

PUZZLE, OBSTACLE, & LEVEL DESIGN

GAM 3362-01 FALL 2024 SYLLABUS AND COURSE CALENDAR

M/W/F, 2PM – 3:10 PM NQSC 125C

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Introduces principles and practices involved in creating compelling interactive experiences. Students will craft a series of puzzles and scenarios for non-digital games and design multiple levels for a digital game using commercial game modifying software and scripting language. Prerequisite: COM 2252. Four credits.

COURSE OBJECTIVES	ASSESSMENT
Student will apply puzzle design strategies to develop physical puzzles as stand-alone puzzles and digital puzzles in video games. (Become a puzzle-master)	Puzzle; Level Design production assignments
Student will analyze game levels and recognize level design theories used in video games. (I think therefore I am)	Level Design Analysis
Communicate level design ideas through professionally appropriate methods (Master the power of the sketch)	Level Design production assignments
Student will apply level design theories to develop original and novel approaches to maps and genres (Level Design, baby)	Level Design production assignments
Develop media technology skills (git gud at makin' stuff fer games)	Level Design production assignments
Apply programming skills to develop basic gameplay functionality in AAA game engines. (Make yer games work!)	Level Design production assignments

COURSE MATERIALS

- **TEXTBOOK**— We will be using a free online text called The Level Design Book:
<https://book.leveldesignbook.com/>
- A **USB flash drive 16GB** (or higher). Every student's storage space will differ. Some students have used 10 GB, some students have used much more. If you are saving your builds for your game on a weekly basis, you may need a lot of storage space. Bring your data/game/assets to every class to work on and show me.
- **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 GAM Lab). It is

The School of Communication Emphasizes Analytical Thinking, Communication Skills, Interpretation of Converging Information, Technological Development, and Integration of Theory and Practice

expected that you will have to organize your time accordingly to use this software, ensuring that you schedule time to work in the classroom when there is not another class going on.

Do NOT leave your school projects on the computers. The data will likely be erased, or inaccessible at some point. Use our class repository (push often) and/or jump drives.

HEAGNEY CONTACT

Instructor: Brian Heagney

Office: NQSC 341

Cell phone: 336-456-2672

Email: bheagney@highpoint.edu

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/brianheagney/

Professor Heagney's Student Hours				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1:00 – 2:00 PM	12:30 – 1:30 PM	1:00 – 2:00 PM	12:30 – 1:30 PM	9:40 – 10:40 AM

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

- **Physical Puzzle (20% of grade)** – Students will begin the semester learning about and designing physical puzzles. Puzzles can take many forms and students will design a puzzle in the style of their choice.
- **Analysis (10% of grade)** – Students will analyze a game level of their choice and complete a written paper that applies level design principles from the readings to a video game of their choice.
- **Greybox + Technical (20% of grade)** – Combined with drafting numerous design iterations on paper, students will complete a full greyboxed level, as well as some technical component of the student's choice.
- **Final (20% of grade)** – Students will apply level design theories and concepts to develop a 3D Level for a multi-player game concept of their choice.
- **Participation (30% of grade)** – In this course, we will have in-class activities and other small assignments that will count toward participation. These activities will be based on the concepts and technology related to the course but will not necessarily be part of the student's current assignment submission.

To clarify, during the module about multi-player level design, your major module assignment might be designing an arena death match, but our in-class activity for participation might be focused on designing a capture the flag map.

Alternatively, during the same module, you may be asked to come prepared with a sketch for a couch-cooperative level.

Expectations for out-of-class work

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.

- Readings and Videos – approx. 36 hours out of class throughout the semester
- Physical Puzzle – approx. 24 hrs. out of class
- Level Design Analysis – approx. 12 hrs. out of class
- Greybox + Tech – approx. 24 hrs. out of class
- Final Level - approx. 24 hrs. out of class

GRADING

Grading Scale

A (Amazing!) – superior quality (90-100%)	B (Beautiful) – clearly above average (80-89%)	C (Coasting) satisfactory work (70-79%)	D (Deficient) – good enough to credit (60-69%)	F (Flubbed) – 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)	
A (93 - 96.9)	B (83 - 86.9)	C (73 - 76.9)	D (63 - 66.9)	F (0-59.9%)
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.

Submissions for assignments:

All students must use blackboard to submit to every assignment. If a student does not submit to blackboard, then the professor will not be able to offer feedback, the student will receive a 0%, and the assignment will be counted as "late".

Most of the time the assignment will list what you will need to submit. If there is no official submission request from the professor, use best judgement based on knowing that the professor will review all of your work. You will very likely need to submit all files that you worked on which could include word documents, animation files, 3D modeling files, etc.

