**DigiPen Institute of Technology**

GAT330 – Interactive Narrative and Character Creation for Games

(3 credits)

**Instructor: Jen Sward**

**Email/phone:** [**jsward@digipen.edu**](mailto:jsward@digipen.edu), x 4432  
Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursdays 1-2:00 pm

**Description**

This course focuses on how to write stories that integrate with gameplay and mechanics. From creating characters to writing branching and interactive dialogue, students work on storytelling in various genres by incorporating their stories and characters into an existing game engine. Topics may include the design and structure of dialogue trees, creating mood parameters for dialogue choices, interactive narrative, autonomous behaviors, emergent gameplay, adding emotional depth through the use of character archetypes, and weaving theme and story into the game in a way that resonates with the player.

**Specific Learning Objectives**

After completing this course, students will:

* Know how to develop story to improve game experiences through emotional and intellectual connections. This includes understanding dialog branching and creating several complete dialog trees for interactive narrative using a variety of industry tools.
* Know how to use game mechanics, level design, game design, exposition, narration and dialog to develop a story experience within games.
* Understand interactive narrative tools including dialog trees, game mechanics, level design, visual design, audio design and game play.
* Improve skills for creating compelling characters, writing interesting and unique dialog and connecting the characters and dialog to forward the game action.

Instructor’s Notes

In this class, you’ll be looking at what it means to “tell a story” interactively. From writing dialog and exposition to designing mechanics and levels for the story experience, the course looks at all aspects of “ludic narrative”.

You’ll be doing the following:

* Do a narrative review of one game, focused on NARRATIVE STRUCTURE.
* Do a review of one game, focused on CHARACTERS: their story arc and development
* Do a review of one game, focused on "neutral" player character
* Do a review of one game, focused on non-verbal storytelling

The course looks at all types of game genre, engagement types and game mechanics, from companions in game to analyzing how mechanics can support the story being told. We’ll look at how visuals, from the artist’s work to animation to camera positioning and movement to level design and flow impact the story. We’ll delve into music and audio as storytelling devices; and we’ll look at the overarching idea of “what is a story.”

**Recommended Reading**

Interactive Storytelling for Video Games: A Player-Centered Approach to Creating Memorable Characters and Stories by Josiah Lebowitz and Chris Klug   
**ISBN-10:** 0240817176, **ISBN-13:** 978-0240817170

David Perry on Game Design: A Brainstorming ToolBox, **David Perry**,David Perry (Author)

ISBN-10: 1584506687, ISBN-13: 978-1584506683

Creating Emotions in Games, David Freeman,   
ISBN-10: 0735713324, ISBN-13: 978-0735713321

The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses, Jesse Schell,   
ISBN-10: 0123694965, ISBN-13: 978-0123694966

**Required PLAYING**

SOME of the following games are on reserve in the DigiPen Library for you, or are readily available online. Consoles can be checked out from the library as well.

* You will be sharing these with other students in the class, so respect the time limitations.
* You can play with others, this can be a shared homework assignment.
* You may play using game-walkthroughs in order to experience more of the game.
* Take notes as you play: the purpose is to look at the games, the characters, the stories and the emotional engagement. Track how the game makes you feel, how the characters make you feel, how realistic they are and how they might be superficial.
* Try to play more than once. I chose older games that you’ve likely already experienced so you can focus as designers, not as players, and for which there exist a number of walk-throughs already.

There are additional games that you will be asked to play; these are either freely available or you may choose from the list for one that you already own or is in the DigiPen library.

**REQUIRED Game List:**

* Full Throttle
* Portal or ICO
* Limbo or Monument Valley
* The Last of Us or Alan Wake

**RECOMMENDED Game List:**

* Shelter 2
* Fallout 4
* Undertale
* Sly Cooper

Required TOOLS

You will need to use TWINE, available for free from Twinery.org. There are tutorials that will instruct you in using this tool, please follow them. Some of the class time will review the tool but we will not be learning this tool within the class setting.

You will need access to a computer to play the various video games. The consoles necessary for playing the games will be on hold for your use in the library as well.

**Grading**

The grades for this class are based on a 0 to 100 point scale, which translates into a final percentage based grade. Each project will receive a grade of between 0 to 100 points expressed as a percentage of the total score. Your final score is based on average of the points for written projects, prototype projects, and your final project (round up), plus modifiers for attendance and participation. There is no midterm or written test, but reference to reading materials will often be required to be included in project execution.

