Syllabus Collaborative Project:
Narrative Games
BA 2

Project Lead: Prof. Bernd Diemer, Game Design (bd@colognegamelab.de)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

One can find multiple narrative principles and structures in games: Linear, non-linear, procedural, driven by choice, tonal narrative, character arcs, environmental experiences, and others. They all tell a story, and evoke emotions.

Your task is to build a game experience that tells a story that evokes emotions and empathy in players through gameplay instead through linear media like cutscenes. Genre, format, media, mechanics, visual and narrative style will be chosen by you and your team.

For your Consideration!

- Make sure you explore the implications of story, emotion and narrative means you chose.
- Carefully consider and discuss what is best for your unique combination of narrative principle, genre, emotion and the story itself.
- Ask yourself why you and your team are passionate about your project.
- Consider and analyse examples of released games to determine how they for balance gameplay freedom with narrative progress, for example limiting the freedom of movement to make players feel helpless.
- A small and polished game is better than a large and rough one.
- Find out what is essential for the success of your creative approach and do that first.
- Be mindful of creative dead ends. Always test your game with the target audience.
- Don't be afraid of spoilers in your presentations! Make sure you tell your audience what is special about your game. Don't keep secrets.
- Feedback will make your game better! Talk to your professors, schedule consultations, run playtests with your fellow students etc.

PROCEDURE

You will form a team of 3 to 5, develop an idea, a pitch, a playable prototype and a full game experience. Every team has to nominate a Project Lead in the beginning of the project. This person will be the main point of contact for the instructors, but not necessarily the spokesperson for the presentations. At set checkpoints you will present your progress on the

project itself, the necessary documentation as well as your project management to the instructors and the other students.

COURSE STRUCTURE
KICKOFF

Kick Off & Introduction to the Narrative Games Project

FIRST PROJECT PITCH

The pitch should explain the core concept of the game and include an initial aesthetic concept (mood boards, first concept sketches, scribbles etc.), as well as a brief technical approach of how to bring this all together. The presentation must include a working title for the game and a list of the project members (+ their roles) - the project lead needs to be defined. The pitches are limited to 10 minutes and must be delivered as a PDF and a representative gameplay video.
Deliverables: One Sheet, Concept Document, Playable prototype, Ripomatic or Gameplay video.

INTERMEDIATE PRESENTATION

Intermediate Presentation - At this point 2/3 of the available project time will have passed! The intermediate presentation will give you the chance to present the current state of your project and get feedback from your fellow students and professors. Your presentation should include all three pillars of game development: Game Design, Game Arts and Game Programming. If you have a running prototype you might include a sneak peak of it. The pitches are limited to 10 minutes and must be delivered as a PDF and a representative gameplay video.
Deliverables: Updated Overview Presentation, updated Concept Doc, Playable Demo, Gameplay video

FINAL PRESENTATION

1Final Presentation
Deliverables: Final Overview Presentation, final Concept Doc, playable standalone Game Build, Gameplay video

—> **Mentoring Sessions** are organised individually by the project leads - please contact the Professors via E-Mail!

PROJECT OBJECTIVES
Upon successful completion of the first collaborative project students will be able to:

—> Recall knowledge of the game development process – from conception (pitching) and design to production, post-production and presentation

—> Develop a narrative supported by gameplay and design mechanisms to evoke emotions in players during the game design and development process as well as generate artwork and practice programming at a basic level

—> Recall basic aspects of project management and apply those to the development process

—> Generate project documentation

PROJECT MANAGEMENT COURSES

Parallel to prototype development, Prof. Odile Limpach will teach project management. This class will cover the principles of project management: the students will explore and reflect on the basic rules of project planning, the role of a producer as well as the composition of a core team. Different project management methods will be introduced, discussed and practiced.

Documentation: In their blog the students should reflect on the planning methods they used and shortly describe their role within the project.

GRADING

The collaborative project will be graded. The final project grade for each participant consists of the following subgrades for group work and individual contributions:

–> Group Grades: 70%

—> Intermediate Presentation: 10%
Formal Criteria: design, structure, time management of presentation; Content Criteria: game design, game arts, game informatics, consideration of target audience, originality and relevance with regard to the theme, project plan.

