MRTS 3250 Section 001 Intro to Game Design

Instructor: Cory Haltinner

University Of North Texas

Location:

RTFP room 135

Days: Monday

Time: 2pm - 4:50pm

Cory Haltinner

Cory.Haltinner@unt.edu

Office Hours:
Mondays 11:30am-1:30pm
RTFP Room 225. Can meet with me before or after class as needed, or other times virtually by appointment.

Class will be notified via canvas of changes or updates to office hours times, or online office hours.

Course Description:

This course is intended to provide students with a solid practical foundation in game design, focusing on the development of concepts, design composition, and prototyping through the creation of non-digital games. Through the use of physical prototyping, playtesting, and iteration, students will learn how to translate game ideas into game pitches, design documents, and game designs. Additionally, students will analyze and recognize the play that exists in important games, stories, and other media. The course is structured with a combination of lectures and labs. As the content expert, the instructor will provide presentations and examples each week to introduce core

concepts with supporting examples. In the lab, students will work individually and/or in groups to put the core concepts into practice.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- **Develop a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental principles of game design, including the essential components of gameplay such as mechanics, rules, and objectives.**
- **Apply design principles to create and refine game prototypes, utilizing playtesting methods to evaluate and improve the quality of the game design.**
- **Critically evaluate and analyze existing video games and board games, as well as those created by peers, utilizing thoughtful critique to inform and improve game design concepts.**
- **Develop professional skills such as time management, public speaking, and collaborative teamwork, as they apply to the practice of game design and game development.**

Communication Practices:

Connect with me through email and/or by attending office hours. During busy times, my inbox becomes rather full, so if you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, please send a follow up email. A gentle nudge is always appreciated.

Attendance Policy:

Because this course involves collaboration, participation is essential to learning. Our project-based activities require you to be actively engaged in discussions and group work. I understand tardiness and absences may occur. If you are late to class, please drop me an email to let me know the circumstances. If you must miss class, please let me know prior to your absence.

If you must miss class, please let me know prior to your absence. Attendance will count towards a student's final grade, accounting for 10% of the overall final grade.

Late Work Policy:
Late work may be turned in for most assignments and will be accepted unless otherwise stated, however there will be a penalty assessed as follows. 10% will be deducted for every week that the assignment is late, to a maximum penalty of 30%.

- **Please note that late work will not be accepted for "Progress Update" turn-ins for projects. Those need to be turned in on time to receive feedback in a timely manner.**
- **Accommodations will be made in accordance to Title IX, University observed holidays, approved absences, sicknesses, etc. Please communicate with me if and when accommodations are needed.**

Examples: an assignment turned in 1-7 days late will be assessed a 10% point deduction
an assignment turned in 8-14 days late will be assessed a 20% point deduction
an assignment turned in 15+ days late will be assessed a maximum 30% point deduction

- **This means that an assignment which has been turned in 15+ days late will receive a maximum score of 70%.**
- **I do allow for resubmissions of work that have been turned in on time if the student wishes to address feedback on their projects and resubmit.**

Evaluation Methods and Criteria Methods: Presentations, papers, production and public critiques.

Required Texts:
1. Fullerton, T. "Game Design Workshop 5th edition" – AK Peters/CRC Press, 2018. (GDW)
https://www.amazon.com/Game-Design-Workshop-Playcentric-Innovative/dp/1138098779

Links to an external site.

Free online access to book at UNT media library:
https://discover.library.unt.edu/catalog/b8024151

Links to an external site.

2. Ralph Koster "Theory of Fun for Game Design" -- O'reilly Media, 2013.
https://www.amazon.com/Theory-Game-Design-Raph-Koster/dp/1449363210

Links to an external site.

Free online access to book at UNT media library:
https://discover.library.unt.edu/catalog/b5871858

Links to an external site.

Suggested Texts:
1. "The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses" by Jesse Schell
https://www.amazon.com/Art-Game-Design-Lenses-Third/dp/1138632058/ref=pd_bxgy_d_sccl_1/133-1456646-4314163?psc=1

2. "Rules of Play" by Eric Zimmerman
https://www.amazon.com/Rules-Play-Design-Fundamentals-Press/dp/0262240459

Recommended Software

MS Word, Paint or Photoshop, Powerpoint, 2d Game Engine (only needed if doing digital final project)

Grade Scale:

90+ = A

80-89 = B

70-79 = C

60-60 = D

59-0 = F

Assignments:

Class Participation:

Attendance 10%

Weekly Worksheets and Exercises 20%

Weekly Reading Journal 10%

Final Projects:

Game Design Document 20%

Final Game 20%

Post Mortem Document 20%

Other Relevant and Important Information:

Acceptable and Unacceptable Use of AI:

Generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) are permitted to be used in this course under specific circumstances:

- **They can be used to fuel your creative process as sources for potential ideas, approaches, or solutions, however, they CANNOT be used to directly create any portion of the end-product that you turn in for any assignment.**

    - **For example, you cannot:**
        - **Use AI to generate your responses to a Worksheet or discussion board post.**
        - **Use AI to summarize assigned Videos rather than watching them.**
    - **However, you can:**
        - **Use AI as a resource**
        - **Use AI to ideate and generate possibilities that feed into your personal creative process.**
        - **Use AI to generate reference images for your Mood Board.**

Simply put, you can use AI as part of the process to produce *your own* creations (posts, documentation, concepts), but you cannot use it to replace your own creations or as a substitute for your own final work product.

Additionally, if you use AI tools:

- **You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content).**
- **Any usage of AI tools must be clearly disclosed (along with a note about the scope and purpose of its usage) in order to stay within university policies on academic honesty.**
- **Any assignment that is found to have used generative AI tools in unauthorized ways or to generate the final submission for any assignment will result in a penalty on that assignment.**
- **When in doubt about permitted usage, please ask for clarification.**

Inclusion Statement:

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. All

discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together.

ADA Statement:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access

Links to an external site.

website (http://www.unt.edu/oda

Links to an external site.

). You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Week #1

Monday 1/12:

Intro to the Class

Professor/Student Introductions

Syllabus Review

GDC Video and Class Discussion "Survival Guide for Game Developers":

https://youtu.be/UaRnAXozc58?si=P96FK9xbxA0WzXVr

Links to an external site.

Play some games

HW: Survival Guide for Game Developers writeup 1/26

Week #2

Monday 1/ 19:

No Class - MLK Day

Week #3

Monday 1/26: MDA / Games as Verbs

Game Design and Game Designers

MDA Framework

MDA Slides

Download MDA Slides

Short video on what MDA is:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxiGduvDJ8s

Links to an external site.

break

Lecture: Verbs as Mechanics Verbs Slides

Download Verbs Slides

In Class Activity: Turning Popular Games into Verbs

HW: GDW Chapter 1: The Role of the Game Designer Due 2/2
HW: Finish up your Verbs worksheet and turn it in Due 2/2

Week #4

Monday 2/2: Games as Systems / Objects, Properties, Behaviors, Relationships

- Game Design as a Principle
- Slides - Games as Systems
- Role of the Designer
- Interactive Process
- Play Centric Design

  Play some SNES games - analyze the O/P/B/R of the games

- Play - Super Flight
    - In class worksheet: Super Flight Redesign

HW: Objects Break Down Worksheet Due 2/9
HW: Worksheet: Super Flight Redesign Due 2/9

Week #5

Monday 2/9: Game Pitches

Watch GDC Talk: 30 Things I hate about your game pitch.

Links to an external site.

Class discussion on pitching.

- Clear and Simple Concept
- Strong Hook
- Understand Your Audience
- Gameplay Focus
- Keep the Scope Realistic
- Identify the Genre
- Show Visuals
- Tested and Refined Mechanics
- Avoid Feature Overload
- Explain the Fun Factor
- Highlight the Player Experience
- Show Confidence in Your Game

  Play some games - analyze MDA, verbs, how you would pitch this game. What's the hook?

HW: Worksheet - Game Pitches Due 2/16

HW: Reading TOF Chapter 2 - How the Brain Works Due 2/16

Bring game pitches to class on Monday 2/16

Week #6

Monday 2/16: Playtesting and Prototyping / Giving Feedback

Lecture Slides on Playtesting and Prototyping

Workshop - get feedback on pitches work on refining pitches worksheet

giving constructive feedback:

https://www.youtube.com/shorts/rDHzMk2yTvM

Links to an external site.

HW: Refining Game Pitches with the "Yes, and..." Approach Due 2/23

HW: TOF Chapter 4 - What Games Teach Us Due 2/23

Week #7

Monday 2/23: Player Choices / Win Conditions

- Lecture Player Choice / Win Conditions
- Photoshop Demo

Gabe Olson's Photoshop Demo Links:

https://youtu.be/6t-rUku7w7w

Links to an external site.

https://youtu.be/La6NJBCiVps

Links to an external site.

HW: Illustration of Win Condition Verb/Mechanic Due 3/2

Week #8

Monday 3/2: One Page Design Docs

Discuss and watch - https://gdcvault.com/play/1012356/One-Page

Links to an external site.

