COM 3432-01

Character Design

MWF 10:40 Am – 11:50 Am

Fall 2021 Syllabus and Course Calendar

Classroom: NQSC 125  
Instructor: Brian Heagney  
Office: NQSC 307

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| Office Hours | | | | |
| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
| 2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | 10 AM – 11:30 AM | 2:15 PM – 3:15 PM | 10 AM – 11:30 AM |  |

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Course Description

Students will gain knowledge of the representational and interactive implications of character design, as well as learn technical skills to develop 2D or 3D game-ready characters. The relationship between character, story, and gameplay are examined. Students will design compelling characters for a variety of game types. *Four credit hours.*

Course Objectives

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| **Upon completion of the course, you should be able to:** | **Assessment** |
| Understand representational and interactive implications of character design | Reading responses (blog posts); Character Sheet; AC / BF Character |
| Produce conceptual drawings and renderings of characters for a variety of game types | Reading responses (forum posts) |
| Develop a game character as it relates to story and gameplay | Reading responses (Blog posts); Character Sheet; Digital Game Character |
| Identify complex ethical issues pertaining to under-representation and misrepresentation of gender, race, sexual orientation, and physical abilities in games; entertain different perspectives on them, and evaluate one's own position. | Reading responses (blog posts); |
| Understand and use the general process of designing meaningful and original characters for interactive and game purposes | Reading responses (blog posts); Character Board; AC / BF Character |
| Use professional video game development tools to design and develop a playable game character. | Digital Game Character |

Textbooks and Required Course Materials

* **NO TEXTBOOK**—all required reading will be available by either blackboard PDF or link to online website.
* **(Small) sketchbook and pens** – Students will be required to keep a sketchbook for blog and major assignment purposes. Students will not be graded on artistic proficiency, but will be required to use sketching as a method of research, planning, and discovery.  
    
  It is highly recommended to purchase a small sketchbook, which can be purchased at many locations, including Walmart, CVS, Walgreens, and even the dollar store on Main St. near the High Point Public Library.
* A **USB flash drive 16GB** (or higher).  The drive must be dedicated to this course and must be brought to each class session.  You should be able to find these at local retailers (e.g. Target, Wal-Mart) or online.
* **Software/Computer Labs** – There will be some use of digital software for this class, all of which are installed on the computers in NQSC 125c (The Game Lab). It is expected that you will have to organize your time accordingly to use this software, ensuring that you schedule time to work in the Game Lab when there is not another class going on.
* **Unreal Engine 4 (UE4)** – it is recommended that you download and install the free Epic Games Launcher and install UE4 (whichever version is installed on the computers in the Game Lab).

Expectations

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. After **TWO** unexcused absences, you will be flagged on Starfish.  (Two tardies equals one absence.) After a **FIFTH** absence, you will be dropped from the course. Exceptions will only be granted for university sanctioned events (with prior notice) or hospitalization (with verification of medical treatment).  HPU Health Services does not supply notes for treatment. However, you can request a payment receipt from them to verify your visit.

It is the responsibility of the student (not the instructor) to secure class notes, handouts, assignments, and other information from missed classes.  The instructor does not post class notes on Blackboard.

Diversity

An appreciation for diversity is an important value in an academic environment and critical to relationships in the professional world. In this course our research will draw from a diverse set of cultural, geographic and artistic influences. We will understand issues with representation and misrepresentation of race, gender, and other stereotypes in media production, especially concerning character design and development.

Assignments and grading

* **Blog Posts (40% of grade)** – Students will have weekly blog assignment which will be completed using Blogger. These assignments will allow students to practice the skills relevant to the course. Blog assignments will be specified on Blackboard and will show up in your assignment calendar.
* **Character Sheet (20% of grade) –** Students will use character design methods to design an original game character. Students will work in any medium they wish (digital painting, clay, sculpture, etc) to develop the original character, but all students will engage in research, silhouette studies, and color theory studies and then produce a character board using Photoshop and/or InDesign.
* **Animal Crossing / Best Fiends Character (20% of grade) –** Students will design and develop an original character for an existing IP (such as Animal Crossing or Best Fiends). Students will engage in the same process as the Character Sheet assignment, but will also explore creating spreadsheets in excel for character abilities, writing dialogue, and more. More details for the assignment are described on blackboard.
* **Digital Game Character (20% of grade)  –** Students will work with their character created in the Character Board assignment, and digitize the character to be used in a game engine. In the course, we will review creating a 2D spritesheet to import into UE4, 3D content and/or other game engines may be considered if the student wishes.

