Basic Course Information

- **Term**: Spring 2020
- **Credit hours**: 3 credits
- **Course hours**: Wednesdays 2.00-4.45pm (Room TYD 0102)
- **Instructor**: Dr. Niklas Elmqvist, Professor of Information Studies
  - E-mail: elm@umd.edu
  - Office: HBK 2117H (HCIL, Hornbake building 2nd floor, South Wing)
  - Office hours: Tuesdays 11am - 12pm (or by appointment)
- **Additional books**: The following books are not required reading, but can be useful:
- **Games budget**: Be advised, you may be asked to buy up to $50 worth of games; please view this as a part of the required material for the course.
- **Prerequisites**: None. Programming experience will be useful, but not strictly necessary.

Introduction

Games are a structured form of play that are typically undertaken for recreational—but sometimes also educational and even professional—purposes. There is evidence of games dating back thousands of years, indicating that they are central to the human condition. But what constitutes a successful game? In this course, you will learn the fundamentals of game design: applying elements and principles of game design, such as goals, rules, and challenges to create games, such as board games, card games, and digital games. You will be introduced to the basic tools and methods of game design: paper and digital prototyping, design iteration, design critique, and user testing. As part of the course, you will be designing several games of different types, each which you will be able to add to your growing portfolio of game design concepts. You will also learn how to use your skills to deconstruct and critique the components of existing games, as well as gain an understanding of the role of the game designer in real-world game development teams.
Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize, analyze, and critique the underlying principles, mechanisms, and aesthetics of existing games;
2. Create, communicate, and motivate a comprehensive game design system adapted to a specific medium, including cards, narratives, boards, and digital;
3. Demonstrate proficiency with a few selected tools currently available for game designers, and apply the most common ones to specific problems; and
4. Describe the role of the game designer in the greater game development industry.

Grading

The course outcomes will be assessed through the following mechanisms:

- **Game deconstruction and critique** (10%) - assignment on reverse engineering and discussing the components of an existing game of the student's own choice. (Outcome #1)
- **Game creation** (70%) - a sequence of assignments creating new games alone or in teams. (Outcome #2)
  - Card game (10%) - creating (or remixing) a card game.
  - Narrative game (10%) - creating (or remixing) a narrative game.
  - Board game (20%) - creating (or remixing) a board game.
  - Video game (30%) - creating a digital game (using an existing game toolkit or engine such as Twine or GameMaker Studio 2).
- **Game tools** (10%) - practical using an existing game design tool for a specific problem (level editor, modding tools, etc). (Outcome #3)
- **Game industry** (5%) - followup quizzes on guest lectures by industry game designers. (Outcome #4)
- **Reading prompts** (5%) - responses to readings prior to the lecture (approximately 200 words)

Class Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading &amp; Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is a game? Definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is design? What is game design?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The role of the game designer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Course Content</strong></td>
<td>Chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2 | **Structure of Games**  
Examples of games  
Design critique  
Focus: card games | 2  
Chapter 2  
Assignment 1 - Game Decomposition |
| 3 | **Elements of Games**  
Deconstructing games  
Game design patterns  
Platforms and media  
Technology | 3  
Chapter 3  
Assignment 2 - Card Game |
| 4 | **Stories, Worlds, and Characters**  
Dramatic elements  
Scripts, stories, and narratives  
Characters  
Focus: narrative games | 4  
Chapter 4 |
| 5 | **Rules and Dynamics**  
System dynamics  
Game dynamics  
Game theory | 5  
Chapter 5  
Assignment 3 - Narrative Game |
| 6 | **Conceptualization**  
Brainstorming  
Ideation  
Focus: board games | 6  
Chapter 6 |
| 7 | **Prototyping**  
Physical prototypes  
Design iteration | 7  
Chapter 7 |
| 8 | **Digital Prototyping**  
Tools: level editors  
Tools: modding tools  
Tools: scripting  
In-class practical - Game Design Tool | 8  
Chapter 8 |
| 9 | **Playtesting**  
Player experience  
Interfaces and interaction  
Focus: digital/video games | 9  
Chapter 9  
Assignment 4 - Board Game |
| 10 | **Functionality, Completeness, and Balance**  
Focus: online/multiplayer games | 10  
Chapter 10 |
| 11 | **Fun and Accessibility**  
Challenge and skill | 11  
Chapter 11 |
Syllabus Change Policy
This syllabus is merely a guide and is subject to change without advance notice.

Academic Integrity
Academic dishonesty is a corrosive force in the academic life of a university. It jeopardizes the quality of education and depreciates the genuine achievements of others. Apathy or acquiescence in the presence of academic dishonesty is not a neutral act. All members of the University Community - students, faculty, and staff - share the responsibility to challenge and make known acts of apparent academic dishonesty.

Students have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with violations of the Code of Academic Integrity. Among these include:

- Cheating: "Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise."
- Fabrication: "Intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise."
- Facilitating Academic Dishonesty: "Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty."
- Plagiarism: "Intentionally or knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one's own in an academic exercise."

For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit https://studentconduct.umd.edu/.
Students with Disabilities

The University is legally obligated to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. The campus' Disability Support Services Office (DSS) works with students and faculty to address a variety of issues ranging from test anxiety to physical and psychological disabilities. If a student or instructor believes that the student may have a disability, they should consult with DSS (4-7682, email dissup@umd.edu). Note that to receive accommodations, students must first have their disabilities documented by DSS. The office then prepares an Accommodation Letter for course instructors regarding needed accommodations. Students are responsible for presenting this letter to their instructors.

Attendance Policy

University policy excuses the absences of students for illness, religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities and compelling circumstances beyond the student’s control. Students who miss a single class for a medical reason are not required to provide medical documentation, but students who are absent more than once are responsible for providing various forms of documentation, depending on the nature of the absence.

Extensions

If you have to miss a deadline, you should inform the instructor as soon as possible, indicating when you plan to submit your work. The instructor will try to accommodate your needs. You should use this clause only for extraordinary personal reasons (e.g., personal illness, family concerns, etc.). The general policy is that late work will be deducted 20% of its total grade per calendar day, starting on the same day it is due. It is at the instructor's discretion to accept late work and assign late penalties.

Emergency Preparedness

See the following URL: [http://www.umd.edu/emergencypreparedness/](http://www.umd.edu/emergencypreparedness/)

Course Evaluation

Course evaluations are a part of the process by which the University of Maryland seeks to improve teaching and learning. The University Senate approved the implementation of a standard, online, University-wide course evaluation instrument. Each course evaluation contains a set of universal questions, and some are supplemented by questions from specific colleges. Students who leave no "Pending" evaluations in their Evaluation Dashboard each semester can view the aggregate results of a subset of universal items online. Across the University, course evaluations are being administered through a web-based system dubbed CourseEvalUM. All information submitted to the Evaluation
System is confidential. Instructors and academic administrators can only view summarized evaluation results after final grades have been submitted. Instructors and academic administrators cannot identify which submissions belong to which students. This standardized set of evaluation results provides the University with useful information on teaching and student learning across the campus.