**Game Design 1**

Instructor: Nicholas O’Brien

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Office Hours: TBA

Meeting Times: Monday, 1 – 4 pm

Location: Morton 201, Visual Art & Technology Lab

**Course Description**

You enter the classroom and see DESKS, BOARD GAMES, A PROJECTOR, GAME CONSOLES, wall to wall WHITE BOARDS, and some fellow CLASSMATES. The TEACHER welcomes you and invited you to take an empty seat. You are facing NORTH.

This class is a quest. Your classmates are you party members. On this quest you will gain experience. Your party will collect items and create an inventory. By the end of this quest your reward will be the ability to make new quests.

**Course Structure**

The course hinges on an overarching metaphor of treating the semester as a collaborative and interactive Role Playing Game (RPG). Your individual statistics (stats) and experience points (XP) will be tracked and updated every class period. Though personal stats will depend on your participation and research, working together as a “questing party” will greatly enhance overall party progress and XP.

As is the case with many RPGs, some material for the class will only be “unlocked” when you have a certain amount of XP to Level Up. For instance, XP will be granted once all students have shown the ability to properly code and execute collision detection. These benchmarks will be used to not only make sure that everyone in the class is on the same page, but also will encourage party members to work together in order to unlock more advanced material. This being said, some students might gain XP more quickly (by equipping talismans or artifacts of ancient/prior knowledge). Only by working together will the entire party advance into unexplored realms.

Each student should think of their abilities and strengths in the course as core statistics. Below is a simple rubric of analogies to consider:

Strength: Project Leadership / Management

Dexterity: Programming / Code

Constitution: Debugging / QA

Intelligence: Artistic Direction

Wisdom: Sound Design

Charisma: Story Telling

These are not hard and fast comparisons, but what you are hoping to do is to play to your best trait. For instance, if you are most adept in Story Telling, you want to invest in your Charisma points. The strength of the party becomes dependent on balancing skills and traits – in other words, having a party of four Clerics will never get you far on your journey. Though all students will get to develop skills in all areas / stats – by collecting items, and gaining buffs from their party members – think about how your particular skills can help the party overall.

The structure of the course will mutate and evolve over time, and specific examples of unlockable content will manifest periodically over the semester. As the party progresses an inventory of prefabs, code snippets, character designs, HUD displays, and story trees will be forged collectively and collaboratively. Higher XP students might use alchemy skills or spell scrolls to bolster party inventory. The inventory will be managed and maintained as a repository that all students will have access to in and out of quest.

The RPG of the class is intended to be fun and light – to be something you can wear softly, and choose to take as seriously or as casual as you like. That being said, the RPG of this course has, like all games, limitations and rules. Some rules are meant to be broken (and we will be talking about cheats and spoilsports during the semester). However, the main rule is that you are getting what you want out of this class and that the structure is meant to show the creative power of game design to create communities and discovery.

**Attendance**

The Visual Art & Technology policy for classes is that attendance is mandatory. The success of this class depends on student participation and engagement. If *you* are not here for demos, class critiques, group discussions, and collaborative activities, then *we* all suffer.

You are allowed two absences. After the third absence your final grade will be automatically lowered by one letter. If you are >10 minuets late you will be marked tardy and three tardies equal an absence. As will be noted later, class participation is part of your grade. This means even if you are here, you must be present. Coming to class unprepared or wasting class time could end up being marked absent.

The only exception to this policy is in the case of extreme illness/injury. Please talk with the professor privately about any concerns you have about this policy.

**Grading**

Grading in this course is not directly tied to student XP. Some students will have higher levels than others depending on skill set and special abilities and it would be punitive to evaluate your grade based on these circumstances. In order to anchor independent growth over the course of the semester the following grade breakdown will be used:

Questing Participation: 25% Save Points / Final Bosses: 35%

Side-Quests: 25% Inventory Crafting: 15%

Grading for assignments and projects will be based on a combination of criteria:

* Aesthetic consistency
* Technical Execution
* Creative Interpretation/Imagination
* Risk
* Intellectual Rigor

These criteria are not weighted for specific preference/importance. With this in mind, students should consider the choices they make in designing and executing their work. Furthermore, students can expect that the above criteria will be applied in critiques as a starting point for discussion and evaluation.

**Cellphone Policy**

Cell phones are forbidden in class. At the beginning of class, students will be asked to switch off their phones to prevent texting, checking social media, and distracting yourself and others. This policy is enforced to insure class participation and also to collectively agree we are committed to respecting one another.

**Copyright and Plagiarism**

We will be discussing copyright and its implications on our culture over the course of the semester. For the purposes of this class, however, you *must* consider the copyright of your work and the work of others. Our inventory will be a repository of intellectual property that we are creating collaboratively and will be distributed via a Creative Commons License. Understanding copyright and intellectual property will be an essential asset for you to wield in your creative and professional careers and future quests.

To reiterate, all work produced in the class must be of *your own creation or in collaborative consort with party members*. Any assignments submitted during the semester that uses appropriated imagery, code, music, text, or other forms of intellectual property must be properly cited and articulated to the professor. Failure to do so will be considered plagiarism, which will result in immediate academic reprimanding.