**1. Breakdown:**

Analysis of 4 games 20% (2 by mid semester, 10% by final)

Written Storytelling 40% (mid semester grade)

Character Development, create 3 characters

Dialog assignments, draft of 1 short dialog, iterate

Narrative assignment, draft of 1 introductory narration

TWINE assignment

Non-verbal Storytelling 40%

Non-verbal mini-game

Slide show of non-verbal storyboards

UI design for HUD or interface

Mechanics development

NON VERBAL GAME

Attendance -10,20,30,40 based on attendance (see below)

**Attendance:** Attendance counts for part of the grading. If you have 10% (3 out of 28 lectures) of the course lectures as unexcused absences, you will lose 10 points off your overall grade out of 100 (a full-letter grade reduction). If you have 20% (6 out of 28) unexcused absences, you will lose another 10 points. At 30% (a total of 9 out of 28 unexcused absences), you will lose another 10 points. After missing 40% (12 out of 28) of the class, you will be at a maximum of 60/100, which is a D. If you have a situation in which you will miss class, please contact the instructor or Bridget Scott in Student Services so we can assist you.

**2. Scale and Standards:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| A | 93-100% | The work is outstanding and meets or exceeds professional standard on all levels. |
| A- | 90-92% |
| B+ | 87-89% | The work is acceptable student work, showing growth and the start of attaining professional standard on most levels. |
| B | 83-86% |
| B- | 80-82% |
| C+ | 77-79% | Average student work, but not considered professional. |
| C | 73-76% |
|  | 68-72% |
| D | 60-68% | Substandard work, although it shows some understanding of the basic principles. |
| F | 60% and below | Unacceptable work. |

**3. Late Work:**

All work will be due at the beginning of class or as indicated in the assignment. The following penalties will apply to work submitted late.

Less than one week late: 1 letter grade deduction

More than one week late: 40% deduction

No late work will be accepted after week 14. Period. Don’t bother asking.

**4. Assignments:**

This class is about story, character, games and game mechanics. You will be writing a LOT of material. Some will be graded, some are not but are checked off as done/not done/incorporating recommendations.

NOTE: your writing improves by the act of writing as well as reading. Do Both.

For each graded assignment, there will be a set of rubrics handed out. However, general formatting, header and footer information, spelling and grammar are important and will always be considered in the grading. For some assignments, two grades will be given: how well the work fulfills the requirement of the assignment, and a second, independent grade on spelling, grammar, etc.

**Academic Integrity Policy**

Each student in this course is expected to abide by DigiPen’s Student Enrollment Agreement. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e-mail, an e-mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy.

Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

During examinations, you must do your own work. Talking or discussion is not permitted during the examinations, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any collaborative behavior during the examinations will result in failure of the exam, and may lead to failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

**Disabled Student Services**

If students have disabilities and will need formal accommodations in order to fully participate or effectively demonstration learning in this class, they should contact the Disability Support Services Office at (425)629-5015 or dss[at]digipen[dot]edu.  The DSS Office welcomes the opportunity to meet with students to discuss how the accommodations will be implemented. Also, if you may need assistance in the event of an evacuation, please let the instructor know.

**Tentative schedule and assignments**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Week** | **TUESDAY** | **THURSDAY** | **FRIDAY (due at 5 pm)** |
| Week 1 | Introduction to class. Games with Stories. | Introduction to Character Design. Introduction to Twine. |  |
| Week 2 | Review of Structure of narrative in games | Writing Unique Dialog for Characters, believable dialog, slang | Full Throttle Analysis |
| Week 3 | Player types: strong characters vs. neutral characters | Companions in games  TWINE Ideas and Demos | Homework: Create 3 characters for a game, Draft dialog for 1 scene with all 3 characters. |
| Week 4 | Cut scenes in games, cinematography review | Good Writin’ | Draft introductory narration |
| Week 5  (GAM week) | Impact of Game Genre on Character, Story, Mechanics. | Gender in Writing: characters, audience | Portal/Ico/Companion Analysis |
| Week 6 | Visual Narrative: showing relationships without words. | Game Play Narrative: showing relationships through game mechanics | **TWINE GAME DUE FRIDAY** |
| Week 7 | Visual Narrative: showing backstory without words | Visual Narrative: Impact of Camera on storytelling |  |
| Week 8 | Level Design and storytelling  Examples of non-verbal mini-games and of slide show | Game Play Narrative: showing story through game mechanics | Mid semester grades due (Tuesday Oct 25, 2016)  Limbo or Monument Valley Analysis |
| Week 9  (GAM week) | Symbols and symbolic language in HUD, UI, game play, and movies | TBD |  |
| Week 10 | Player-centric design review | Demo non-verbal mini-games | Non-verbal mini-game (level design and relationships) |
| Week 11 | Creating Aliens Cultures, research, modifying culture to create individuals: what does it mean to be human? Creating language | Symbols: Slide Show Presentation | Non-verbal SLIDESHOW (visuals telling the story) |
| Week 12 | Translating your dialog into a script, hiring and working with actors for voice over, working with actors for video, working in studio | Thanksgiving | Alan Wake or The Last of Us Analysis |
| Week 13 | The future: Auto-generation of stories: natural language generation, AIs, procedurally generated stories | The future |  |
| Week 14 | Final Presentation | (no class, focus on GAM) | **Final project** |
| Week 15 Finals | Finals (no final in this class) | | |