

Game Design Course, Syllabus

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Chapter 1 – Iterative Design

This Chapter begins by exploring what a game is (and isn't) and defining the terms "mechanic" and "dynamic". Students identify the core mechanic and dynamic of a game to help guide iterative playtesting and optimization.

Chapter 2 – Where do game ideas come?

This Chapter introduced two frameworks for designing games: formal abstract design and MDA (Mechanics-Dynamics-Aesthetics). Students play a primitive board game and apply these analytic tools, then modify the rules and repeat the exercise.

Chapter 3 – Prototyping

Before games come to market, they undergo several tests: Are there technical glitches? Can players easily get started? Is the gameplay what the designers intended? We will discuss how and why to conduct focus testing.

Chapter 4 – Brainstorming!

Let's talk about how to brainstorm constructively, despite social pressure and interpersonal dynamics. Students practice generating ideas individually and in groups, ending with concepts for the first team project, a card game for 2-4 players!

Chapter 5 – The Social Function of Games

Today's reading examines the various interactions between players and spectators of games. Students then brainstorm ideas for their first team project: designing a card game for 2-4 players.

Chapter 6 – Strategy, Skill, and Chance, Part 1

Games contain various skill requirements, chance elements, and information availability, which guide strategy development. Changing the balance between these factors can create very different player experiences.

Chapter 7 – Strategy, Skill, and Chance, Part 2

This Chapter reviews the concepts of information flow and uncertainty, analyzing well-known games in these terms. Examples include Scrabble, Go Fish, Mario Kart, Monopoly, chess, War, and Settlers of Catan. Next, students consider feedback loops.

Chapter 8 – Knowing Your Players...

Today's class analyzes user motivation along two axes: interest in the world vs. fellow players, gaining knowledge vs. proficiency. Students discuss the utility of this taxonomy, how games encourage these interactions, and come up with their own frames.

Chapter 9 – Puzzles

Puzzles are a popular type of game, characterized by a strict rule set and (ideally) a single solution. They may appear on their own or embedded into a larger narrative, sometimes representing a similar real-life mechanism (e.g. unlocking a door).

Chapter 10 – Abstraction and Simulation

To build a good simulation, identify relevant features in the source and assumptions in the resulting model. Students explore the meaning of games' choices about what to include, simplify, and abstract, and generate ideas for their next assignment.

Chapter 11 – What is Intellectual Property?

After feedback on the first assignment, the class covers the basics of intellectual property in the gaming industry. Successful adaptations often incorporate popular elements and distinctive aesthetics from the original media.

Chapter 12 – Games as Teaching Tools

A panel of game developers from the Education Arcade and Learning Games Network talk about their research, effectively connecting learning and games, engaging a target audience, defining and evaluating success, and common design pitfalls.

Chapter 13 – Creating Sequels

Sequels can improve on the original: fixing problems, adding new features, targeting an established fan base, etc. This connection can also constrain the sequel concept and discourage new users.

Chapter 14 – Fiction and Stories in Games

Many games incorporate story elements, to drive the plot, set the scene, create engaging characters, etc. Some even use player actions to build an open-ended adventure. Let's talk about how and why to use stories in games.

Chapter 15 – Games as Art

Games have emerged in recent decades as a rich artistic medium, combining elements from audiovisual, interactive, and performance art traditions.

Chapter 16 – Start Project

In this chapter, students start to create a video game based on their previous learns.

Chapter 17 – Final Exam