

USC School of Cinematic Arts CTWR 410

Character Development and Storytelling for Games

4 Units

Professors: Marianne Krawczyk/Danny Bilson

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Office hours: by appointment; Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons in SCI 201.

Class hours: Thursdays 7PM-10 PM, Room SCI 206

Course Description:

The dramatic potential of games and interactive entertainment is in its infancy today. Popular games offer lavish worlds and 3D environments to explore, and attempt to people them with believable and empathetic characters. There is much room for growth, however, in this aspect of games; much opportunity for serious writers and creative thinkers to build the foundation for the next generation of immersive fiction.

The purpose of this class is to give students an understanding of classic dramaturgy – characterization, motivation, story patterns, structures, styles, genres, etc. Our goal is to learn new ways in which to use these storytelling skills to create emotionally rich characters and worlds for interactive entertainment--in other words, how to convey story through objectives and rewards.

The methods in this class will draw from both the wealth of experience in the Writing Division of the USC School of Cinema Arts, as well as high-level thinkers in the game industry who are charting new ground in this area.

The class will explore two core creative issues facing game fiction writers: developing fiction for existing game mechanics, and inspiring original game mechanics with great fiction.

In addition to this convergence of classic and interactive storytelling methods, the class will occasionally have working interaction with game producers, designers, and writers whose games are pushing the envelope on the development of character and story in games.

Meeting Information:

The class will meet once a week for three hours. Generally, the first ninety minutes of each week will be spent discussing the topics described below and screening/playing examples from games. The second ninety minutes will be a working session where student assignments are pitched, critiqued and revised with input from the entire class.

Pre-requisites: CTIN 488 is recommended but not required.

Recommended Texts:

- Students will also be called upon to critique fiction from different games currently published.

Evaluation of student performance:

- Class Participation: 10%
- Game Fiction Reviews: 10%
- Assigned Fiction Project 1 10%
- Assigned Fiction Project 2 10%
- Game Opening 5%
- Game Ending 5%
- Original Game Fiction Project: 50% as follows:
 - 1 page concept 10%
 - 3 page treatment 15%
 - Power Point Presentation 15%
 - Final Walkthrough 10%

Written assignments will be turned in by start of class, usually one week in advance of review.

Course content (summarized by class meeting)

Week 1: Introduction

Introductions: Who we are and why we are here.

How can good writing advance the interactive experience?

- Fiction before mechanics or vice versa?
- The X and the Y.
- Course overview – objectives, assignments, grading, etc.
- Final Project: Original game I.P. (build the game you want to play the most) PP and Walkthrough.
- What are student game fiction reviews?
- Guest Speakers
- Intro PP: Screenwriting in Gamespace

Week 2: Pitching the Original Game Concept

- Discussion: Classic characters in games, films, television & literature. What is character in gamespace? What is motivation in gamespace? Backstory? How do these impact the creation of game characters?
- Student game reviews
- Student I.P. pitches 1

Week 3: Emergent Fiction

- Diplomacy: Emergent fiction experience
- Winter's Tale: A narrative game experience
- Student IP one page treatment due.

Week 4: Emergent Fiction pt. 2

- Student Game Reviews.
- Discussion: Meaningful moments, identifying with characters, making choices that matter.
- The Three Act structure for games: Opening, Mid Game, End Game.
- Diplomacy Reports
- Notes on 1 page assignment

Week 5: Using Game Mechanics to Inspire Fiction

- Student Game Reviews
- In class team exercise: Mechanics to Fiction
- Discussion: Developing conflict: collision, complication and culmination.

Week 6: Mechanics to Fiction pt2

- Student Game Reviews
- Team Presentations: Mechanics to Fiction

Week 7: Writing the Game Opening

- Student Game Reviews
- Game opening Demos
- Discussion: The terminology of structure: exposition, point of attack, rising action, turning point, falling action, revelation, twist, and resolution.

Week 8: Review Game Opening Assignments

- Student Game Reviews
- Review and Note Game Opening Assignments

Week 9: Developing Game Mechanics from Story

- 3 page write up for original game due
- Student Game Review
- Discussion: How great game fiction inspires great game mechanics.
- Assignment: Develop original mechanics from existing fiction.
- In class team exercise: Fiction to Mechanics

Week 10: Developing Mechanics from Fiction pt2

- Student Game Reviews
- Review Fiction to Mechanics Presentations
- Transmedia discussion

Week 11: Drama and Memorable Moments in Gamespace

- Discussion: Revelation versus emergence. Creation of drama within levels and across levels. Pacing of playtime and the “mini-arc.” Emergent A.I. versus “scripts”.
- Review and note 3 page treatments

Week 12: Transmedia Project Reviews

- Transmedia Presentations Reviewed
- Student Game Review

Week 13: The Student IP Project Presentations

- Original Student Power Points Reviewed
- Student Game Review

Week 14: The Student IP Projects pt2

- Student Power Points
- Walkthroughs due.

Week 15: Final Presentations with guest feedback.

Selected Power Points for professional presentation and review

Expectation of Professionalism:

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

Internet Policy:

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:

EXPLAIN YOUR POLICY ON LAPTOPS AND CELL PHONES.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by 5%. Your grade will be lowered by 5% for every absence after. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

Please note that if you are a Writing for Screen and Television major/minor you must receive a grade of a C or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

Class Schedule:

Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

Safer Spaces

In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will issue content warnings as appropriate, use preferred pronouns, and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together. If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with either the undergraduate or graduate advisor for the division, who can discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

<p>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
