

Course: DMED 503: Foundations of Game Design (3 credits)
Term: Fall 2023
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Course Description

A fundamentally human pursuit, games provide a vital window into human nature. Through understanding what motivates people and what constitutes “fun” we can create more meaningful and engaging experiences in all areas of digital and interactive media. This course explores game design from both a theoretical and applied standpoint. We will explore the various aspects of games – from “indie” to “triple A” titles - including mechanics, emotion, agency, balance, motivation and the process of making games (plan, build, test and repeat!). It’s important to note that game design principles can be applied in ALL areas of digital media.

The course will consist of graduate level seminars and game deconstructions. Students will be expected to participate in classroom activities, and should show up prepared (having completed any necessary readings, or consumed any relevant media requested). Throughout the course of the semester, students will deconstruct the design of existing games using the principles taught in class, complete individual and/or team-based assignments, and deliver a final team-based (5-6 students) comprehensive game-design document and accompanying digital game prototype. The course is capped by a final class presentation of each team’s project.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students will be able to:

- Identify and practice key design elements such as mechanics, dynamics, core loops, etc.
- Critically analyze and discuss games in terms of their technical structure.
- Identify key genres, trends, themes, and tropes.
- Discuss game design as a manifestation of human-centric design.
- Provide concrete examples of how the concepts of “play” and “fun” can be applied in any interactive media.
- Understand the iterative process of making a game.
- Effectively articulate critical reviews of games and related media.
- Apply cognitive principles to explain player/user motivation and engagement in digital media.
- Prepare a comprehensive design document appropriate for real-world use.
- Produce and playtest digital prototypes to test some/all of their game assumptions.
- Articulate their design and prototypes to faculty and students.

Format of the Course

This course uses a flipped classroom model, where each week students will have required reading materials assigned which will be relevant to the topics discussed in the following class. Each class will consist partly of lectures, various activities, workshop elements, and a lot of discussion.

Course Schedule

The following schedule outlines the majority of the topics covered during the course. *Based on the interaction with students as well as the topics covered by parallel courses, some topics may be added or modified during the semester at the discretion of the instructor.*

Class	Topic
Week 1	CORE QUESTION: WHAT IS GAME DESIGN ALL ABOUT?
Week 2	CORE QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE CORE CONCEPTS OF GAME DESIGN?
Week 3	CORE QUESTION: HOW DO WE MAKE A GAME? TEAM SELECTION DAY
Week 4	CORE QUESTION: HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT TO BUILD?
Week 5	CORE QUESTION: HOW DO WE GET THE PLAYER TO UNDERSTAND?
Week 6	CORE QUESTION: HOW DO WE KNOW IF IT IS WORKING?
Week 7	CORE QUESTION: ARE WE READY TO TEST? PLAYTEST DAY
Week 8	CORE QUESTION: WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE?
Week 9	CORE QUESTION: WHY DO PEOPLE WANT TO PLAY THIS GAME?
Week 10	CORE QUESTION: IS THE GAME ENGAGING? PLAYTEST DAY
Week 11	CORE QUESTION: HOW DIFFICULT IS OUR GAME?
Week 12	CORE QUESTION: HOW CLOSE ARE WE TO BEING DONE? PLAYTEST DAY
Week 13	CORE QUESTION: WHAT DID WE CREATE THIS SEMESTER? FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Course Assignments

Note: Assignments, due dates and weighting are subject to change before the start of the semester

