

Fall 2025 - GMSD 1800.001: *Survey of Game Studies and Design*

Dr. Stephen Mandiberg (he/him) – Stephen.Mandiberg@unt.edu

Tuesday/Thursday 9:30am - 10:50pm in RTFP 184

Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:00am-1:00pm in RTFP 224, or by appointment; remote meetings
by request

TA Info: Michael King (xx/xxx) – MichaelKing7@my.unt.edu

TA Info: Jake Parrish (he/she/they) – email@my.unt.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND STRUCTURE

Explores the dynamic realm of games as an artistic and industrial practice and as an academic discipline. Delves into the diverse landscape of games as a medium, examining their interpretation, analysis, and creation. Emphasizes both scholarly inquiry and practical skills. We will be looking at the different moments and jobs of game creation through readings, quizzes, and a series of multi-modal individual and team projects

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define the various positions available within the game industries and what is involved with each
- Explain the basic structure of video game creation and the groups involved
- Practice basic writing skills
- Create basic character/prop assets
- Explain the agile collaboration framework: Scrum
- Practice teamwork by creating and iterating on a game paper prototype

MATERIALS

- Andy Bosson & Ben Dunning. *Video Games: An Introduction to the Industry*. Fairchild Books, 2016. ([available free digitally through the UNT Library](#))
- Other articles, presentations, and videos are available online for free

ASSIGNMENTS

6 Quizzes - six quizzes drawing on class lectures and readings. Questions are multiple-choice, match, fill-in-the-blank, etc. These are primarily about jobs and industry terminology. *Quizzes are cumulative; lowest score is dropped.*

Written Project Pitches – Individual, 1-page project pitches for the team project. Students will vote on the groups in early October before moving onto the Art Project detailed below.

Character/Prop Art Project – Students will individually create assets characters/props, visualizations, and descriptions. The visualizations can be hand drawn, pixel sprites, or 3d models, and can be either singular images or model sheets. Your description will give pertinent character/prop details; you must also include your rough drafts and thought processes in your explanation/description. You are making these individually for your group project. Groups can choose to use all of the assets, or they may choose to open source some, making them available for other groups to use (and your group can pull assets from the open source pile, too). If your

group is doing a research project about game studies you can make your art project willy-nilly with the intent of making it open source for other groups to use.

Scrum Team Project – Teams will be formed in early October after voting on the written project pitches. Your team will then use agile development processes to create something over three sprints. The project can be one of several things: a paper prototype for an analog game, a twine game, a studio pitch document for a digital game (w/ design docs including assets), or a research poster about game studies. Other projects possible with proposal approval. Grading is based on final presented product, improvements over the sprints, group check-in documents, and individual written evaluations.

GRADING

(600 points total) – Attendance and Participation (100 points), Quizzes (100 points), Written Project Pitch (100 points), Character Art Project (100 points), Scrum Team Project (200 points).

General Grading Criteria:

- A. The student demonstrated an excellent understanding of course material, and presented clear, well-articulated analysis in written works. The student is able to intelligently employ terms and concepts introduced in class in proving his or her thesis. The student was highly motivated and nearly always participated in discussions. [90-100 = A]
- B. The student demonstrated accurate comprehension of course material, but the student's understanding did not go beyond the basic requirements. Ideas are presented in clear and direct manner with few errors. Analysis was incomplete, the thesis was unclear, or there was a gap between the thesis and argument. The student was attentive in class, but often did not participate. [80-89.99 = B]
- C. The student demonstrated an incomplete understanding of course material. Written ideas and arguments were incomplete, unclear, often inaccurate, and generally needed editing. The student was often distracted in class, and rarely participated. [70-79.99 = C]
- D. The student showed inadequate comprehension of the basic premise, and core concepts of the course. Writing did not fulfill the assignment, and was constructed poorly. The student often failed to attend class, or inattentively attended class while on a device. [60-69.99 = D]
- F. Work not submitted; or submitted in a way that fails to fulfill requirements. [0-59.99 = F]

Late or Missed Assignments

Most late work is accepted for one week after the original deadline (teamwork, peer review, and end of term work not accepted late without prior approval), but will be marked down by one grade point (A→B, etc). Work submitted after the one-week grace period will be marked down by two grade points (A→C, etc). Unsubmitted work will receive a 0. Exceptions may be granted for religious holy days, for active military service, for official university functions, for pregnancy/parenting under Title IX, and for medical or family emergencies. In the event of emergencies, documentation (e.g., doctor's note) must be provide within 1 week following the absence. Upon returning to class you have 1 week to reschedule the exam and/or submit the assignment

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is mandatory. Attendance may be taken at the beginning and/or end of each class. *Six or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course.* In addition to being in a seat, your grade depends on active participation during class: talk, question, play, be a member of the class community. If you are unable to participate during class please talk to me to work out alternate strategies for participation. Discussing theories during office hours can count as participation!

QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, ask them! Short/simple questions are best through email; long/complex questions are best through office hours. Grades may only be disputed in person during office hours.

PROBLEMS

Please talk to me if you have any problems. Email me immediately if readings are no longer available through the eLibrary, or if the links provided are dead. That said, searching for the text through the library portal (or scholar.google.com) will often solve any broken link problems.

VPN

The readings are available digitally, but they often require you to be on campus, or to sign in as if you were on campus so that you do not have to pay for the materials. The most common way this happens is through using a VPN (virtual private network). Detailed instructions on setting up a VPN on your computer, tablet, or phone can be found here: https://itss.untssystem.edu/sites/default/files/campus_vpn.pdf.

TURNITIN

By taking this course students agree that certain required assignments will be subject to submission for textual similarity and AI review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. Using ChatGBT and other forms of AI writing tools is a similar form of academic integrity violation. While some classes utilize AI writing, this class does not. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. Plagiarism of any sort will not be tolerated. As a minimum, plagiarizing will result in failure for the assignment. It might also result in further sanctions at the university level. Familiarize yourself with the UNT policy at: <https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-003>.

AI USAGE

As stated in the Academic Integrity policy above, this class does not allow the use of Generative AI tools like Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, etc. While these tools can be helpful in some contexts, they do not align with our goal of fostering the development of your independent thinking. However, some AI adjacent writing tools like Grammarly are allowed with provisions. As noted above in the TurnItIn policy, all work is subject to submission for textual similarity and AI review. In accordance with the UNT Honor Code, if you use Grammarly or a similar writing assistance tool you must disclose your use and submit a clean, initial draft of your paper. Both your initial draft and your final, Grammarly assisted draft must be submitted to TurnItIn. It is mandatory that you disclose your use and that TurnItIn not detect any use of AI in your initial draft.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the Office of Disability Access website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION AND PROCEDURES

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

A NOTE ABOUT OUR INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITHIN THE CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL AND INDUSTRIAL MOMENT

I value the diverse perspectives students bring to our campus, but of equal importance, the game industries benefit from a plurality of perspectives and audiences. As a corollary, if we as a class explore issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion from a critical standpoint within an educational and industrial framework it's important that we do so with care for each other. 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. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together; and the game industries progress with all of us together.

SCHEDULE

(this class schedule is subject to change after discussion)

August 19 - Class 1 - Intro to the Class

August 21 - Class 2 - Intro to the Game Industries

- B&D - selections from Chapter 1 (pp. 14-29)

August 26 - Class 3 - Industry Structures (Hobby, Indie, AA, AAA, and Art)

- B&D - selections from Chapters 1, 2 and 4 (pp. 30-46, 72-73, 102-109)

August 28 - Class 4 - Overview of Jobs

- B&D - selections from Chapter 2 (pp. 50-55)

September 2 - Class 5 - Game Lifecycles: Studies and Design

- Quiz 1 (Industry Structure and Jobs)

September 4 - Class 6 - Game Scholarship vs Game Journalism (and how to access materials)

DO NOT FREAK OUT! Skim/Browse these inside/outside of class. You will not be tested on the data/findings, but we will discuss the differences: tones, data, methods, scope, audiences, etc. Think about the different jobs creating these different works. We will cover them over ~3 weeks. What you'll be tested on is how the different tones, methods, etc fit and are the products of certain jobs within the game industries.

