CTK 380.3 Introduction to Game Design
Course Syllabus

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IMPORTANT: Some parts of this syllabus have been redacted.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Description
This course provides theoretical background and craft-based foundation for designing and analyzing games. The course examines fundamental domains that are necessary to understand what games are and how they affect players. The course explains the core elements of game design, including goals, rules, environment, and resources, and introduces students to formal abstract design tools that can be used in game design to systematically capture these elements. We will explore several models of design process and iteration, including ideation, basic prototyping, iteration based on playtesting, participatory design practices, and formative evaluation methods. The students will practice game design in groups by developing game concepts and by creating analog game prototypes.

Learning Objectives
After the course, you should be able to:
- Understand the basic concepts and core elements of game design
- Analyze a game experience based on several dimensions, including but not limited to player behavior, mechanics, learning, culture, and interface design
- Understand the psychological and phenomenological dimensions of gameplay and its effects
- Acquire the ability to apply design tools and methods
- Formalize game concepts in a manner that is easily transmissible and clearly understandable by a large team
- Apply several models of design process and iteration and realize where in the design process you are (e.g., success or failure)

Delivery
The course will be taught in a combination of lecture and in-class and out-of-class assignments that demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subject through applying the concepts. Students are expected to apply concepts learnt and identify them in existing or newly designed games.

GRADING POLICY

Grading Table

Item	Points
Attendance & Class Participation	20
Game Project #1 (High Mechanics, Low Context)	20
Game Project #2 (Low Mechanics, High Context)	20
Game Project #3 (High Mechanics, High Context OR Free Form)	40
Total	100

Game Project

Each game project will be developed by a group of up to 2-4 students. A project includes the following deliverables:

- **Rules Document and simple marketing materials:** A clean and comprehensive rulebook that will be used for blind playtests, as well as a key sellsheet (e.g., logo, photo, slogan, features, etc.).
- **Playtest Report:** A testing report discussing the methods used and test results with at least a few different user groups.
- **Game and postmortem:** A team presentation of a playable prototype of the game in class as well as a project postmortem. The team will prepare and present an analysis and reflection of their project process: what worked well, what didn't, and what the team learned.

For both projects you are encouraged to create a novel experience by creating a game that does not resemble existing practices in the game industry. You could create a game around a new and unexplored theme, develop an innovative game mechanic or a twist on a traditional game mechanic, or build a new interaction paradigm. You must work with the following constraints:

- No killing or shooting; and
- Military simulations; and
- No zombies or ogres or other stereotypical "fantasy" villains; and
- If you will work on a digital game, it needs to be on a platform that is easy to access and use— web is the optimal platform for this.

The first three constraints are to force you to consider less obvious ideas and to avoid game clichés. The third constraint is to make sure that everyone has access to the game you have created. For both projects keep in mind to keep it simple. Note that you can request to bend the first three constraints, but if you choose to do so, you are making it more difficult for yourself to provide the level of creativity that earns the highest grades.

Game Project #1 (High Mechanics, Low Context)

Design & develop a game with high mechanics (high does not necessarily mean numerous; here, it especially means well-crafted, balanced, unique, and fun) but low context (low context means game ideas that has small to no narrative, storytelling or character, world, location designs, etc.). Examples to high mechanics and low context games are chess, *Tetris*, *Blokus*, *Zendo*, *Hanabi*, most card and dice games. (One could argue that even *Settlers of Catan...*!)

Game Project #2 (Low Mechanics, High Context)

Design & develop a game with low mechanics but high context. Examples are *A Murder Most Fowl*, *Wizard's Apprentice*, *Look to the Skies, Shoutdown to Destruction,* etc.

Game Project #3 (High Mechanics, High Context OR Free Form)

Design & develop a game with both high mechanics and context. Examples are *Lords of Waterdeep, Gloomhaven,* etc. Alternatively, you can create your own focus.

Deliverables can and should be discussed with the instructor prior to scheduling a formal presentation. Once the team formally presents them before class, they will be critiqued on content and presentation and be graded.

Game Project Rubric Details

Item	Points
Rulebook (How well written and comprehensive is the rulebook?)	10
Playtest report (How well written and comprehensive is the report?)	15
Quality of the final product (How pleasant and exceptional was the aesthetic experience of the game?)	15
Usability and user experience of the final game (Does the game work well and does it facilitate the intended aesthetic experience to its players?)	15
Innovation of the final game (Does the game play with or undermine game conventions, or explore untapped aspects of the familiar?)	15
Completeness of the final game (How complete is the prototype and what functionalities have been implemented?)	15
Cohesion of the final game (To what extent does the game look and feel as a coherent and consistent whole, across mechanics, look and feel, audio elements, narrative elements, etc.?)	15
Total	100%

Your final grade is calculated by summing all the acquired points and by converting them to a letter grade. You should not expect a curve to be applied.

