

GAME DESIGN AS  
CULTURAL PRACTICE  
LCC-4725/6325-SPRING 2012  
CELIA PEARCE



**1. Instructor Name, Contact Information and Office Hours**

Instructor, Celia Pearce

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Meetings by Appointment

**2. Course Title: LMC-4725 Game Design as Cultural Practice/LMC-6325 Game Design and Analysis**

**3. Course Prerequisites:** ENGL 1102

**4. Core Area/Attributes Fulfilled by this Class:** (None)

**5. Course Description**

Students analyze games as cultural artifacts and gameplay as a patterned cultural experience. The course will survey the history of board games and video games with an emphasis on the cultural, historical and economic contexts in which these forms were produced. Students will conduct analysis of influential and representative games from ancient times to the present, across cultures, eras and genres. This will cover not only traditional, commercial games, but also various cultural and art movements which have used games as an expressive medium or intervention strategy, such as the Dada, Fluxus and Situationist Art, the New Games Movement. The course will also look at issues of representation, identity, gender and diversity in games, as well as the ways narrative and values can be expressed through game design.

Class time will consist of lecture/discussions and structured play and design activities. Students will develop a critical play method by keeping a journal/blog of their gameplay, which they will analyze with reference to specified readings. Through this process students will develop analysis skills and versatile command of the expressive capabilities of games. The course will culminate in a team-based game project, which will include generation of pitch and design documents and team evaluations. Students taking this course for graduate credit will also be asked to do additional readings give presentations and run class sessions during the course of the semester.

**6. Learning Outcomes**

**Undergraduates**

- Literary/Film/Narrative Art Inquiry: Students will be aware of the traditions and conventions of literature, film, and other forms of narrative art, and they will be able to analyze those traditions and conventions in specific cultural contexts.
- Communication Skills: Students will be able to gather, organize, and express information clearly and accurately, with sensitivity to will be able to do so both by using traditional media and by tapping the potential of new digital media.
- Application of Mathematical Principles: Students understand and apply the mathematical principles and computational affordances appropriate to creative digital expression.
- Create Digital Artifacts: Students can create digital artifacts with an awareness of history, audience, and context.
- Evaluate Future Trends: Student can appreciate and evaluate future trends in the development of digital media.
- Teamwork: Students can work effectively in teams to accomplish a common goal.
- Idea Communication: Students can communicate information and ideas to a range of audiences.

**Master's Students****Top Level**

- Demonstrate knowledge, comprehension, and application of the tools and formal design elements of digital media design.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate existing digital media artifacts, services, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one's critical evaluation.
- Demonstrate the ability to devise, design, create, and assess prototypical digital media artifacts, services, or environments and to contextualize them within recognized traditions of practice.

**Secondary Level****Knowledge**

- Formally identify digital media design elements, such as interface conventions, processing strategies, and information structures.

**Comprehension**

- Ability to explain, give examples of, and defend one's use of formal digital media design terminology

**Application**

- Demonstrate use of digital media to create prototypes
- Demonstrate good time management skills
- Demonstrate ability to set realistic goals

**Analysis**

- Can analyze digital media artifacts, services, and environments
- Can analyze digital media as cultural objects
- Can develop interactive media artifacts

**Synthesis**

- Can design and create digital artifacts that create the experience of agency for the interactor.
- Can communicate, coordinate, and work productively as a team member.

**Evaluation of Works**

- Can compare, critique, and appraise digital media artifacts, services, and environments using formal terminology
- Can summarize their work orally and in written form using formal terminology
- Can justify the design choices in their works
- Can formulate and test design hypotheses

**Ph.D. Additional Learning Outcomes****Top Level**

- Students have knowledge, comprehension and ability to apply historical, cultural, and theoretical concepts to the study of digital media
- Students can formulate original interpretations and design original prototypes that reflect an understanding of the humanistic context of digital media

**Secondary Level****Knowledge**

- Identify the historical and cultural roots of digital media

**Application**

- Apply theoretical concepts to specific digital media works

**Synthesis**

- Demonstrate ability to conduct original research in support of designing new genres and forms of digital media
- Demonstrate ability to conduct original research in support of assessing and / or critiquing new genres and forms of digital media
- Students can formulate and explore the answers to critical questions in the domains of Arts & Entertainment, Public & Civic Media, and Knowledge & Creativity as related to new media.