In the event that you are working on a class repository that everyone has access to and you think that you don't need to "submit" anything, remember that you MUST submit something to blackboard in order to receive a grade and feedback. If it is true that you do not "need" to submit an actual file, then you still must submit something to the blackboard assignment, such as a note of where to find your important game level, a short write-up of how your submission responds to the assignment, or at minimum a note saying "Hello, Heagney!"

Feedback

All students will receive feedback through blackboard rubrics.

Grade Availability

This class is based on 1000 points. Once assignments are graded and posted, your grade will automatically update and be available on blackboard. This grade will be based on the current number of points you've earned, divided by the number of points that have been available up to that point.

Grade Appeal

If a student has a complaint or concern about a faculty member regarding a grade, they should first try to resolve it with the instructor in question. If the complaint is not resolved through this interaction, the student should then go to the Department Chair. If the instructor of the course also serves as a Chair, then the student should approach the Dean as the first step in the process.

For this course, a student should pursue the following process:

1. Talk with the instructor of the course,
2. Talk with Dr. Stefan Hall who serves as the Chair of the Nido R. Qubein School of Communication's Game Design department.

The decision of the Chair/Dean is final.

Grievance Procedure

If a student has a complaint or concern about a faculty member regarding any matter other than a grade, they should first try to resolve it with the instructor in question. If the complaint is not resolved through this interaction, the student should then go to:

1. the Department Chair;
2. the Dean of the School of Communication; then
3. the Senior Vice-President of Academic Affairs, which is the final step in the grievance process.

Bypassing any of these steps—going directly to the president, for example—will not resolve the issue and will only delay resolution. Senior administration will not deal with grievance issue unless it has been discussed at the appropriate level.

For this course, a student should pursue the following process:

1. Talk with the instructor of the course.
2. Talk with Dr. Stefan Hall who serves as the Core Courses Coordinator of the Nido R. Qubein School of Communication.
3. Talk with Dr. Eltantawy, who serves as the Interim Dean of the Nido R. Qubein School of Communication.
4. Talk with Dr. Erb, who serves as the Provost of High Point University.

The decision of the Senior Vice President is final.

POLICIES FOR ASSIGNMENTS & EXAMS

Late work

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).

However, I have a new “72 hour” late policy that is more lenient yet harsher than I’ve been previously. See “Typical Heagney Policies” at the end of this document.

Makeup Exams

If this course has quizzes, then quiz due dates are final. Because the nature of my quizzes are that they are online and readily available, make-up exams will only be allowed due to typical reasons such as hospitalization or major accident or incident. Please discuss this with me in person.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

After two unexcused absences you will receive a Starfish notice (because we care). After a **SIXTH 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 frowned upon. Be on time. Better yet, be early. Three tardies will equal one absence. Students will not be permitted to make up grades for work missed due to an absence or tardy.

COMMUNICATION

Email

Most of our out-of-class communication will be through email. Email is appropriate for any questions about assignments or grading. While I do give feedback for assignments through blackboard rubrics, if you're still confused or if you think I'm confused, please reach out through email.

Do NOT email me your assignments. Assignments should only be submitted through the blackboard interface.

My goal is to respond to emails within 24 hours during the weekdays. My other goal is to not work at all on the weekends, so I do not promise that I will respond at all during the weekends. Feel free to email me at any time of the day or night. I purposefully keep my work email OFF of my phone, so I will never be bothered by an email in the middle of the night.

Be informal. If you're writing me an email, just write what you need to write without beating around the bush. 😊

Text

I always include my cell number in case you ever have a question that needs to be answered right away. I don't promise that I'll be awake or respond, but feel free to text me any time of the day for rare emergencies. My phone sound is off and it won't wake anyone up if I'm asleep. Seriously, if I'm awake up in my office for some reason, and you're experiencing a disaster in the computer lab, it will help if you text me!

Blackboard

As mentioned throughout this syllabus, all assignments must be submitted through the blackboard interface. Sometimes that means submitting a project file. Sometimes it means submitting a zip folder. Sometimes it means submitting a link to a SHAREABLE google drive.

DIVERSITY

This course relies on students considering the diverse nature of players as they design for differing skills and abilities. This course also encourages students to understand the diversity of map styles and genres.

