

IMGD 1000: Critical Studies of Interactive Media and Games D Term 2016

TF 10-11:50 AM
Fuller Labs 311

Instructor: Dr. Alexandrina Agloro

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Office Hours: Friday 8 AM-10 AM or by appointment, SL 208

Course Description:

This course is one part critique and analysis, one part design, and one part *Project Runway*. Yes, *Project Runway*. One day each week we will explore design theory, game studies, and critically analyze existing games to grow a vocabulary for talking about interactive media and games. Each week students will be presented with a game design challenge, and every week students will rapidly design a game that follows the weekly theme and challenge. Using the acquired language around game design analysis and critique, students will present their designs each week in a classroom showdown.

Course Objectives:

Students who take this course will be able to:

- Fearlessly take design risks that might fail
- Learn basic game design fundamentals
- Understand games as cultural artifacts
- Understand games as reflections of culture
- Articulate design choices
- Succinctly present designs according to a theme

Grading:

Resume of Failures: 10%

Weekly Game Design Challenge (presentation, 1 page write-up): 70%

Participation: 20%

Class Attendance and Participation

Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance and participation are requirements for passing this course. Since a critical part of your grade involves being physically in class to present your designs, more than 1 unexcused absence will result in a participation grade penalty. Valid excuses include illness and religious observances. You are responsible for making up your own work.

This class will be most successful, and you will get the most out of it, if we work together as a group. This means the honest and thoughtful sharing of our ideas. The portion of your grade based on participation will reflect not how many times you speak in class, but how you share in developing a lively and respectful conversation. Thoughtful participation can take many forms—expressing your own ideas, asking a question, critiquing the day's reading, drawing connections,

and respectfully challenging the ideas of other students and the instructor. Reading quizzes will be instituted if it becomes evident that students are not reading.

Weekly Discussion Posts: Weekly discussion posts are part of your participation grade. By 8 AM each non-presentation day of class, students will post 3 questions or comments about the day's reading. These posts are not graded for content—completion of the 3 questions/comments will receive a ✓, incomplete posts will earn a 0.

Resume of Failures:

The first assignment is to create a one-page resume of your failures. In our high achieving environments, we are encouraged to only show our successes and hide the things that were less than stellar, even if it was a learning experience. The goal of this exercise is for students to reflect on past mistakes and failures and how those moments have contributed to personal development and growth. This resume should be formatted exactly like a professional resume with headings, titles, bullet point descriptions, etc. that include awards, acceptances, assignments, projects, performances, jobs, and other things that didn't turn out as planned. And just like a resume, keep it to one page. *Due in class Tuesday, March 22 hard copy.*

Weekly Game Design Challenge:

This is our one part *Project Runway*. The weekly game design challenge has three components: (1) design a game in accordance to the weekly theme, (2) a 4-minute presentation in class, and (3) a one-page write up about your game.

1. Design a game in alignment with the weekly theme:

This course explores different themes and ideas and students will design a game within the parameters of each assigned theme. Note: students do not have to build a polished, completed game each week from start to finish. The game design challenge requires students to think through ***design*** and give careful thought to mechanics, aesthetic, rhetoric, and the game's relationship to the weekly theme.

2. Deliver a 4-minute presentation

Each student will have 4 minutes to describe what their game is; the rules, mechanics, and necessary information about their game; and their aesthetic choices. The presentations must use visuals, either as paper prototype/storyboarding or as presentation slides. Warning: part of this challenge is getting your point across within a limited amount of time, so presentations will be strictly held to 4 minutes. Additional advice: Wow your judges! The presentation itself is as important as the material you're discussing, so don't forget to add the dazzle.

Two student presentations will be selected as winners from each design challenge.

The prize: Students who win the design challenge will be exempt from having to create and present a game the following week. There is no limit to how many times a student can win.

3. One-page write up about your game

Students will turn in via myWPI to the professor a one-page write up that explains your decision making process for each game. This reflection explains the choices you made and why, rather than what the game is and how it works. Inevitably, some of the game mechanics will come up in

your explanations, but the focus of this write up is to work on articulating the significance of your design choices. While these questions may not be relevant for every game every week, here are some questions to reflect upon and answer:

- Why did you choose the characters you chose?
- Why did you choose the setting/scenery/background/location you chose?
- For what reasons did you choose the characters you chose?
- What is your game's aesthetic?
- Name some defining characteristics of your game's aesthetic.
- What is your game's cultural significance?
- Who is your ideal audience?

