USC Games

Advanced Game Project Fall 2024

CTIN 291 - Section 18413
CTIN 491L - Section 18370
CTIN 491L Directors - Sections 18418, 18422
CSCI 491aL - Section 29989
CTIN 591 - Section 18371
CSCI 529a - Section 29992

Units: 4
Fall Semester 2024: Thursdays from 2:00pm-5:20pm
Location: USC Games Studios aka EGG Building **@ 746 West Adams, Los Angeles, CA 90089**
(students will be notified in advance if there is a change of class location)
+
Kerckhoff Hall **for Project Review @ 734 West Adams Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90007**
ALWAYS meet in EGG Building at the Beginning of Class

Instructors:
Contact Info: agp-faculty-2025-2026@googlegroups.com

Lead Instructor:
David White (Faculty Lead)
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Office Hours: TBA
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AGP Instructors w/their Functional Roles:

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Course Description

This class is where third- and fourth-year undergraduate and graduate students in Design, Computer Science-Games, and other disciplines from a variety of USC and external partner schools are exposed to working on teams needing both technical skill as well as the emotional maturity to work within a collaborative group. CTIN 491 etc. intentionally models the world of professional game development: the post-graduate workplace we are preparing students for.

The most important feature of this class is that it empowers students to work as a team to execute a collaborative creative vision and have fun in the process.

Advanced Games Projects (AGP) is a capstone class where undergraduates and graduates from Cinema IMGD and Viterbi collaborate on large-team games projects, working with students from departments across the University, including—but not limited to—Thornton, Marshall, Annenberg, and Roski. AGP also partners with complementary Art Schools around the US, with a focus on schools in Southern California to facilitate team in-person meetings and instruction.

This class is where advanced undergraduate/graduate students will need both technical skills and emotional maturity to work within a collaborative group. CTIN 491 intentionally models the world of professional game development- the post-graduate workplace we are preparing students for. The finished product is often used as a key portfolio piece for job seekers.

Before taking the class, students will have learned the core principles of game design, can work in-engine, and have collaborated on smaller teams on projects. In AGP, students will take those skills to the next level, bringing their individual talents into a comparatively large team that will operate like a small development studio. Team members will work collaboratively on one large project for an extended period and incorporate faculty (aka "publishing") feedback and direction as needed. The full production course covers two semesters from Fall through Spring.

The selection of the slate of AGP projects is made in the year prior through a rigorous pitch process. Key roles on these teams must be staffed by registered class members. Team Leads work closely with instructors and mentors to learn to manage their teams and contribute to a large project, while individual team members participate regularly in workshops to learn about their functional roles and actively work on challenges they are facing during the development of their respective games.

Teams learn to work through sprints and defined goals to meet a larger schedule, regularly presenting their work in class for feedback from their fellow students, instructors, and external industry experts, while working in a professionally modeled production environment. The class culminates as the centerpiece of the annual USC Games Expo presentation at the end of the Spring semester, where students showcase and represent their work to a large community of industry professionals.

Teams will be given odd and even numbering and we will review "odds" and "evens" on alternate weeks to allow enough time for quality feedback.

In addition, there will be the following weekly meetings:

- Game Directors will meet at a to be determined day/time to discuss topics the director role, with a focus on creative process management, team leadership.
- Game Directors will meet on a to be determined day/time to discuss project issues and blockers as well as faculty requests.

Learning Objectives

The goal of the course is for students to work as a team over the course of a school year to design and develop a fully polished, playable 10-30-minute game demo, ready for professional demonstration, prepared for consumer play and faculty evaluation by the end of the school year. This demo will encompass a segment of the game which highlights its core design pillars, has polished art and animation, is fun, intuitive, and fully playable with minimal bugs by the time they achieve "gold master" in May.

AGP offers students a window into their future careers, providing the closest academic experience of working in the Games industry. Before taking the class, students will have learned the key principles of game design, can work in-engine, and have collaborated on smaller teams on projects. In AGP, students will take those skills and operate as a "small studio," working collaboratively on one large project for an extended period and incorporating faculty direction as needed. Once again, as mentioned above, the finished product is often used as a key portfolio piece for job seekers.

Focused feedback on both process and product from instructors provides a solid foundation to facilitate project-based learning. Lectures and hands-on guidance on project management, design, production, research, and publishing, gives students a taste of the "real world" that they'll experience as they embark on their careers as professional game creators. Students working in specific "functional areas" will have focused sessions with instructors to learn the skills of their position and troubleshoot the inevitable problems that arise during development. The class will teach all students a better understanding of their roles on larger teams, what everyone does, and how to collaborate as part of a game development process from concept to "ship."