A – 100-90
B – 89 -80
C – 79-70
D – 69-60
F – 50 and below
I – Incomplete

SCHEDULE

W	D	Classroom Activity	Readings / To-Dos	Projects
1	#1	**Discussions:** - Student self-introductions - Curriculum overview and expectations from the course - Who is a game designer?		
	#2	**Design Exercise:** Randomness or Decisions (or Both)? **Discussions:** - Information vs. No Information Games - Understanding randomness, risk taking - Designing interesting decisions		
2	#1	**Project progress:** - Present your top/bottom 5 ideas - Students will discuss the ideas and form groups around selected ones	**50 Game Ideas:** Create your 50 HM/LC Game Ideas list.	Ideas & form groups for P#1

		Discussions: - The essential experience - Gaming emotions - Elemental tetrad		
	#2	**Design Exercise:** Mod a Game (Blokus, Hanabi, or Zendo) **Discussions:** - What is fun? - Types of Fun	- Read the rules for Blokus, Hanabi, and Zendo - Read Bjork & Holopainen's "Game Design Patterns"	
3	#1	**NO CLASS – Labor Day**		
	#2	**Project progress:** Short progress updates in class **Design Exercise:** Add a Rule #1, #2, and #3 **Discussions:** - Designing / Understanding Rules - Designing / Understanding Goals	- Read Costikyan's "I Have No Words & I Must Design."	Progress Update for P#1
4	#1	**Project progress:** - Check the prototypes in class **Discussions:** - MDA Framework - Unification and resonance	- Read Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubek's "MDA Framework"	Prototype for P#1
	#2	**Design Exercise:** 100 Zombies **Discussions:** - Iterative Design and playtesting - Game loops	- Read Birdwell's "The cabal: Valve's design process for creating Half-Life."	
5	#1	**Project progress:** - Present playtest results and discuss iterations **Discussions:** - Emergence **Game play:** Carcassonne	- Read the rules for Carcassonne	Playtest results for P#1 and iteration plan
	#2	**Project progress:** - Blind playtests of P#1s in class	- Read the rules for Settlers of Catan	

		Discussions: - Designing for skills - Learning and curves **Game play:** Settlers of Catan	- Watch: James Paul Gee on learning and games	
6	#1	**Project progress:** - Present your top/bottom 5 ideas - Students will discuss ideas and form groups around selected ones **Discussions:** - Player types and personas, 1 of 2	**50 Game Ideas:** Create your 50 LM/HC Game Ideas list. - Watch: Nick Yee on "Gamer Motivation Profile Findings"	- Submit P#1 - Ideas & form groups for P#2
	#2	**Discussions:** - Player types and personas, 2 of 2 **Game play:** Puerto Rico	- Read the rules for Puerto Rico - Read Short's "Maximizing the Impact of Procedural Personalities."	
7	#1	**Project progress:** - Progress update in class **Discussions:** - Player motivations and mental processes **Game play:** Ticket to Ride	- Read the rules for Ticket to Ride - Watch Scott Rigby on "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Player Motivation: Implications for Design and Player Retention"	Progress Update for P#2
	#2	**Design Exercise** Text-only mechanics Visual-only mechanics **Discussions:** - Communicating your ideas, rules, and game designs		
8	#1	**Project progress:** - Check the prototypes in class **Discussions:** - Narrative, 1 of 2	- Watch: Mitu Khandaker-Kors on "Thinking About People: Designing Games for Social Simulation"	Prototype for P#2
	#2	**Discussions:** - Narrative, 2 of 2 **Game check:** Lords of Waterdeep	- Read the rules for Lords of Waterdeep	

9	#1	**Project progress:** - Present playtest results and discuss iterations **Game check:** Gloomhaven	- Read the rules for Gloomhaven	Playtest results for P#2 and iteration plan
	#2	**Project progress:** - Blind playtests of P#2s in class		
10	#1	**Project progress:** - Present your top/bottom 5 ideas - Students will discuss ideas and form groups around selected ones	**50 Game Ideas:** Create your 50 HM/HC Game Ideas list.	- Submit P#2 - Ideas & form groups for P#3
	#2	**Discussions:** - Balance, ratios, and fairness **Design Exercise:** Us vs. It		
11	#1	**Project progress:** - Short progress update in class **Game check:** Diplomacy	- Read the rules for Diplomacy	Progress Update for P#3
	#2	**Discussions:** - The Future! (of Game Design) **Game check:** Love Letter	- Read the rules for Love Letter	
12	#1	**Project progress:** - Check the prototypes in class		Prototype A for P#3
	#2	**Discussions:** - Ethics and Cultural Scene of Game Design **Game check:** Secret Hitler	- Read the rules for Secret Hitler - Read Microsoft's Inclusive design approach	
13	#1	**Project progress:** - Present playtest results and discuss iterations **Discussions:** - Transition into digital game design, 1/2	- Read Chris Wright: A Brief History of Mobile Games: In the beginning, there was *Snake*	Playtest results for P#3 Prototype A and iteration plan

	#2	**Discussions:** - Transition into digital game design, 2/2	- Read Logan Rivenes, "The History of Online Gaming."	
14	#1	**Project progress:** - Blind playtests of P#3 Prototype Bs in class **Discussions:** - Analog and digital interfaces		Prototype B for P#3
	#2	**Discussions:** - Economics and business of games **Design Exercise:** Game Design Jam		
15		**NO CLASS – Thanksgiving**		
16	#1	**Project progress:** - Present playtest results and discuss iterations **Discussions:** - Short introduction to level design and expanding content		Playtest results for P#3 Prototype B and iteration plan
	#2	**Discussions:** - Final comments - Review and blindtest of P#3s		

Finalize and submit your final projects (P#3) till the end of finals week!
We will arrange a final play day for all the projects throughout the semester where we invite other students and faculty members to playtest your games. Time and location to be finalized.