## 7. Required Texts:

### Books

DeKoven, B. (1978) *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy*. New York: Anchor Books. (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)

Laurel, Brenda. (2001). *Utopian Entrepreneur*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. (2005). *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. The following:

- *Topic Essays/Salen & Zimmerman*
- *The Player Experience* 3
- *The Rules of a Game* 9
- *Gaming the Game* 15
- *The Game Design Process* 21
- *Player and Character* 27
- *Games and Narrative* 33
- *Game Communities* 39
- *Speaking of Games* 45
- *Game Design Models* 53
- *Game Economies* 59
- *Game Spaces* 65
- *Cultural Representation* 71
- *What is a Game?* 77
- *What is Play?* 83

### Other Essays

- *Nature and Significance of Play as a Cultural Phenomenon (1955)/Johan Huizinga* 96
- *The Definition of Play: The Classification of Games (1962)/Roger Caillois* 122
- *Construction of a Definition (1990)/Bernard Suits* 172
- *"Complete Freedom of Movement" (1998)/Henry Jenkins* 330
- *The Lessons of Lucasfilm's Habitat (1990)/F. Randall Farmer and Chip Morningstar* 728
- *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs (1996)/Richard Bartle* 754

Yalom, Marilyn. *The Birth of the Chess Queen*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

### Papers

Brand, Stewart. "SPACEWAR: Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums," Rolling Stone, December 7, 2001. [http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling\\_stone.html](http://www.wheels.org/spacewar/stone/rolling_stone.html)

Curtis, P. "Mudding: Social Phenomena in Text-Based Virtual Realities." [http://www.eff.org/Net\\_culture/MOO\\_MUD\\_IRC/curtis\\_mudding.article](http://www.eff.org/Net_culture/MOO_MUD_IRC/curtis_mudding.article)

Dibbell, Julian. (1993/1998). "A Rape in Cyberspace." <http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle.html>

Farmer, R. & Morningstar, C. (1990/1991) "The Lessons of LucasArts Habitat." <http://www.fudco.com/chip/lessons.html>

Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. & Pearce, C. (aka Ludica) (2005). "Sustainable Play: Towards A New Games Movement for the Digital Age." Digital Arts & Culture Conference Proceedings, Copenhagen, December 2005. Download here: <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/DACSustainablePlay.pdf>

Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. & Pearce, C. (aka Ludica) "The Hegemony of Play." In *Situated Play: Proceedings of Digital Games Research Association 2007 Conference*. Tokyo, Japan, September 2007. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/HegemonyOfPlayFINAL.pdf>

Fullerton, T., Morie, J. & Pearce, C. (aka Ludica) (2007). "A Game Of Ones Own: Towards a New Gendered Poetics of Game Space." In *Proceedings, Digital Arts & Culture 2007*, Perth, Australia, September 2007. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/LudicaDAC07.pdf>

Lazarro, N. & Keeker, K. (2004). "What's My Method? A Game Show on Games." In *CHI 2004 Conference Proceedings*, April 2004. <http://www.xeodesign.com/whatsmymethod.pdf>

Lazzaro, N. (2004-2005) "Why We Play Games: Four Keys to More Emotion Without Story." Self-published white paper. [www.xeodesign.com/whyweplaygames.html](http://www.xeodesign.com/whyweplaygames.html)

Mnookin, J. (1996) Virtual(ly) "Law: The Emergence of Law in LambdaMOO." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*: Volume 2, Number 1: Part 1 of a Special Issue, June, 1996. <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol2/issue1/lambda.html>

Norman, D.A. (2004). "Affordances and design." [http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/affordances\\_and.html](http://www.jnd.org/dn.mss/affordances_and.html)

Pearce, C. (2006). "Productive Play: Game Culture from the Bottom Up." *Games & Culture*. Volume 1, Issue 1, Winter 2006. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/PearceGC-Jan06.pdf>

Pearce, C. (2007). "Narrative Environments from Disneyland to World of Warcraft." In *Space, Time, Play: Computer Games, Architecture and Urbanism: The Next Level*. Friedrich von Borries, Steffan P. Walz, and Mattheas Bottger (eds). Basel: Birkhauser. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/PearceSpaceTimePlay.pdf>

Pearce, C. (2008). "The Truth About Baby Boomer Gamers." *Games & Culture*, Vol 3, Issue 2. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/BoomerGamersPreview.pdf>

Pearce, Celia. "Games as Art: The Aesthetics of Interactivity." *Visible Language: Special Issue on Fluxus*. January 2006. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/PearcePubs/fluxus-pearce.pdf>

Taylor, T.L. (2003). "Multiple Pleasures: Women and Online Gaming," *Convergence*, Vol. 9, No.1, 21-46, Spring 2003. <http://lcc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/CourseReadings/TaylorMultiplePleasures.pdf>

Taylor, T.L. (2003). "Intentional Bodies: Virtual Environments and the Designers Who Shape Them." *International Journal of Engineering Education* 19, no. 1. [www.itu.dk/~tltaylor/papers/Taylor-Designers.pdf](http://www.itu.dk/~tltaylor/papers/Taylor-Designers.pdf)

Zimmerman, E. (2003). "Play as research: The iterative design process." [http://www.ericzimmerman.com/texts/Iterative\\_Design.htm](http://www.ericzimmerman.com/texts/Iterative_Design.htm)

### **Additional Readings for Graduate Students**

Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play & Games*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001 (1958).