Working Hours

The standard formula of two hours of work outside class per unit per week is the minimum expectation for hours put into an AGP project. Students are expected to perform at the high levels needed to build quality interactive experiences. Dedication to the team and its shared goals is expected.

Key Milestones and Deliverables (minimum requirements)

Pre-Mid Term Key Deliverable- **First playable**, A **graybox-only** hands-on demonstration of the core mechanic.

First Semester Mid Term- **GDD Presentation + List of Technical Challenges + 360 Feedback Pilot**, A full-class presentation by multiple team members of the "Final" Game Design Document (GDD), Engineering Technical Challenges, and—returning for 2024-25—a limited 360-Feedback Pilot.

Fall Semester Final- **State of the game**. Roughly five minutes of gameplay featuring one or more of the distinct beats or movements of the game flow and "left-to-go" elements and blockers to get to Alpha when classes resume in January. This will serve as a "stake in the ground" for December.

Spring Semester Month 1- **Alpha Build.** In or around week 3 of the second semester, the teams will deliver their Alpha builds for review.

Spring Semester Late Mid Term- **Beta Build**. Feature complete, version of the demo, final assets incorporated. The Demo at this stage should be "ready to ship, except for a few bugs"

Spring Semester Final- **"Gold Master"/ USC Games Expo.** Roughly 10-30 minutes of highly polished gameplay. Entire build should be distributable for publishing.

Prerequisite(s): CTIN 489L Intermediate Game Design and Production (unless AGP crew: CTIN291 and CTIN 591)

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None
Recommended Preparation: CTIN 458, CTIN 497
Course Notes: Letter Grade

Description and Assessment of Assignments
Assignments are laid out in an [Integrated Milestone Calendar](#) which provides **general direction** on deliverables and due dates. The "Key Milestones" listed above are the priority, but other assignments are due throughout the school year. The Milestone Calendar is regularly updated, as each project has its own unique velocity, and faculty will adjust dates as necessary. **IMPORTANT**: the due dates for non-Key Milestone projects are not rigid or meant to be a "one-size-fits-all" process. Each project is different and has its own production flow. If teams need more time, support, and direction, they can notify the Lead Instructor(s) and appropriate Functional-Specific Faculty. All due dates are subject to change. See the linked calendar above for the exact dates.

Game and Narrative Design Documents
Game Design / Technical Design / Narrative Walkthrough Documents (due week 1)
Final Narrative Story Design (due week 3)
"Final" Team Milestone Dates Set (due week 5)
Marketing Creative Brief Due (due week 10)
Art Bible (due final week of Fall semester)
Game Design "Depository" of documents (due as needed by project, should be shared with team + instructors)

Playable Game Level
Delivered as an executable or application
Must show off and demonstrate the key features of the game
The level must be working software - e.g. not a mockup
The level should include art assets appropriate for your project including SFX, music, animation, HUD/GUI

(Zipped) project on server
We expect your game to be delivered as weekly builds posted on Perforce by 5PM PST every Tuesday.
If your team is running late in "pushing" to Perforce by the deadline, it is the team's responsibility—via their Creative Director or Lead Producer—to notify the faculty via email.

Project Properly Organized on Server Directory
We expect proper organization and version control of your project on Perforce, following best practices outlined by faculty at the beginning of the year.

Marketing Deliverables
Marketing Content can be developed in a variety of different ways/formats, but the final elements used will be based on consumer feedback/preference determined via research.

Key Art / Game Poster
We expect each team to produce a marketing-style game poster that tells the story and promotes the game.

5-10 Screenshots: Focusing on different stages or features
Focusing on different stages or features Show off the key features of the game
These shots can be used for your website or personal portfolio.

Gameplay Video – edited, 30 seconds-3 minutes in length
We expect you to make a polished video showing off the game, usable to market to festivals, individuals, and others.

Game Microsite/Website
We expect each team to create a marketing website or microsite for your game that incorporates all the materials described above.

All teams must present and demo at USC Games Expo at the end of school year.

Grading and Evaluation Framework:

Performance Measurement
The Advanced Games Project is a ***project-focused*** class. In alignment with professional industry standards, student performance in this course will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. **Overall Project Development and Deliverables**
2. **Individual Contributions**

Grading will reflect the quality of project development, deliverables, and adherence to defined goals and processes. All projects start with a baseline grade of "B+," which can be adjusted up or down depending on the quality of the outcomes and the effectiveness of the development processes employed.

Grading is structured to balance individual accountability with collaborative success. By adhering to the Weekly Task Sheet and milestone reviews, students can ensure transparent and fair evaluation of their contributions throughout the course.

Due to the unique requirements of each project, it is impossible to establish a rigid structure that categorically assesses qualities such as attitude, willingness to help, code efficacy, project significance, foresight, insight, honesty, collaborative spirit, and other intangible attributes vital to effective teamwork but unrelated to coding. Nevertheless, these traits are invaluable and play a crucial role in the success of the project.