- Your choice - Game review on YouTube or web.
- Jody MacGregor. 2025. "D&D is Quintessentially American and Warhammer is Quintessentially British." *PCGamer*. August 10. <https://www.pcgamer.com/games/d-and-d-is-quintessentially-american-and-warhammer-is-quintessentially-british/>
- Tanya Krzywinska, Douglas Brown, Minhua Ma, Anton Belinskiy, and Kam Bhui. 2025. "Coziness in Games: Second Homes, Audiences, and Esthetics." *Games and Culture*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/15554120241310920>
- Christopher J. Ferguson, Anastasiia Gryshyna, Jung Soo Kim, Emma Knowles, Zainab Nadeem, Izabela Cardozo, Carolin Esser, Victoria Trebbi and Emily Willis. 2022. "Video Games, Frustration, Violence, and Virtual Reality: Two Studies." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 61: pp. 83-99. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/15554120241310920>
- *Pick One:*
 - John Hopson. 2015. "User Research on Destiny." *Game Developers Conference*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izZcrG4WqGI>
 - Joseph Humfrey. 2018. "Designing Text UX for Effortless Reading." *Game Developers Conference*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4G8UNiE560>
 - Dan Jenrette. 2019. "Games User Research: A World of Warcraft Case Study." *Games UR Summit*, March 19. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_t6tBSCIOQ

- Bradlyn Walker, Elizabeth Zelle, Nikki Crenshaw, and Laura Levy. 2019. "You Play Like a GURL: Perspectives from Female-Identifying Researchers." *Games UR Summit*, March 19. <https://youtu.be/VRQwEpKE-5o?si=-sO3sZdHbJTEFFhv>

September 9 - Class 7 - Explanation of Writing Assignment, Art Project, and Team Project

September 11 - Class 8 - Industry Hat: Game Journalist

September 16 - Class 9 - Industry Hat: Game Researcher

September 18 - Class 10 - Industry Hat: User Researcher

September 23 - Class 11 - Gaming Technologies

- B&D - Selections from Chapter 3 (pp. 77-92)

September 25 - Class 12 - Game Lifecycles: Development and Publishing

- Quiz 2 (Studies and Technology)
- Writing Assignment DUE Friday by 11:59pm

September 30 - Class 13 - Programming and Design

- B&D - selections from Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 67, 93-98)

October 2 - Class 14 - Coding vs. Scripting

- Scrum Team Project Group Formation – obtain vote slate and pitches

October 7 - Class 15 - Game Designers (of all sorts)

- B&D - selections from Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 114-122, 140-143, 151-152, 178-181)

October 9 - Class 16 - Paper Prototyping (and the example of Roberta Williams)

- Scrum Team Project Group Formation – vote due

October 14 - Class 17 - Industry Hat: Narrative Designer

October 16 - Class 18 - Art & Animation

- B&D - selections from Chapter 2 (pp. 62-66, 68-9, 74-75)

October 21 - Class 19 - Character/Prop Art Project Workshop

- Scrum Team Project Group Formation – groups formed

October 23 - Class 20 - Agile Game Development & Scrum

- Quiz 3 (Programming, Design, Art and Animation)
- B&D - selections from Chapter 2 (pp. 60-61)

October 28 - Class 21 - Audio

- Character/Prop Art Project (upload to Canvas before class)
- Sprint 1 - Plan (meeting + plan for week – prof and TAs cc'd)

October 30 - Class 22 - Production

- Sprint 1 - Work (+ end of day emails – prof and TAs cc'd)
- B&D - selections from Chapter 2 and 6 (pp. 56-59, 70-71, 154-177)

November 4 - Class 23 - Sprint 1 Presentations

- Sprint 1 - Presentation (upload by class start and present during class)

November 6 - Class 24 - Industry Hat: Producer

- Sprint 1 - Evaluation (upload to Canvas before class)
- Sprint 2 - Plan (meeting + plan for week – prof and TAs cc'd)

November 11 - Class 25 - Brand & Marketing

- Quiz 4 (Scrum)
- Sprint 2 - Work (+ end of day emails – prof and TAs cc'd)
- B&D - Selections from Chapter 6 and Conclusion (pp. 182-198)

November 13 - Class 26 - Sprint 2 Presentations

- Sprint 2 - Presentation (upload by class start and present during class)

November 18 - Class 27 - Quality Assurance (QA) & Localization

- Quiz 5 (Audio and Production)
- Sprint 2 - Evaluation (upload to Canvas by 11:59pm)

November 20 - Class 28 - Industry Hat: Playtester

- Sprint 3 - Plan (meeting + plan for week – prof and TAs cc'd)

November 24 - November 30 - Thanksgiving Break - No Class

December 2 - Class 29 - Games Around the World

- Quiz 6 (Marketing, QA, and Localization)
- Sprint 3 - Work (+ end of day emails – prof and TAs cc'd)

December 4 - Class 30 - Sprint 3 Presentations

- Sprint 3 - Presentations (upload by class start and present during class)

Finals Week

- December 11 - Sprint 3 - Evaluations (upload to Canvas by 11:59pm)