—> Final Presentation: 10%
Formal Criteria: design, structure, time management of presentation; Content Criteria: game design, game arts, game informatics, consideration of target audience, originality and relevance with regard to the theme, reflection on development process including a detailed project plan.

—> Game: 50% - Criteria: game design, game arts, game informatics; originality and relevance to the theme "Narrative Games"

—> Documentation: Pass/No Pass
The documentation must be submitted at each milestone. It has to include a written project plan and the following documentation that will be published on the CGL project archive/ website: project type; production year; platform; genre; tagline; team members; "About" (a descriptive text of max 1000 characters); thumbnail image for menu; 5-10 images (from concept art to final game); gameplay video (youtube/vimeo); optional link to prototype.

—> Individual Grade: 30%

Each student has to write at least 1 blog entry per week documenting her or his work and contribution to the team project (text, artwork, video, code, prototypes). The individual grade is based on these blog entries.

—> Game Design Criteria: Conceptual originality of the approach, design and application of the core game mechanics, conceptual design of character, objects and game-levels.

—> Game Arts Criteria: Process - Transparent and traceable design process. Design Quality: Does the result show a consistent and discrete design concept? Convincing use of aesthetical approach in regard to the given task? Technical Quality: Appropriate use of tools (analog + digital), details and over all finish.

—> Game Programming Criteria: Conceptual approach to technical realisation of the game, Quality of the written code (documentation!), functionality of the game prototype.

—> Game Studies: Unity of artistic vision as expressed in the game prototype; quality of analytic and artistic self-reflection with regard to the position of the game project / prototype in game history and in contemporary culture as expressed in the group presentations and the individual blog entries.
Please note that in order to pass the module you have to pass each individual part, i.e., you have to achieve at least a sufficient grade (4) in all graded parts and you must pass the documentation portion

DELIVERABLES DEFINITIONS

1 page pitch: A PDF or PPT with max 2 slides
- Describes your game at the highest level on the first slide
- Supporting visuals (concepts, images, photos, scribbles) on the second slide.
- This must make readers curious to learn more about your game

One Sheet (in most cases this is two pages): PDF or PPT
- Needs to be able to stand on its own
- Quickly provides an overview of your game
- Looks sharp and professional
- Lists briefly and concisely the following information:
    - Title
    - Platform and genre
    - Summary
    - Unique selling points
    - Target market and group
    - Rough production plan
    - High quality in-game screenshot or concept art
    - Team info and contact

Overview Presentation: A PDF or PPT, 10-15 pages
- Used to present your game to an audience
- Provides a guide for presenting a more detailed overview of your game
- Fits the visual theme of the game
- Looks sharp and professional
- Contains the following information:
    - All information of the one sheet
    - Explains the game direction
    - A deeper dive into every aspect of the game
    - A deeper dive into the development aspects of the game
    - A selection of 1-5 high quality in-game screenshots or concept artworks
    - Slides showing comparable successful titles
    - Shows the good side of your game

Concept Doc: PDF, 8-10 pages
- Professional layout
- Printable and standalone- this needs to give someone the essentials of the game
- Immersed in the game theme
- Explains the game direction
- Covers essential design and feature questions
- Contains the following information:
    - Game overview
    - Game pillars and the features supporting them
    - Unique Selling Points
    - High quality concept and game art
    - Gameplay example described from the players point of view

- o   Team info and contacts
- o   Specific target audience

Playable prototype and demo: 2-5 minutes of high impact gameplay
- This shows the best and most impressive part of the game. Don't worry about spoilers!
- Small and polished is better than large and rough
- Has voices, audio and music
- You will demo this- make sure you train how to play it so it is impressive to players!
- If you can't show off some features fake the experience

Standalone Game Build:
- Your game ready to give it into the players hands
- Small and polished is better than large and rough
- Includes all necessary tutorials
- This needs to stand on its own- make sure you test it well!
- Include all necessary installers and needed software in an archive
- Include install and gameplay instructions in a printable document
- Include a list of known issues
- Include a contact for support

Gameplay Video:
- A 1:30 – 2:00 high impact recording of your game or prototype

Ripomatic:
- A 1:30 – 2:00 high impact video made up of concepts and existing material from movies showing off the essence, mood, tone and vision of your game.