

Game Design 101

Intro to Games

Spring 2021 Syllabus

GD101 Intro to Games

Units: 3 | **Semester:** Spring 2021 | **Sections:** 208A and 612A | **Prerequisites:** None

Meetings:

- 208A: Mondays 2:00-4:45pm
- 612A: Fridays 4:00-6:45pm

Location: Online, check Blackboard for the Zoom and Discord links

Instructor: Marcelo Díaz Viana Neto (he/him)

Office: C-417 (one day...) | Office Hours: TBD | mviananeto@hostos.cuny.edu

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Course Description

This course introduces students to game culture, theory, design, and development. Principles from traditional board games, sports games, and party games will be analyzed and this analysis will then be applied to designing two analog games over the course of the semester. Students will analyze several readings focusing on game history and theory. They will also play, make and analyze several games in order to build a common and more extensive vocabulary to both discuss and understand what game development is all about.

A note on this syllabus:

This is a living document. While the course's topic and main structure are final, most of the material herein, including the course schedule and readings are liable to change throughout the quarter. The instructor will periodically revise this document to take into account student input and to better fit the student body's interests and composition. Please check the syllabus regularly for updated content and revised schedule.

Learning Outcomes

- Develop familiarity with the core concepts and vocabulary of game design, and be able to speak about them in an informed manner
- Become comfortable with iterative design techniques
- Develop competency at both running playtests and interpreting player feedback
- Integrate yourself into a team and be a healthy part of the team dynamic*
- Be able to write the game rules in an easy to read and understand fashion
- And, in general: [Things that Colleges Should Teach Students](#)

Required Materials

Textbooks

This is a ZERO COST course. There are no required textbooks and all course readings will be provided as downloadable PDFs or links to existing sites posted in the *schedule* below.

Hardware *(if using a personal computer)*

Access to a computer with a reliable internet connection is going to be very important in this course for attending and participating in the live video lectures. A mobile device that you can access Discord and email with is also recommended.

Software *(if using a personal computer)*

Students will be required to download and install free software or software with a free educational license, announced ahead of time during live lectures. Image-editing software like GIMP and Photoshop is recommended, but not required.

Other required materials

Bound sketchpad with cleanly removable sheets:

- 8.5"x11" or larger
- Dot grid paper or graph paper highly recommended

Course Expectations

1. Honest communication with peers and the professor if the expectations below can't be fulfilled. No judgment, just mutual respect.
2. Punctual attendance to all meetings.
3. Completion of assignments on time.
4. Participation in project critiques providing feedback about other students' work.
5. Read the entire syllabus and refer to it during the quarter.
6. Be proactive in communicating and arranging to meet with the instructor if you're having difficulties with the course.

Participation

There is no participation grade (more on this below), but this isn't your usual passive, sit back and respond course. While the professor will provide the structure and bring in most of the content for the course, you will be expected to be proactive in the classroom AND seek out more knowledge outside of the classroom structure. Being a proactive learner is one of the most important skills you can have as a game artist/designer/developer. You're also expected to contribute to making this course the best it can be. This is *your* classroom, even if it's a virtual one.

Commitment to Diversity and Safer Spaces ([source](#))

We understand the classroom as a space for *practicing freedom*; where one may challenge psychic, social, and cultural borders and create meaningful artistic expressions. To do so we must acknowledge and embrace the different identities and backgrounds we inhabit. This means that we will use correct pronouns, respect self-identifications, and be mindful of special needs.

Disagreement is encouraged and supported, however our differences affect our conceptualization and experience of reality, and it is extremely important to remember that certain gender, race, sex, and class identities are more privileged while others are undermined and marginalized. Consequently, this makes some people feel more protected or vulnerable during debates and discussions. A collaborative effort between the students and instructor is needed to create a supportive learning environment.

While everyone should feel free to experiment creatively and conceptually, if a class member points out that something you have said or shared with the group is offensive, avoid being defensive; instead approach the discussion as a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn from one another. Alternatively if you feel that something said in discussion or included in a piece of work is harmful, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor.

Assignments and Grading (*in-progress*)

This is an ungraded course.

What does this mean? **You will not receive a grade for your assignment submissions.** Instead, you will receive *feedback*. Your overall grade in the course will be determined by 2 in-class self-evaluations, in other words, you will assign yourself a grade. At the end of the course, the instructor can decide to adjust your final grade, but only up.