Papers must be double spaced, one-inch margins, Times New Roman or Arial font. Only place your name in the heading.

Fair Use and Citation Guidelines

WPI asserts that its use of media within courses is covered under Fair Use, since it is educational in nature. All projects created by students will need to consider copyright and fair use, and must include academically-appropriate citations in the form of a Works Cited section which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The Works Cited is either included in the project or as a separate document, as appropriate to your project.

Statement on Academic Integrity

WPI seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and these obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Please inform me if you have a disability or other condition that might require some modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information contact the Office of Disability Services at disabilityservices@wpi.edu.

Writing Center

Located on the first floor of Daniels Hall (Room 116), the Writing Center is a valuable resource for helping you improve as a writer. Writing Center tutors are your peers (other undergraduate and graduate students at WPI) who are experienced writers themselves and who enjoy helping others tackle thinking and writing problems. Although a single tutoring session should never be seen as a quick fix for any writing difficulty, these sessions can help you identify your strengths and weaknesses, and teach you strategies for organizing, revising, and editing your course papers, projects, and presentations. Writing Center services are free and open to all WPI students in all classes, and tutors will happily work with you at any stage of the writing process (early brainstorming, revising a draft, polishing sentences in a final draft). Visit the Writing Center website to make an appointment.

Email

I check email regularly Monday-Friday, 9 AM-7 PM and intermittently on the weekends. Expect I will respond within 24 hours, if I don't and it's pressing, email me again. Students are responsible for reading and replying appropriately to emails sent from the instructor in a timely fashion. Please forward emails from your school email address to the one you check regularly- I will be emailing you at your school email address.

Facebook Policy: I do not accept friend requests from my students on Facebook while the course is in session. After the semester is over, you may friend request me (I will never request you- that crosses an inappropriate boundary), and I will add you, but on a limited profile view basis, as is appropriate for instructor/ student relationships.

Course Texts:

- Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals. (2004) Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. MIT Press.
- Critical Play: Radical Game Design. (2009) Mary Flanagan. MIT Press.

****All other readings are available on myWPI****

Note: This syllabus is subject to revision at the discretion of the instructor.

COURSE OUTLINE

Tuesday March 15

Intro to course, review syllabus, basics of game design

Friday March 18

Read:

"The Unfinished Masterpiece" in *The Rise*. Sarah Lewis. 2014. [On MyWPI]

"Introduction to Critical Play" in *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. Mary Flanagan. 2009. pg. 1-15

Tuesday March 22

****Resume of Failures Due****

Read:

"Defining Rules" in *Rules of Play*. pg. 119-125

"Rules on Three Levels" in *Rules of Play*. 127-139

Friday March 25

Read:

"Power to the People: Anti-Oppressive Game Design." Gunraj, Ruiz, York. in *Designing Games for Ethics: Models, Techniques and Frameworks*. 2011. [On MyWPI]

Tuesday March 29

****Game #1 Presentations: Rules****

Presentations + 1 page write up due

Friday April 1

NO PHYSICAL CLASS: Meet with your community group to create participatory design game

Tuesday April 5

****Game #2 Presentations: Participatory Design Game****

Presentations + 1 page write up due

Friday April 8

Read:

“Design” in *Rules of Play*. pg. 39-47

"Games as the Play of Pleasure" in *Rules of Play*. pg. 335-361

Tuesday April 12

****Game #3 Presentations: Fan Fiction Choose Your Own Adventure****

Presentations + 1 page write up due

Friday April 15

Read:

“Defining Culture” in *Rules of Play*. pg. 505-513

“Games as Cultural Rhetoric” in *Rules of Play*. Pg. 515-534

Tuesday April 19

****Game #4 Presentations: Art Museum Inspiration****

Presentations + 1 page write up due

Friday April 22

Read:

"Designing for Critical Play" in *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*. pg. 251-262

"Breaking the Rules" in *Rules of Play*. pg. 267-285

Tuesday April 26

****Game #5 Presentations: Design for a Client****

Presentations + 1 page write up due

Friday April 29

NO PHYSICAL CLASS: Work on iterative design for final presentation

Tuesday May 3

****Game #6 Presentations: Iterative Design Prototype****

Presentations + 1 page write up due