Expectations for out-of-class work

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| Out-of-Class Work: | In addition to attending class and completing all course requirements, students are expected to spend at least 2 hours each week engaged in out-of class work (i.e., reading, studying, doing homework, working on projects, etc.) for every hour of credit earned in this course. |

According to HPU’s accreditation guidelines, for every 1 hour of credit earned in a course, students are expected to spend at least 2 hours each week engaged in out-of-class work (i.e., reading, studying, doing homework, working on projects, etc.). Therefore, in a 4-credit course, students are expected to commit an average of at least eight hours per week outside of class. (In a 2-credit course that meets for half of the semester, you are still expected to commit to an average of eight hours per week.) The estimates listed below reflect the out-of-class time expectations for a typical student – some students might need more or less time on these assignments.

* Assigned readings and videos (approx. 39 hours throughout the semester)
* Blog posts – (approx. 39 hrs. outside of class throughout the semester)
* Character Sheet – approx. 14 hrs out of class
* AC / BF Character – approx. 12 hrs out of class
* Digital Character – approx. 16 hrs out of class

Deadlines

See School of Communication policy at end of this document (short version = late work loses one letter grade per day; no late work is accepted after three days).

Grading

Grades are assigned as follows (there is no “rounding” of grades):

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| A (superior) –superior quality (90-100%) | B (excellent) –clearly above average (80-89%) | C (average) satisfactory work (70-79%) | D (inferior) –good enough to credit (60-69%) | F (failure) –work fails to meet the minimum expectations (0-59.9%) |
| A+ (97 - 100) | B+ (87 - 89.9) | C+ (77 - 79.9) | D+ (67 - 69.9) | F (0-59.9%) |
| A (93 - 96.9) | B (83 - 86.9) | C (73 - 76.9) | D (63 - 66.9) |
| A-(90 - 92.9) | B-(80 - 82.9) | C-(70 - 72.9) | D-(60 - 62.9) |

**Please note that simply completing all required elements of an assignment does not entitle you to an A. Acceptable work of average quality earns a C.** You must go above average expectations to receive an above average grade. This mimics the professional world of communication, where basic proficiency might get you in the door at the entry level, but creative thinking and a willingness to go beyond the minimum expectations are necessary to get noticed and advance.

The following rubric will be used to grade all major assignments (slight modifications will be made depending on the nature of the assignment):

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|  | SUPERLATIVE (90-100%) | EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS (80-89.9%) | MEETS EXPECATIONS (70-79.9%) | BELOW EXPECTATIONS (60-69.9%) | UNACCEPTABLE (0-59.9%) |
| Project Management (25%) | Meets all requirements and shows both exceptionally thorough planning AND exceptional organization on the part of the student. | Meets all requirements and shows either exceptionally thorough planning OR exceptional organization on the part of the student | Required elements are present and submitted correctly, technical specs are correct, and project files show organization | Not altogether satisfactory, but good enough to receive credit for the assignment. | Does not meet minimum expectations of the assignment. |
| Research (25%) | Student has presented supporting evidence that they engaged in superlative amount of research and investigation prior to developing character. | Student has presented above average amount of supporting evidence that they engaged research and investigation prior to developing character. | Student has presented evidence that they engaged research and investigation prior to developing character. | Not altogether satisfactory, but good enough to receive credit for the assignment. | Does not meet minimum expectations of the assignment. |
| Technical Proficiency (25%) | Project employs advanced tools and techniques to effectively improve the project AND makes exceptionally creative use of required software and equipment. | Project either employs advanced tools and techniques to effectively improve the project OR makes exceptionally creative use of required software and equipment. | Project effectively utilizes required software and equipment. | Not altogether satisfactory, but good enough to receive credit for the assignment. | Does not meet minimum expectations of the assignment. |
| Message / Story Development based on class readings (25%) | Reserved for the MOST creative and compelling concepts and approaches in the class AND executes the concept exceptionally well. | Concept and/or approach is exceptionally creative or compelling OR executes a concept exceptionally well. | Project effectively communicates a required message and/or story. | Not altogether satisfactory, but good enough to receive credit for the assignment. | Does not meet minimum expectations of the assignment. |

Digital Portfolio

All students in the school of Communication are required to develop a digital portfolio on their LinkedIn page. The digital portfolio is an online collection of the work you've done during your time at High Point University.

In this class, you will produce projects that could be suitable for your digital portfolio. If you are proud of your work, then consider posting it to your LinkedIn page to show a potential employer and colleagues what you are capable of.

Writing styles

Professional work should be written in the latest revisions of the Associated Press (AP) Style Manuals for print and broadcast. (Yes, AP also has a style manual for broadcast.) The School requires academic papers to be written in the latest revision of the American Psychological Association (APA) style. If you’re unfamiliar with this style, please see the Chair or the Dean. Other academic styles are not accepted unless the student work is written for a publication or event that requires a different format. Having students learn multiple writing styles only confuses them.