Grading Breakdown

Project Grade (Overall Team Grade)

The overall project grade reflects the team's success in meeting its goals. This grade will be assigned to the Project Director and serves as the foundation for individual evaluations.

Individual Grade

Individual grades are derived from the project's overall grade but may be adjusted based on task performance as documented in the Weekly Task Sheet.

Weekly Task Sheet and Color-Coding System

The Weekly Task Sheet is a tool to track task completion and assess individual contributions. Each team member's agreed-upon or assigned tasks will be recorded weekly, along with their completion status, represented through the following color codes:

The Lead Producer (or a designated individual) will update the color coding each week. Once assigned, color codes should not be altered. Accurate tracking ensures timely redistribution or reassignment of tasks when necessary.

Color Coding

Color	Meaning
Blue	The task was completed with additional stretch tasks documented.
Green	The task was completed on time.
Yellow	The task was partially completed (50% or more).
Red	The task was not worked on or absent.
Gray	The student is no longer participating in the team.

Grade Adjustments Based on Weekly Task Sheet

Condition	Adjustment
3+ Blue	Increase grade by 2/3 (e.g., B to A-)
3-5 Red	Decrease grade by 1/3 (e.g., B+ to B)
6+ Red	Decrease grade by 2/3 (e.g., B+ to B-)
3 Yellow = 1 Red	Grade penalties as above apply.

Grading Milestones and Review Cadence

Fall Semester

- **Mid-Term Review** (Non-Recorded): Faculty provides progress feedback on the project trajectory. This grade is for guidance only and will not be recorded.
- **State of the Game Review** (Recorded): Faculty evaluates the project's current state to determine the overall PROJECT GRADE for the semester. Individual grades may be adjusted based on Weekly Task Sheet performance.

Spring Semester

- **Alpha Review** (Non-Recorded): Faculty provides progress feedback on the project trajectory. This grade is for guidance only and will not be recorded.
- **Beta Review** (Non-Recorded): Faculty provides progress feedback on the project trajectory. This grade is for guidance only and will not be recorded.
- **Release Candidate Review** (Recorded): Faculty evaluates the final project to assign the FINAL PROJECT GRADE. Individual grades may be adjusted based on Weekly Task Sheet performance.

Important: The faculty of USC IMGD reserves the right to cancel any AGP production due to lack of team performance and reassign the team members to another project.

Assignment Submission Policy
During class, each team must be ready to present the current state of the game when called upon, and individuals on each team must be prepared to discuss his/her work from the previous week. Some weeks, there will be presentations, which require the teams to be ready to present the game or an aspect of the game or its production process to the class and instructors. However, ***EVERY*** week, each team ***must*** have a playable build, even if it's the prior week's build as backup.

Other assignments are the sprints teams determine for themselves, and area leads are responsible for assigning tasks to their team members as a part of the sprint.

Team members are expected to put in time in the advanced games laboratory to work on their tasks for each sprint.

Team members and leaders are expected to bring the results of sprints and active development problems to the workshop meetings with instructors.

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes:
The only acceptable excuses for missing a Key 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 instructor or student assistant before final grades are due.

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.

Attendance Policy:
Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an unexcused absence from class unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media & Games Division handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading
● Three or more absences: lower grade one full grade point (for example, from A to B)
● Five or more absences: request to withdraw from a course (instructor's discretion)

Social media, including text messaging and internet messaging, are not allowed to be used during class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using them.

Diversity
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 my 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.

Additional Policies
Add any additional policies that students should be aware of: late assignments, missed classes, attendance expectations, use of technology in the classroom, etc.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown
- (Please see most-recent Integrated Milestone Calendar for a week-by-week breakdown). **These dates are subject to change based on individual faculty discretion.**

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems
Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism on the OAI website https://academicintegrity.usc.edu/.

Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information on university policies on scientific misconduct, https://academicintegrity.usc.edu/.

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).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the *Department of Public Safety* https://dps.usc.edu/. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *Sexual Assault Prevention and Survivor Services* https://sites.usc.edu/clientservices/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage https://dps.usc.edu/safety-tips/sexual-assault-and-violence/ describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems
Several of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services https://osas.usc.edu/ provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* *http://emergency.usc.edu/*will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Disruptive Student Behavior:
Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

Safer Spaces:
In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will issue content warnings as appropriate, use preferred pronouns, and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together. If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for the division, who can discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

Syllabus Updates:
This syllabus is subject to change up to the beginning of class and possibly over the semester. Please check the posted syllabus and [Integrated Milestone Calendar](#) regularly, and note all changes that are shared by the instructor in class.