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1955.

Salen, Katie and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004.

Select Parks game art portal: <http://www.selectparks.net>

Sutton-Smith, Brian. *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

## 8. List of Graded Assignments

### Blogposts

The course requires you to submit 6 blogposts during the semester. This is a public blog that anyone can read, and believe it or not, people actually read them! This will be a Wordpress blog and you will receive an invitation when your account is set up.

Each blogpost must be minimum 1000 words and must contain substantive reference to the assigned reading, not simply your opinion. The readings can be found [here](#). *Note that no matter how brilliant your blogpost is, you will not get anything better than an F if you your blogpost does not demonstrate that you have done the reading and are applying its content to the assignment.* Blogposts should be submitted directly to the course blog via the Wordpress back-end, a link to which will be included in your invitation. Each blogposts should have a properly formatted bibliography (format of your choice.) You are welcome to include additional references. Wikipedia is an acceptable reference but must be accompanied by other source material. Please make sure and spell-check before submitting; the Wordpress tool actually has a spell-checker, so use it! Each assignment has its own category. Please give each blogpost a unique title that is indicative of its content and **be sure and post in the correct category. An assignment will not be considered complete until it is posted in the correct category.**

**All blogposts are due on Tuesday as shown on the schedule.**

**ANY BLOGPOSTS RECEIVED MORE THAN ONE WEEK AFTER THE DUE DATE WILL RECEIVE AN AUTOMATIC F.**

- **Blogpost 1: The Culture of Chess.** Drawing from *Birth of the Chess Queen*, write an essay on one of the following topics:
  - A. Pick one of the mechanics or characteristics of chess and describe how it changed as the game migrated between regions; how did these changes or modifications reflect the culture where they appeared. OR
  - B. Describe the cultural role of chess at a given point in history in a given culture. Who played the game, in terms of class and gender? What were the objections to it, if any, and by whom? What role did it play in other aspects of culture?
- **Blogpost 2: Elements of Gameplay.** Play a video game from the 80s or 90s and describe how the various elements and features of the game support or refute the definition of games provided by Huizinga (p.96), Caillois (p.122) and Suits (p. 172) in *The Game Design Reader*.
- **Blogpost 3: Alternative Game Movements.** Drawing from the lectures, as well as readings from Brand; DeKoven, Pearce (*Games as Art*), and Fron et al (*Sustainable Play*), select three games from the movements discussed and describe how they use or subvert traditional game concepts, representation or mechanics.
- **Blogpost 4: Gender, Race & Representation.** Drawing from Laurel, Jenkins, Fron et al (*Hegemony of Play*) and Fullerton et al, play the video game of your choice and discuss the ways in which gender and/or race and/or culture embedded in both in the space, representation and the game mechanics.
- **Blogpost 5: The Social Life of Networked Play.** Play one MMOG, such as *World of Warcraft*, *EVE Online*, *Guild Wars* or *Maple Story*, and one virtual world such as *Second Life*, *Habbo Hotel*, *Blue Mars*, or *Twinity*. Drawing from Dibbell, Mnookin, Curtis, Morningstar and Farmer, Pearce (*Productive Play, Narrative Environments*), Taylor, describe the significant differences between the two forms and give one or more comparative examples of how these design differences affect player behavior.
- **Blogpost 6: Design Reflection.** Describe the ways in which you applied the readings and core concepts learned in the class to your final project. Focus on your own personal interests and contribution to the project. (Reference Norman, Zimmerman, Lazzaro, other readings where relevant.)

## 8. List of Graded Assignments (continued)

### Final Team Project: Experimental Game

In teams of 4-5, design a Flash or Unity game prototype that introduces a novel experience, theme, mechanic, interaction paradigm or aesthetic that plays with or undermines game conventions in some way. You may work with existing genre, but your game must present some new innovation, or a twist on a traditional game mechanic. Consider looking to non-digital games for inspiration. Game may be single- or multiplayer. Please see me if you need access to a multiplayer game server. Game design constraints are as follows:

- You may not use any of the following game clichés:
  1. No killing
  2. No post-apocalyptic scenarios
  3. No medieval fantasy elements
- In addition to your team members, your game must appeal to a player demographic outside your own group, e.g., adults over 25, Baby Boomers, women, children, etc.
- Adaptation Option: If you like, you can base your game on material from another medium, such as a novel, graphical novel or film, or even a TV commercial or YouTube video, provided it is material that has not been adapted before, or you are proposing a wildly original approach that significantly differs from prior adaptations.
- When your game is complete, you must post it to an online indie game site, such as Kongregate or equivalent.