OARS ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

High Point University welcomes students with disabilities into our educational programs. HPU promotes efforts to provide equal access and a culture of inclusion without altering the essential elements of coursework. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers that may be due to disability, including but not limited to, chronic medical conditions, Deaf or hard of hearing, learning disability, mental health, or vision impairment, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services at 336-841-9026 or OARS@highpoint.edu. The OARS office is located on the 4th floor of Smith Library

If you have an OARS accommodation letter, you are required to do the following:

- (A) Meet with me privately during office hours or a scheduled appointment as early in the semester as possible to discuss implementing your accommodations. I am here to help you, and I want to make sure we discuss how best to integrate your OARS approved accommodations in a way that helps make you successful. Your accommodations will be implemented only after we meet to discuss the best path for your success.
- (B) Give me reasonable notice (at least three business days) to implement your accommodations.
- (C) If you have testing accommodations and we determine together that it would be best for you to take exams in the OARS testing center, you must arrange through OARS with sufficient notice (3 business days for exams/quizzes and 6 business days for midterms and final). If you do not arrange your exam with OARS, I will not be able to provide extended time, assistive technology, or a distraction free environment, but you will be able to take the exam with the class.
- (D) If you experience any access barriers in this course that are part of your OARS accommodations, such as with printed content, graphics, online materials, or any communication barriers; reach out to me or OARS right away.

COURSE-SPECIFIC POLICIES

BLACKBOARD BLACKBOARD BLACKBOARD BLACKBOARD 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!

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 ASAP so you can participate in the course.

STARFISH SYLLABUS STATEMENT

High Point University cares about your success!

This course is part of a HPU initiative that utilizes Starfish Connect, a communication tool for students and faculty. Through Starfish, instructors, coaches, and advisors provide feedback to you about course progress by emailing you about your academic performance. The emails are designed to be helpful by identifying strategies that increase your success in courses. Be sure to open any emails you receive and follow the recommendations.

Your instructor, coach, or advisor may also recommend that you contact a specific campus resource, such as the Learning Lab or Counseling Center. If an instructor makes a referral, you may also be contacted directly by this campus service as a follow--up.

Starfish also allows you to schedule appointments with various offices and individuals across campus and request help on a variety of topics.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

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

Week	Day	Date	Topic / Module	To Do	Estimated Hours
1	Monday	8/19		In-Class Puzzle Design Activity	Readings / Videos: 4 hrs Puzzle: 4 hrs
	Wednesday	8/21			
	Friday	8/24			
2	Monday	8/26		In-Class Puzzle Design Activity Peer Review of Puzzles	Readings / Videos: 4 hrs Puzzle: 4 hrs
	Wednesday	8/28			
	Friday	8/30			
3	Monday	9/2		In-Class Puzzle Design Activity Peer Review of Puzzles	Puzzle: 8 hrs
	Wednesday	9/4			
	Friday	9/6			
4	Monday	9/9		In-Class Intro to Level Design Puzzle Due	Puzzle: 8 hrs
	Wednesday	9/11			
	Friday	9/13			
5	Monday	9/16			Readings / Videos: 6 hrs Analysis: 2 hrs
	Wednesday	9/18			
	Friday	9/20			
6	Monday	9/23		Student Showcase: Their Favorite Games that relate to a level design principle	Readings / Videos: 4 hrs Analysis: 4 hrs
	Wednesday	9/25			
	Friday	9/27			
7	Monday	9/30		Analysis Due	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Analysis: 6 hrs
	Wednesday	10/2			
	Friday	10/4			

break	Monday	10/7			
	Wednesday	10/9			
	Friday	10/11			
8	Monday	10/14	Greyboxing & Iteration	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Greybox +: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	10/16			
	Friday	10/18			
9	Monday	10/21	Peer-Review / Check-In	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Greybox +: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	10/23			
	Friday	10/25			
10	Monday	10/28	Greyboxing & Iteration	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Greybox +: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	10/30			
	Friday	11/1			
11	Monday	11/4	Level Design Finalizing	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Greybox +: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	11/6			
	Friday	11/8			"Greybox" Due
12	Monday	11/11	Level Design Finalizing	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Final Level: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	11/13			
	Friday	11/15			
	Monday	11/18	Peer-Review / Check-in	Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Final Level: 6 hrs	
	Wednesday	11/20			

13	Friday	11/22			
14	Monday	11/25			Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Final Level: 6 hrs
	Wednesday	11/27/2024 Thanksgiving Break			
		11/29/2024 Thanksgiving Break			
15	Monday	12/2	Level Design Finalizing		Readings / Videos: 2 hrs Final Level: 6 hrs
	Wednesday	12/4			
		Reading Day			
EXAM BLOCK	Wednesday	12/11/2024 3:30 - 6:30	Final Due		
		PM			

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) unless alternate standards are specifically outlined elsewhere in this syllabus.

HEAGNEY POLICIES

Students are also expected to read, understand, and abide by the following policies:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/142Bg51BWzqot571f3BnPudUjcxenVrq2YJWRcw0I-IQ/edit?usp=sharing>