Self-Evaluations

You will submit a self-evaluation and grade at the halfway point and at the end of the course. The evaluation should account for, in order of importance:

1. The time and effort you have put into the course;
2. If you've achieved the goals you set for yourself and the course's own learning objectives;
3. Your participation in critiques and exercises;
4. Your participation in peer-to-peer instruction on Discord, including helping others in the course troubleshoot their work.

That's it. Your grade in the course should be a reflection of *your engagement with the material and the community*, not the perceived quality of your work. If you are engaged and putting in the time and effort, you will learn the course material and grow as an artist and maker and get a good grade.

HOWEVER... You cannot pass this course without completing the work, independent of your self-evaluation grades.

Minimum Work Required to Pass

To receive a passing grade in this course, regardless of your self-assigned grade, you will need to complete, *at a minimum*:

- 3 assigned game projects that correctly and *completely fulfill their assignment description*;
- 2 game revisions based on feedback or playtests;
- 1 playtest report.

Assignment Assessment

You will receive written feedback plus an overall assessment using the “Excellent / Good / Good enough / Poor” system for each assignment submission:

<i>Excellent</i>	Extra time and effort spent, work goes beyond the minimum
<i>Good</i>	Meets basic requirements, well-executed, good effort
<i>Good enough</i>	Meets basic requirements, hasty execution, nominal effort
<i>Poor</i>	Missing components of the assignment, shows low effort

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Grade Value
Self Evaluations	100%
Instructor Modifier	Adjust grade up, if necessary

Missing an Assignment Deadline

There is no grade penalty for late assignment submissions, HOWEVER *there is a minimum amount of assignment submissions required to pass the course (above).*

Assignments *do have deadlines*, for 2 important reasons:

1. Deadlines get us moving. They help to keep you focused and on track. They give the semester structure and communicate to you when you should be done with something.
2. It keeps all students in sync, working on the same material, and therefore more able to help each other and participate in class activities.

What if I can't submit the assignment by the deadline?

Most assignments in this course are games. Most class meetings will start by students and the instructor playing your games. If you don't turn in your work on time, your game won't be played, you will miss out on feedback and we will miss out on your work. *Turn stuff in on time.*

HOWEVER, life happens and it's understandable if you can't submit everything on time. If that happens, *communicate with me*. No need to provide written or official documentation of any form, just an email or Discord DM letting me know what's going on is fine. *I'm not a cop.*

If you're constantly unable to turn in stuff on time (and therefore, are out of sync with the rest of the class) I may ask to schedule a meeting with you.

Attendance Policy

Attendance has no direct impact on your grade, but as per college policy (more below), I will keep track of your attendance. *Regular attendance is required for financial aid eligibility.*

TL;DR: Come to class, participate, every single class meeting is important. Communicate if you can't.

HOWEVER... if you're constantly MIA, I'll know and I'll assume you're either going through stuff and you're not able to come to class, or you think this class is boring or unimportant, in which case I'll want to know why so I can make it better. Either way, the important thing is to *communicate* so I know what's going on. If you don't attend class, you will fail the course and this has unfortunate consequences. I want you to thrive in this class.

The #1 predictor of success in college is regular attendance to classes. Not showing up invariably results in worse grades, not learning the material, and it can snowball. Don't sabotage yourself and your peers. We want you in the classroom.

Hostos-wide Academic Policies

Hostos Community College believes that developing student's abilities to think through issues and problems by themselves is central to the educational process. Since the Hostos College degree signifies that the student knows the material s/he has studied, and the practice of academic dishonesty results in grades or scores that do not reflect how much or how well the student has learned, understood, or mastered the material, the College will investigate any form of academic dishonesty brought to its attention. If the charge of academic dishonesty is proved, the College will impose sanctions. The three most common forms of academic dishonesty are cheating, plagiarism, and bribery.

Cheating

In the collegiate setting, cheating is defined as the purposeful misrepresentation of another's work as one's own. Faculty and students alike are responsible for upholding the integrity of this institution by

not participating either directly or indirectly in the act of cheating and by discouraging others from doing so.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which occurs when persons, even if unintentionally, fail to acknowledge appropriately the sources for the ideas, language, concepts, inventions, etc. referred to in their own work. Thus, any attempt to claim another's intellectual or artistic work as one's own constitutes an act of plagiarism.

Bribery

In the collegiate setting, bribery involves the offering, promising, or giving of items of value, such as money or gifts, to a person in a position of authority, such as a teacher, administrator, or staff member, so as to influence his/her judgment or conduct in favor of the student. The offering of sexual favors in exchange for a grade, test score, or other academic favor, shall be considered attempted bribery. The matter of sexual favors, either requested or offered, in exchange for a grade, test score or other academic favor, shall also be handled as per the Sexual Harassment procedures of the College.

College Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all class meetings in the courses for which they are registered. Classes begin at the times indicated in the official schedule of classes. Arrival in class after the scheduled starting time constitutes lateness.

The maximum number of absences is limited to 15% of the number of scheduled class hours per semester and a student absent more than the indicated 15% is deemed excessively absent. Attendance is monitored from the first official day of classes. In the case of excessive absences or lateness, the instructor has the right to lower the grade, assign a failing grade, or assign additional written work or readings.

Absences due to late registration, change of program, or extenuating circumstances will be considered on an individual basis by the instructor. Each department and program may specify in writing a different attendance policy. Instructors are required to keep an official record of student attendance and inform each class of the College's or department's attendance policy.

Note:

- Any work missed during any period of absence must be made up by the student.
- To meet financial aid criteria, a student must attend class at least once in the first three weeks and once in either the fourth or fifth week of class.

Use of Video in Online Classes

Students who participate in this class with their camera on or use a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded solely for the purpose of creating a record for students enrolled in the class to refer to, including those enrolled students who are unable to attend live. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have

their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the “chat” feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live.

ADA Statement

As required by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, reasonable accommodations are provided to ensure equal opportunity for students with verified disabilities.

If you have a disability that requires accommodations, contact:

Accessibility Resource Center
Savoy (D) Building
120 Walton Ave, Room D101P
Bronx, NY 10451
Phone: (718) 518-4454 (Voice/TTY)

If you are already registered with ARC and have a letter from them verifying that you are a qualified student with a disability, please present the letter to the instructor as soon as possible. The instructor will work with you and ARC to plan and implement appropriate accommodations.

Please Note:

Students who do not register with the ARC office and have their disability verified are not eligible to receive any special accommodations.

Additional Policies

- CUNY Policy on [Academic Integrity](#) (pdf)
- [Política de Integridad Académica de CUNY](#) (Spanish)
- Policy on [retention](#) of academic records
- CUNY [Uniform Grade Symbols: Glossary and Guidelines](#)
- CUNY [Testing Policy for students with disabilities](#)
- CUNY Policy on [Drug and Alcohol](#)
- CUNY [Testing Policies and Procedures](#)
- State Education Department [rules on awarding credit for same courses in different degree programs.](#)
- [Religious Accommodation of Students - Memo from General Council.](#)
- [CUNY student complaint procedure](#)
- [Board of Trustees resolution on articulation and transfer](#)

Course Schedule (*in-progress*)

This schedule is subject to change throughout the semester.

Week	Unit	Topics	Assignment/Reading Due
1	Intros	Course expectations and introductions	
2	Play	Defining Play	<p>Get on the Discord server and introduce yourself</p> <p>Read the syllabus, send me any comments</p> <p>Read (PDFs linked on Discord):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt from <i>Homo Ludens</i>, by Johan Huizinga: Chapter 1 up to the first paragraph on page 14 <i>The Definition of Play</i>, by Roger Caillois <i>Play and Ambiguity</i>, by Brian Sutton-Smith (OPTIONAL) <i>What's the Point if We Can't Have Fun?</i>, by David Graber
3	Games	Defining Games	<p>Assignment Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subversive Play
4	Intro to Game Design	Game Design Frameworks	<p>Assignment Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read, Play, Think, Make <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt from <i>Elements of Game Design</i>, by Robert Zubek Excerpt from <i>Game Design Workshop</i>, by Tracy Fullerton
5		Iterative Design Paper Prototyping Playtesting	<p>Assignment Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design with Intention (OPTIONAL) Find and share another Game Design Framework <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Game Design Workshop</i> Chapter on Playtesting, by Tracy Fullerton
6	Links	Game Narratives Twine	<p>Assignment Due:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game Revision <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt from <i>Elements of Game Design</i>, by Robert Zubek <p>Play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of Twine games
7		Playtest	Twine Game prototype

8			Twine Game final
9	Resources	Units, abilities, currencies, exchange	Play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of Resource-based games Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt from <i>Elements of Game Design</i>, by Robert Zubek
10		Playtest	Resource Game prototype
11	Affordance	Affordance mini-lecture	Resource Game final Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordance chapter from <i>The Design of Everyday Things</i>, by Don Norman
12	Graphical Game	Bitsy Demo	Play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of Bitsy games
13		Work time	Graphical Game (prototype)
14		Final playtest	Graphical Game (final)
15		<i>Make-up Day</i>	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excerpt from <i>Rise of the Videogame Zinesters</i>, by anna anthropy

It was a pleasure working with you.