Your final project is worth 50% of your total grade in the class. 25% is for the overall quality of the project and your contribution to it; the other 25% is for teamwork, dictated by your team evaluations. During the project, you will be asked to complete two team evaluations, an interim evaluation and a final evaluation. This will be conducted via online survey form, which I will send you. This means that your teammates are responsible for HALF the grade on your final project. If they are dissatisfied with your performance, it will reflect poorly on your grade. You will receive feedback from evaluations targeting specific areas to work on; your final grade for teamwork will be based on **final evaluations**, so if you show improvements in response to the feedback, this will also have a positive impact on your grade.

**All design documents, prototypes and other artifacts of your work will be submitted via the blog. Each Game will have its own category on the blog for submitting your various documents.**

Deliverables for your project will include (see schedule for due dates):

- **Preliminary Concept Pitch (In-Class Presentation):** A five-minute in-class pitch, *including contributions from all team members*. This can be somewhat informal but should include some visual materials. Does not have to be posted on the blog.
- **Paper-and-Pencil Prototyping:** This will be done several times iteratively throughout the design process to refine your design; the first session will be in-class. Please document each playtest and post images and notes on the blog as to your findings.
- **Final Concept Pitch Doc & Project Plan (In-Class Presentation and Blog Submission):** This should be your final pitch doc and should consist of approximately 5 PowerPoint slides or pages describing the basic elements of your game, including: narrative, core gameplay, interaction, art direction/aesthetic. This pitch should also include a PLAN as to what aspect of your game you plan to produce for the class, and who is responsible for which aspect. All team members must participate in the presentation.
- **Working Core Mechanic Prototype (In-Class Presentation):** Come to class with a working prototype of your core mechanic. Teams will break into smaller groups to play and critique each others' games.
- **Interim Team Evaluation:** Interim evaluation form for assessing your teammates performance. Note that failure to complete this or the final evaluation will result in an F in teamwork.
- **Playtesting (In-Class):** Bring a working prototype to class prepared to playtest it with outside playtesters. Guests will be invited to the class to play and provide feedback to your games. You may

also invite playtesters to this session. *You should continue to playtest your game throughout the development process.*

- **Interim Status Presentation 1 (In-Class):** Come to class prepared to present your current prototype.
- **Interim Status Presentation 2 (In-Class):** Come to class prepared to present your current prototype, and give a report on playtesting.
- **Final Design Presentation/Post Design Doc:** Should include a written document and/or a PowerPoint presentation with complete description of game features and a refined plan for implementing the prototype, including playtest results.
- **More Playtesting (In-Class):** Again, bring your prototype to class ready to test with outside players.
- **Process Documentation:** Document your design process by taking pictures of the team, of your paper and pencil playtests, and by posting any interim documents, sketches and other working materials used in your game design. You may post these at any time throughout the process.
- **Final Team Evaluation: Final team evaluation to assess team performance. *Failure to complete this will result in an automatic F in teamwork.***

**Final Game Prototype NOTE—ALL FINAL PROJECTS MUST BE SUBMITTED TO KONGREGATE OR ANOTHER INDIE GAME PORTAL:** The final game should be a browser-based application. Post your game on Kongregate ([www.kongregate.com](http://www.kongregate.com)) or another game portal, then, post a brief description, the final design document, and a link to the completed prototype by the deadline.

### Grading Scale

Total points for the course will be 100. Grade breakdown is as follows:

|          |         |         |         |        |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 90-100=A | 80-89=B | 70-79=C | 60-69=D | 0-59=F |
|----------|---------|---------|---------|--------|

Assignment grading will be as follows:

- Blogposts: 8 points each, except final blogpost, which is worth 10 points
- Final Project
  - Concept & Implementation (Including your component of the implementation): 25 points
  - Teamwork: 25 points

Incompletes will only be given in the event of a valid reason, such as a health problem, a family emergency, or other major event that prevents you from completing work. Incompletes will not be given for failure to complete assignments. Any assignments left unfinished at the end of the semester will be given an automatic 0 or F grade.

