at USC."

"The most valuable class I've taken at USC."

Meeting Information

Lecture, Speakers, Participation and Discussion: Up to 3 but usually 2.5 hours/week

Evaluation of student performance

The course will have ongoing in-class assignments, a solo midterm project and a final group "tear down" project. Students will be graded based on applying critical thinking and creativity to their work, and participation in class activities. Attendance is mandatory.

Grading Assignments

1) Minor homework assignments will sometimes be assigned.
2) Class participation: Students are expected to verbally contribute to class discussions.
3) Half-way through the semester, each student will present a solo five minute report on whether or not to acquire a real world game (student selected) which a hypothetical company is considering.
4) Final requirement are group presentations of a "teardown" of a real world game. The presentation deconstructs the creative, business, and live operations of a real world game (student selected), and propose future strategies to grow the game.

Grade value will be apportioned as follows:

Homework	15
Participation	25
Mid-Term Presentation	25
Final Presentation	35
Total:	**100**

Course content

Due to the evolving nature of guest availability and industry changes, weekly topics are listed below but the order, and topics for that matter, are subject to change.

Introduction to the Class: Syllabus overview and intro to course

Publishing: Market evolution, strategic planning, platforms

Social graph: Evolution from PR to influencers/creators

Product Management: Use of analytics to guide decision-making

Incubation/Greenlighting: How to determine what to develop

Team dynamics: Synergies that leverage creative and business development

Pop Culture: Relevance to modern gaming including entertainment licenses integrated with games

Entrepreneurial: Startups, indie game development, early-stage funding (eg, venture capital and Kickstarter).

Megatrends: Metaverse, blockchain, NFT's, play to earn, UGC.

Career opportunities: Overview of career paths and how to explore them.

Missing an Assignment, Incompletes:

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructor before the assignment is due 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 before final grades are due.

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 8:30am5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity:

The School of Interactive Media 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 or submitting work authored by anyone other than yourself or your team. 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.

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 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).