One-page Design

- **Clarity & Focus**: One-page designs force clarity and focus, distilling ideas to their core elements for easy understanding.
- **Visual Communication**: Use visuals like sketches, diagrams, and flowcharts to quickly convey concepts and relationships.
- **Simplicity Over Detail**: Prioritize simplicity and key ideas over exhaustive details, ensuring the document remains easy to digest.
- **Living Document**: Treat the one-page design as a living document, allowing it to evolve and adapt as the game design changes.
- **Effective Collaboration**: A concise, visual one-pager improves team communication and facilitates more effective collaboration and feedback.

technical tips

- **Limit Text & Maximize Space**: Use minimal text, focusing on keywords and short phrases to maximize visual elements and ensure readability.
- **Incorporate Visual Hierarchy**: Use size, color, and positioning to emphasize the most important elements and create a clear flow for readers.
- **Use Diagrams & Flowcharts**: Create clear visual representations of systems, mechanics, and game loops, making complex interactions easy to understand.
- **Show Relationships & Connections**: Use arrows, lines, and symbols to indicate how elements of the design connect and influence each other.
- **Iterate & Simplify**: Regularly update the document, refining visuals and language to strip away unnecessary details and maintain focus on the core concept.

Work on One page docs

HW: Reading/video: GDC Vault Talk - One-Page Design Due 3/16
HW: Worksheet - One Page Design for Verb/Mechanic Due 3/16

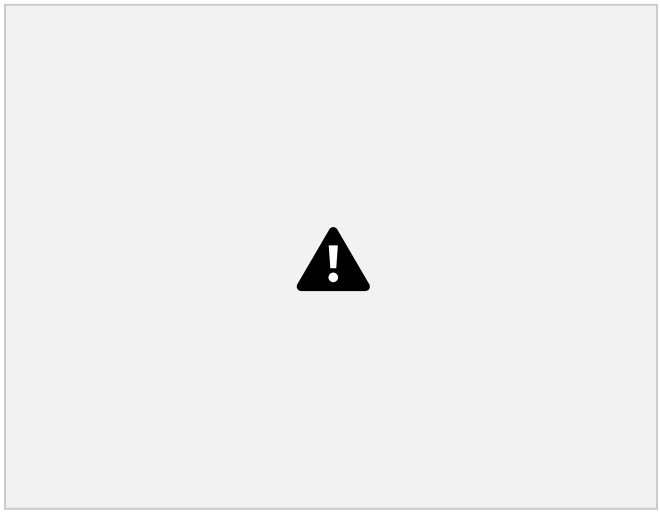
Week #9

Monday 3/ 9:

No Class - Spring Break

Week #10

Monday 3/16: One Page Review / Rapid Prototyping
One page pitch class review / Prototyping Planning
The person reviewing your one page should be able to answer the following:



GDC talk - Hitchhiker's Guide to Rapid Prototyping

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYWkiv1hTPM

Links to an external site.

Discuss Playtest #1 next class on the 23rd

Play: TBA

HW: Prototype Goals and Planning Due: 3/23
HW: Reading: GDW Chapter 7: Prototyping Due: 3/23

Week #11

Monday 3/23: What is playtesting? / Playtest #1

Lecture: What is Playtesting? Slides

Review:

"Don't Follow these Rules! A Primer for Playtesting" by Nathalie Pozzi Eric Zimmerman

Links to an external site.

Playtest #1

HW: Playtest #1 - Paper Prototype Playtest Worksheet Due 3/30

Week #12

Monday 3/30: What makes a good Rulebook?

Lecture / Slides

Instruction Page (Rule Book): Rules, Obstacles and Challenges workshop

HW: turn in worksheet from workshop in class Due 4/6

HW: Instruction Page (Rule Book): Rules, Obstacles and Challenges Due 4/13

HW: GDC Reflection Video: "Making Your Games...the Uncharted Way" Due: 4/6

Week #13

Monday 4/6: Playtesting and Prototyping / Playtest #2

Lecture: Playtesting / Playtesting slide

Playtest #2 - focusing on core game loop and mechanics

HW: Testing the core game loop worksheet Due 4/13

HW: Reading: TOF Chapter 8 - The Problem with People Due 4/13

Week #14

Monday 4/13: Pitching workshop and feedback / Playtest #3

Playtest #3 - with new rules sheets

HW: Playtest #3: Testing with Rulebooks Due 4/20

HW: Reading: GDW Chapter 10 - Prototyping Due 4/20

Week #15

Monday 4/20: Discuss Final Turn-in / Post Mortems & Design Diary

Prototype workshop, ensure everyone has what they need for final day of class

HW: Prepare for final playtest and turn in next class 4/27

Week #16

Monday 4/27: THE LAST DAY

This is our final, bring your game, play and get feedback. Gather info for your final design diary and post mortem due the following week.

- **Students will turn in their finished game to me by the end of class.**
- **Students will then have one more week to finish their Design Diary and Post Mortem assignment.**

  Final Print and Play, Design Diary and Post Mortem Due May 4th