### 9. Attendance Policy

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. Three unexcused absences will result in a half grade point reduction. An **excused** absence is one in which permission is requested in advance and you have a legitimate reason to skip class, such as an illness. You are expected to make up what you missed by checking with other students and reviewing lecture materials on the web site. Chronic tardiness during the semester will also result in a half point grade reduction.

### 10. Information for Students with Disabilities

Please notify the instructor if you have any disabilities with which you need special assistance or consideration. The campus disability assistance program can be contacted through ADAPTS: <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>

### 11. Honor Code Statement

Students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code:

<http://www.honor.gatech.edu/plugins/content/index.php?id=9>

- Please note that since this class emphasizes team effort, collaboration is encouraged, but please bear in mind that part of your evaluation for teamwork will be made by your peers. This means it's important to fulfill your team responsibilities and complete your assignments on time.
- Any works appropriated for your project (such as art assets or music) should be cited both within the project and the final design documents.



## 12. Week by Week Course Schedule

| Week #                         | Tue Play   | Thu Listen  | Read   | Analyze (due Tue)                                       | Design (due Thu)  |
|--------------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Week 1</b>                  | Course Overview Gameplay: Traditional/Folk Games                 | Lecture: A Cultural History of Traditional Folk Games                           | Yalom: Intro, Leaders, Pts 1 & 2   | Register for Course Blog                                |   |
| <b>Week 2</b>                  | Gameplay : Victorian Board Games                                 | Lecture: Technologies of Amusement: From Pier to Parlor + Games of the Cold War | Yalom: Part 3  |   |   |
| <b>Week 3</b>                  | Gameplay : Board Game Modding                                    | TECH TUTORIAL (TBD)   | <i>Game Design Reader</i> : Topic Essays; Values @ Play  | Blogpost 1  |   |
| <b>Week 4</b>                  | Video Games of the 80s & 90s Show & Tell                         | Lecture: History of Video and Computer games                                    | <i>Game Design Reader</i> : Huizinga, Caillois, Suits.   |   |   |
| <b>Week 5</b>                  | Games & Art And Indie Games                                      | TECH TUTORIAL (TBD)   | Pearce: <i>Games as Art</i> ; Grand; Fron et al: <i>Sustainable Pla</i>                        | Blogpost 2  |   |
| <b>Week 6</b>                  | Gameplay: New Games  | Team Game, Team Roles & Intro to Brainstorming                                  | DeKoven  |   |   |
| <b>Week 7</b>                  | <b>Preliminary Concept Pitch+</b><br>Intro to Project Management | Identity, Representation and Gender   | Ludica: Fron et al: <i>The Hegemony of Play</i> ; Fullerton et al: <i>A Game of Ones Own</i> ; | Blogpost 3  | <b>Present Concept &amp; Project Plan</b>               |
| <b>Week 8</b>                  | Paper & Pencil Playtesting                                       | <b>Final Concept Pitch/ Plan</b>  | Jenkins: <i>Complete Freedom of Movement</i> ; Laurel; Pearce: <i>Baby Boomer Gamers</i>       |   | <b>Post Final Concept Pitch Doc. &amp; Plan on Blog</b> |
| <b>Week 9</b>                  | TUTORIAL or GUEST LECTURE  | Lecture: History/Sociology of MMOGs & Virtual Worlds                            | Lazarro (both); Zimmerman: <i>Play as research</i> ; Norman                                    | Blogpost 4  | <b>Interim Team Evaluation</b>                          |
| <b>Week 10</b>                 | <b>Working Prototype of Core Mechanic</b>                        | <b>Playtesting</b>  | Curtis; Dibbell; Mnookin   |   |   |
| <b>Week 11</b><br>SPRING BREAK | NO CLASS   | NO CLASS  |  |   |   |
| <b>Week 12</b>                 | <b>Playtesting</b>   | <b>Interim Status Presentation</b>  | Farmer/ Morningstar; Pearce: <i>Prod. Play and Narrative Environments</i> ; Taylor (both)      | Blogpost 5  |   |
| <b>Week 13</b>                 | Lecture: Evolution of Game Space                                 | TECH TUTORIAL (TBD)   |  |   | <b>Final Design Doc</b>                                 |
| <b>Week 14</b>                 | <b>Interim Status/ Playtest Report</b>                           | TECH TUTORIAL (TBD)   |  |   |   |
| <b>Week 15</b>                 | <b>More Playtesting</b>  | Refining and Debugging  |  |   |   |
| <b>Week 16</b>                 | <b>Final Project Presentations</b>                               | <b>Final Project Presentations</b>  |  | <b>Post Final Project on Kongreate and Link to Blog</b> | Blogpost 6<br><b>Final Team Eval.</b>                   |