Absences and tardies

After two unexcused absences you will receive a Probation Notice. After a fifth absence you will be dropped from the class. Exceptions will only be granted for university-sanctioned events (with prior notice) or hospitalization (with a doctor’s note). Tardies are also unacceptable. Be on time. Better yet, be early. Two tardies will equal an absence. Students will not be permitted to make up grades for work missed due to an unexcused absence or tardy.

Copyright, Plagiarism, and cheating

Each of you signed the HPU Honor Code and it is your responsibility to abide by it. Cheating or plagiarism can result in failure for the course. Theft of intellectual property (such as images, audio, or video) is equivalent to plagiarism. See the School of Communication policies on plagiarism and copyright at the end of this document.

On occasion, the professor will provide media/materials for use in class.  These materials may include photos, video/audio files, scripts, and design templates.  These items are copyrighted (by the professor and others) and may only be used in classroom exercises as specified by the professor.  Consequently, students may not use media supplied by the professor in their projects unless they have been given permission to do so. Student projects containing unauthorized material provided by the professor may be penalized or disqualified.  Students also may not share, distribute, or post online any media that contains media elements provided by the professor.

In addition, the professor holds the copyright on all course materials including lectures, PowerPoint presentations, handouts, video/audio media, etc.  Consequently, course sessions and materials cannot be recorded, copied, or distributed in any form without the written permission of the professor.

Plagiarism involves copying the work of others and/or representing it as your own without attribution. Students should not use any media created by another student or outside entity (e.g. downloaded online) in their assignments without prior permission from the professor.  In addition, students should not copy edited sequences, documents, sessions, or projects and represent them as their own. Incidents of copyright infringement and plagiarism will be treated as University Honor Code violations.

Blackboard

I am a self-avowed blackboard nut and evangelist. I use blackboard for all of my class administration, and therefore you MUST use blackboard as well. If you have never used Blackboard before, it will become your friend. If Blackboard is already your friend, you will become BFFs. If you dislike Blackboard, then please come see me and I will evangelize to you appropriately. The following is how I use Blackboard:

**Assignments:** All assignments will be hosted and explained in Blackboard. Every major assignment will have a rubric attached to it in Blackboard, which will help you understand how I will grade your submissions.

For every assignment, you MUST submit something through Blackboard. If you complete an assignment and do not submit it to Blackboard, it is as if you have not completed it and it will be counted as late.

**Assignment Calendar:** Blackboard has an amazing assignment calendar associated with it. When you go to the Blackboard assignment calendar, you will be able to see EVERY assignment and quiz that is assigned so you won’t ever forget!

**Blog/Forums:** All blog assignments must be completed using Blogger. The student will then post the url of their blog to the blackboard forum for their peers to read and comment on. Your comments to your peers will be completed using the blackboard forum, NOT blogger’s comment functions.

**Syllabus:** This syllabus will also be hosted on Blackboard.

**Blackboard is Master:** Blackboard assignment dates and descriptions take precedence over all dates/descriptions on this syllabus.

**Problems with Blackboard:** Please contact **IT IMMEDIATELY** if you do not have access to our class blackboard page. I cannot help you, only IT can help you. It is your responsibility to remedy the problem on your own.

Hollywood

In addition to uploading major assignment submissions through blackboard, you will be expected to transfer all of your working files to the School of Communication “Hollywood” server. Instructions for transferring to Hollywood server will be found on Blackboard.

While Blackboard will be used for uploading a final compressed version of a project, Hollywood will be used to show me your ENTIRE project folder. You will transfer a major project folder which will include any number of subfolders containing all of the appropriate files (images, audio clips, video clips, etc.).

You WILL NOT use the Hollywood server in place of a jump drive: your folder in the Hollywood server will remain organized with only the appropriate folders and subfolders corresponding to our major assignments.

Additionally, you WILL NOT work directly from the Hollywood server. If you absolutely need to work on a file that is in your Hollywood folder, you MUST transfer all appropriate files to your hard drive and work on them from there. Every time a student has worked directly from the Hollywood server, problems have arisen and it is easier to just work directly from the hard drive of the computer you are working on.

Tentative schedule

This is a tentative schedule that is subject to change. Details for each week’s assignments will be posted on Blackboard.