Assignment	Due Date	Weight	Details
<i>Deconstruction #1</i>	<i>Week 3</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>MDA Theory & Core Loop</i>
<i>Deconstruction #2</i>	<i>Week 5</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>Features & Rules of Design</i>
<i>Documentation #1</i>	<i>Week 2</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>One Page Game Concept</i>
<i>Documentation #2</i>	<i>Week 6</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>Features & CDD Skeleton</i>
<i>Documentation #3</i>	<i>Week 9</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>Updated CDD & Test Plan</i>
<i>Documentation #4</i>	<i>Week 11</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>Test Results & Analysis</i>
<i>Final Game Concept</i>	<i>Week 13</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>Originality, innovation of game concept</i>
<i>Final Core Design Document</i>	<i>Week 13</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>Formal written technical / functional documentation of the game</i>
<i>Final Digital Prototype</i>	<i>Week 13</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>Final digital artifact of game or portions of thereof (scope refined throughout term)</i>
<i>Final Project Presentation</i>	<i>Week 13</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>10min team presentation</i>
<i>Class Participation</i>	<i>Week 7 (5%) Week 13 (5%)</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>Contribution to class discussion, participation in class and group activities</i>

Evaluation

Grades will be based on the following criteria (subject to instructor revision if deemed necessary):

Deconstructions	20
<i>Deconstruction #1 (MDA Theory & Core Loop)</i>	
<i>Deconstruction #2 (Features & Questions)</i>	
Documentation Check-Ins	20
<i>Documentation #1 - One Page Game Concept</i>	
<i>Documentation #2 - Features & CDD Skeleton</i>	
<i>Documentation #3 - Updated CDD & Test Plan</i>	
<i>Documentation #4 - Test Results & Analysis</i>	
Final Deliverables	50
<i>Final Game Concept</i>	
<i>Final Core Design Document</i>	
<i>Final Digital Prototype</i>	
<i>Final Presentation</i>	
Participation	10
<i>Class Participation</i>	
Total	100

Note on assessment:

- Unless specifically specified **a student's grade will be based on their INDIVIDUAL contribution to team assignments, presentations, and projects.**

Required Readings

Each week students will be assigned required readings which will be posted on Canvas. Required readings include written materials, videos, and games that will be discussed during the following class. Students are expected to have read all the materials before class. There are also additional suggested readings for that supplement the course notes for students interested in delving further into game design.

Attendance

Attendance and punctuality is mandatory. Repeated offences will not be tolerated and WILL affect your grade. You are responsible for making up for materials, in-class activities, and assignments missed. Students who are unavoidably absent due to illness or disability should notify their instructors of their situation.

Note that late assignments/projects will not be accepted without prior arrangement or medical documentation.



Written & Spoken English

English is the official language of the school and all communication (written and spoken) is expected to be conducted in English. SFU and the MDM Program provide a wide range of free language support for those who need and it is up to each student to seek that support.

Accommodations

The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let your instructor know in advance, preferably the first week of class, if you will require any accommodations on these grounds.

The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) will make every effort to assist students with disabilities so that they achieve their educational goals.

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning/establishing-accommodations/accommodation.html>

Academic Integrity

MDM considers plagiarism to be the most serious academic offense that a student can commit.

Regardless of whether or not it was committed intentionally, plagiarism has serious academic consequences and can result in expulsion from the university. Plagiarism involves the improper use of somebody else's words or ideas in one's own work.

It is the student's responsibility to ensure you fully understand what plagiarism is. Please see the SFU website for an explanation of the various types of plagiarism and to take the plagiarism tutorial:

<http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/plagiarism>

Grading Profile

A+	95-100
A	90-94
A-	85-89
B+	80-84
B	75-79
B-	70-74
C+	65-69
C	60-64
F	0 - 59

Laptops & Cell Phones

The use of laptops and cell phones during class is at the discretion of the instructor. *Please respect your classmates and instructors and refrain from text messages, social media, games and videos during class and workshop times.* Please note you should always bring pen and paper to class.

Inappropriate use of technology in coursework

If you are using generative AI to produce content that will be part of your graded work in the course, you must be transparent about the tools that you use. Undeclared use of the tool/technology will be considered a violation of the academic integrity policy. Be aware that any tool used will require you to evaluate the output for accuracies and be responsible for making the appropriate corrections.

Graduate Studies Notes

Important dates and deadlines for graduate students are found here: http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current/important_dates/guidelines.html.