**Required Materials**

This class requires that you download an educational/free version of Unity as well as a copy of Brackets for coding. If working with 3D characters/environments, it is also recommended that you download and educational copy of Maya or Blender. Other software that will benefit you will be provided by the department of Visual Art and Technology (Adobe products, etc.)

On top of this software requirement, you must also have:

* Pen + Paper for taking notes, making sketches, and journaling
* USB Hard Drive / Flash Drive (64GB+)
* USB or Bluetooth 3-click mouse and NumPad
* Cloud Storage Space (Dropbox, Google Drive, personal server)
* Active GitHub account
* Active Registration with Unity Answers and Stack Overflow
* (Optional) Monthly subscription to Digital Tutors
* (Optional) Active Steam Users Account and/or Itch.io account

**Required Reading**

All reading materials for this course will be provided by the professor or available online in PDF/ebook formats. With the exception of content already distributed for free online, it is requested that you limit the circulation of printed material to the confines of the class. The professor encourages you to support the authors of the text whenever possible.

*The Practice of Everyday Life* (excerpts), Michel de Certeau

*How to do Things with Videogames* (Art Chapter), Ian Bogost

*Without a Goal*, Jasper Juul

*Homo Ludens* (Introduction), Johan Huizinga

*Video Games: the Addiction*, Tom Bissell

*Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (chapter excerpt), Alexander Galloway

*Critical Play* (excerpts), Mary Flanagan

*Hamlet on the Holodeck* (excerpts, Chapter 3 & 5), Janet Murray

*Painkiller Deathstreak*, Nicholson Baker

*Video Games Spaces* (excerpt, Chapter 1), Michael Nitsche

[subject to change, additions TBA]

**Side Quests / Inventory Crafting / Save Points / Final Bosses**

There are a number of different assignments that will be distributed throughout the semester. Assignments are broken into two tiers: short-term and long-term. Short-term assignments will be labeled **Side Quests** and **Inventory Crafting**. Side quests will look like weekly homework (or in class) assignments to gain XP and access to inventory equipment. Inventory Crafting won’t have specific due dates, but won’t be as labor intensive as longer-term projects. For Inventory Crafting, it is expected that as a party member of this quest you will contribute *at least* five items for our inventory. This will easily be accomplished during our quest and can take on a variety of item contributions as stated above. Some items will be marked “common” items, such as a torch (for lighting). But crafted items (made by party members) will have particularly useful properties to assist everyone in the quest. Side quests will often be assigned to make sure party members are equipped and trained to use inventory items properly when making new quests.

**Save Points** and **Final Bosses** are longer-term assignments that will serve as midterms and final projects. Objectives and details of these assignments will develop as the party levels up and gains XP. Prompts, expectations, specific breakdown of guidelines for these long-term assignments will be handed out in a timely way to make sure that party members have ample time to complete these projects.

All assignments will be turned in electronically to the Professor **SATURDAY** before midnight in order to receive a full XP.

**Weekly Schedule**

[subject to change]

Week 01 – August 31

Introduction / Starting the Quest / Building a World Together

**Viewing** / **Playing**:*Magic: The Gathering* Cards, *Mountain*, *Viridi*

**Side Quest**: Campfire Backstory of an Inanimate Object

Week 02 – September 07

Campfire / Shaping Expectations / First Stages of Ideation

**Viewing / Playing**: *Apples to Apples, Metagame, Cards Against Humanity, Gwent*

**Side Quest**: Folktale Cardgame

**Reading**: *How to Do Things with Videogames*, *Homoludens*

Week 03 – September 14

Reading Response / Folktale Cardgames / Cards to Boards

**Viewing / Playing**: *Ticket to Ride*, *King of Tokyo*, *Dominion*

Week 04 – September 21

Ideation session / Starting Unity / Assets and Inventories

**Side Quest:** Discover a Tool

**Reading:** *Without a Goal*, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*

Week 05 – September 28

Reading Response / Discover a Tool presentations

**Viewing / Playing**: *Passage*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Dear Esther* (depending on time)

Week 06 – October 05

Ideation session pt. 2 / Unity Continued / Inventory building

**Viewing / Playing**: *Journey, Kentucky Route Zero (Act 1)*

Week 07 – October 12

**SAVE POINTS**

**Reading:** *Hamlet on the Holodeck (Both chapters)*

**Side Quest**: Go to Town, Find an Inn

Week 08 – October 19

Reading Response / Inventory building

**Viewing / Playing**: *Jazzpunk*, *Goat Simulator*

**Reading**: *Critical Play*

Week 09 – October 26

Reading Response / Ideation Session pt. 3 / Stat Check

**Viewing / Playing**: Glitch Speedruns

**Side Quest**: Magic Item

Week 10 – November 02

Magic Item presentations / Inventory Building / Unlocking Levels

**Reading**: *Video Games: An Addiction*, *Painkiller Deathstreak*

Week 11 – November 09

Reading Responses / Inventory Building

**Side Quest**: Master Blacksmith (Gearing up for FINAL BOSS)

Week 12 – November 16

Master Blacksmith preparations

**Viewing / Playing**: Party Choice / Multiplayers

**Reading**: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, *Video Game Spaces*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 13 – November 30

Reading Response / Inventory Building / Leveling Up

**Side Quest**: Miniboss

Week 14 – December 07

Mini Boss / Individual Campfire

Week 15 – Final Exam

**FINAL BOSS DUE**