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| **Week** | **Day** | **Date** | | **Main Topic** | **Topic** | **Readings (To read by first day of week)** | **Assignments Due** | | **Estimated Hours** |
| 1 | Monday | 8/23/2021 | | Character Sheet | Sketching Bootcamp: Gesture | Readings / Videos for Week 1 | Activity: Design a Character from Prompt | | Readings / Videos: 4 Blog Post: 4 |
| Wednesday | 8/25/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 8/28/2021 | |  | Blog post 1: Gesture + Scribble | |
| 2 | Monday | 8/30/2021 | | Sketching Bootcamp: Sketching Research and Thumbnails | Readings / Videos for Week 2 |  | | Readings / Videos: 4 Blog Post: 4 |
| Wednesday | 9/1/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 9/4/2021 | |  | Blog post 2: mind map, mood board, Sketch Research | |
| 3 | Monday | 9/6/2021 | | Scale, Shape, Color | Readings / Videos for Week 3 |  | | Readings / Videos: 3 Blog Post: 3 Character Sheet: 2 |
| Wednesday | 9/8/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 9/11/2021 | |  | Blog post 3: Investigate colors | |
| 4 | Monday | 9/13/2021 | | Stereotypes and tropes | Readings / Videos for Week 4 |  | | Readings / Videos: 2 Blog Post: 2 Character Sheet: 4 |
| Wednesday | 9/15/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 9/18/2021 | |  | Blog post 4: redesign scale and proportion of a game character | |
| 5 | Monday | 9/20/2021 | | Multiplayer cooperative Characters |  |  | | Character Sheet: 8 |
| Wednesday | 9/22/2021 | |  | Bring to class a sketch of original cooperative multi-player duo | |
| Friday | 9/25/2021 | |  | Due: Character Sheet | |
| 6 | Monday | 9/27/2021 | | Best Fiends / Animal Crossing New Character | Intro to the games | Readings / Videos for Week 6 |  | | Readings / Videos: 4 Blog Post: 4 |
| Wednesday | 9/29/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 10/2/2021 | |  | Blog Post 5: write about some of the systems and how character traits affect them. | |
| 7 | Monday | 10/4/2021 | | Game Balancing with Excel | Readings / Videos for Week 7 |  | | Readings / Videos: 3 Blog Post: 3 AC / BF Character: 2 |
| Wednesday | 10/6/2021 | |  |  |  | |
| Friday | 10/9/2021 | |  |  | Blog post 6: Excel Fun | |
| **FALL BREAK** |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  | |
| 8 | Monday | 10/18/2021 | |  | Dialogue / Monologue | Readings / Videos for Week 8 |  | | Readings / Videos: 3 Blog Post: 3 AC / BF Character: 2 |
| Wednesday | 10/20/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 10/23/2021 | |  | Blog Post 7: Monologue/Dialogue | |
| 9 | Monday | 10/25/2021 | | Work week | Readings / Videos for Week 9 |  | | AC / BF Character: 8 |
| Wednesday | 10/27/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 10/30/2021 | |  | AC/BF Character Due  Quickposes Certificate Due (for extra credit) | |
| 10 | Monday | 11/1/2021 | | Digital Playable Character | Intro to 2D UE4 | Readings / Videos for Week 10 |  | | Readings / Videos: 4 Blog Post: 4 |
| Wednesday | 11/3/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 11/6/2021 | |  | Blog Post 8: Original frame-to-frame Sprite Import | |
| 11 | Monday | 11/8/2021 | | Animating in Animate | Readings / Videos for Week 11 |  | | Readings / Videos: 4 Blog Post: 4 |
| Wednesday | 11/10/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 11/13/2021 | |  | Blog Post 9: Sprite Import | |
| 12 | Monday | 11/15/2021 | | MudBox I | Readings / Videos for Week 12 |  | | Readings / Videos: 3 Blog Post: 3 Digital Character: 2 |
| Wednesday | 11/17/2021 | |  |  | |
| Friday | 11/20/2021 | |  | Blog post 10: simple digital sculpting assignment with Mudbox | |
| 13 | Monday | 11/22/2021 | | Mudbox II | Readings / Videos for Week 13 |  | | Readings / Videos: 3 Blog Post: 3 Digital Character: 2 |
| **THANKSGIVING BREAK** |  |  | | **THANKSGIVING BREAK** |  |  | |  |
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| 14 | Monday | 11/29/2021 | | MudBox II | Readings / Videos for Week 14 |  | | Readings / Videos: 2 Blog Post: 2 Digital Character: 4 |  |
| Wednesday | 12/1/2021 | |  |  | |  |
| Friday | 12/4/2021 | |  | Blog Post 11: Digital Sculpting II (hard edge sculpting) | |  |
| 15 | Monday | 12/6/2021 | | Finishing Up | Readings / Videos for Week 15 |  | | Digital Character: 8 |  |
| Wednesday | 12/8/2021 | |  |  | |  |
| **EXAM BLOCK** | Saturday | 12/11/2021 8 AM - 11 AM | | EXAM BLOCK ACTIVITY: TBA (in-class blog post 12)  Major Assignment: Digital Game Character Implementation Due | | | | | |  |

FAQs

1. What are your office hours?
   1. Check the Syllabus as well as blackboard
2. I can’t meet you during your office hours.
   1. That’s not a question. But, I have included my entire schedule on blackboard so you can check out when it looks like I could possibly meet with you, and email me to ask if we can meet then. I am very open to meeting outside of my office hours.
3. When is the assignment due?
   1. Every single assignment given comes with a due-date, which you can find on blackboard in the section called “Assignment Calendar”.
4. How do you grade?
   1. Every single major assignment comes with a rubric that should guide you to obtaining the grade you desire.
5. Can I email you the assignment?
   1. No. Don’t ever email me an assignment. Ever. Turn it in through the appropriate blackboard assignment.
6. I turned in my assignment late, will you still grade it?
   1. Check the syllabus for details on turning in late assignments.
7. Why didn’t you grade my assignment yet?
   1. It could be because you didn’t actually upload the assignment to blackboard. In fact, most of the time a student asks me this question it is because they have not yet given me an assignment to grade through blackboard.
   2. It could also be because you uploaded your submission to the wrong assignment. Please ensure that you are uploading to the proper blackboard assignment.
   3. It could also be because you have turned in the assignment late. Grading late-work is last priority.
8. Why did you give me a 0% on one of my submissions?
   1. Great question. For every blackboard assignment I allow unlimited submissions. I only grade one of the submissions, so my comments to you will be consolidated to only one of the submissions. But, to clear the alert on my end, I have to give some sort of grade. I give a zero to clear the alert, and so that you know which of the graded submissions my feedback is connected to (the grade that is NOT a zero).
9. I was working on my project in the computer lab last night and I was expecting to continue working on it this morning BUT IT’S GONE!!! What happened? (And are you still going to count my project as late?)
   1. First, you will recall that in almost every class I talk about how you should be saving your work onto a jump drive or other external drive, and how the computers in the computer labs all over campus will erase your work. So, yes, it sounds like your project is erased. But don’t fret. You probably have a backup saved somewhere right?
   2. Second, yes, I will count the project as late because it is late. Please ensure that you always save your work to an external drive.
10. Why did you give me the grade you gave me?
    1. I use a blackboard-based rubric to grade assignments. You should be able to see my comments on the rubric on blackboard.
11. Okay. I think I did an excellent job on my project, why did you give me a B?
    1. “B” is the grade given to excellent work.
12. I have to miss class, are we doing anything important?
    1. We have to cover a lot of material in this semester, so every class we are going to cover something that is of some importance.
13. Oh. Well, since I’m going to miss class, can you just email me what I missed?
    1. My answer to this question is going to be very brief and may not be helpful. It is more helpful if you talk to me during office hours or after class to more fully understand any class-content you missed.
14. I’m trying to open a file from the Hollywood server and it’s not finding the links. What’s going on?
    1. Really, you should only put a folder on Hollywood when you’re ready to turn in a project. (But, if you absolutely need to edit something from Hollywood, the safest way to work on it is to drag the main project folder to your desktop, work on it from your desktop, and then replace the Hollywood folder when you’re finished).
15. I just drove home and I’m trying to upload my project to the Hollywood server and for some reason I cannot connect…what’s going on?
    1. You can only connect to the Hollywood server when you’re on campus. And, even if you are on campus, there are some places on campus that cannot connect to Hollywood.
16. Do we have to come to our exam block at the end of the year?
    1. Our exam block will be treated like a class time, where you can work on your accessible video project.
17. I need to drive/fly home early so can I do whatever it is we’re doing during the exam block at a different time?
    1. Refer to FAQ #16
18. I emailed you a question and you emailed me back a statement like, “FAQ #18”. What does that mean?
    1. FAQ #18.

**School of Communication Policies, Practices and Expectations**

Students are expected to adhere to all standards outlined in the School of Communication’s Policies, Practices, and Expectations (located at  [http://www.highpoint.edu/communication/files/nqsc\_syllabus\_policies.pdf](https://mobile.highpoint.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=JyyBBLgH4fYmI71qL7W8GyxmheTK83O7pgF3_zLiu7DsPhTIQFTVCA..&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.highpoint.edu%2fcommunication%2ffiles%2fnqsc_syllabus_policies.pdf)) unless alternate standards are specifically outlined elsewhere in this syllabus.