

George Mason University
College of Visual and Performing Arts
Game Design Program

GAME 400: Senior Practicum

Term: Fall 2015
Section: 001

Meeting Time: Friday 4:30PM – 7:10PM
Room: Art & Design Building 1018

Instructor: Paul Eric Piccione
Office: Art & Design Building 2023

Email: ppiccion@gmu.edu
Office Hours: Fridays 11:00 AM-1:00 PM

Course Description

This course represents that capstone experience of the Game Design Minor, and serves to prepare students to pursue further game education or possibly to enter the game design and development workforce. For the first half of the semester, each student (or student team) will create a game design of their choosing, and will complete the necessary design and prototyping phases to generate a complete game design document. At midterm, designs and process will be presented by students to a group of peers and instructors. The design presented will become the blueprint for the game which will be developed by the student (or student team) in the second half of the semester. Completed games will be presented to a panel of colleagues, instructors, and industry professionals at the end of the semester.

Student senior game projects will demonstrate the design skills they have learned and will highlight their area of study within the Computer Game Design Minor. For example, a student with an area of study in “Sound and Music” will create a game project that will showcase the student’s work in developing sound effects, voiceover and music.

Course Objectives

- Write, design, and develop a professional Game Design Document.
- Compose a comprehensive, itemized development schedule.
- Design, conduct and assess a prototyping process for their game design.
- Produce a fully functioning platform, PC, or mobile game.
- Present their game, game design, and process publicly to a group of peers, instructors and industry professionals.

Apply critical thinking skills in each phase of development beginning with assessment of the game concept, generating and testing design assumptions, planning and scheduling the game’s development, and in preparing a presentation of their game’s design as well as final product.

Team versus Solo Projects

Students may choose to work with a team of developers on their senior practicum or decide to develop a project on their own. Historically, students have worked with other students enrolled in the senior practicum. Some student teams are comprised of students both enrolled in the senior project and those who are not (either CGD underclassmen or students in the Computer Science game concentration).

The core elements of this course involve teamwork, participation and working with others. Video game development is not typically a solo endeavor, but requires being able to work as part of a team, and the prime objective of this class is to prepare students for that dynamic. Generally solo projects have a more difficult time than teams do, and teams usually develop projects that are more robust and feature-complete.

It is recommended that if you embark on a team project with other CGD Minor students enrolled in the practicum, so that you share the same motivation, timeframe and requirements with your teammates. The dangers of accessing resources outside the project are that they may become unreliable and your grade and project might suffer. This has occurred in the past and it is why it is strongly recommended to choose teammates who share the same deliverable goals and responsibilities each semester. All teams will be approved by your instructor prior to development.

Project Focus

The focus of a student's senior practicum should function as a synthesis of what they have learned in the Computer Game Design curriculum. Game development is a multidisciplinary field, and our students often have different areas of interest and expertise. The project should be a representation of both your skills and your passion in the form of a game.

For example, if you aspire to become a character animator in the game design industry, your project should be a game which shows off your character animation above all else. Nonetheless, it may require you to do some character modeling and rigging, level design and scripting, but the primary focus will be to demonstrate your animation. Alternatively, if your focus is on game design, your project needs to show off game mechanics, level design and scripting ability. As in the animator example above, it may require you to create some art assets, animations etc., but the focus should be on showing off the design elements in your game (whether mechanical or aesthetic).

Requirements and Evaluation

At the beginning of each meeting, students should be prepared to discuss and demonstrate the state of their game project or design.

The teams will present their progress four times during the two-semester: at mid-term and again at end-of-term.

In the first half of the semester, students will develop their game design in what the game industry refers to as the “pre-production” phase of development. During this phase, the game idea will be refined, the scope will be determined, the look and feel of the game will be decided, all necessary assets and functionality will be defined. Once the core design is complete, the student will design, conduct and assess prototypes needed for the development of this game. It is the goal of these prototypes to determine the final target feature set of the game and to test any design assumptions the student’s design may pose. At midterm, students will present the design and prototyping process along with analysis, followed by a presentation of the completed game design.

During the second half of the semester, students will focus solely on developing a vertical slice of the game described in the game design document in accordance with a schedule developed with their instructor. At the conclusion of the semester, students will present a professional public presentation of the vertical slice along with their game design. The vertical slice will be a fully functional version of the game with a narrow focus on all portions of the design showing how they work together and achieve the design goals.

Required Texts/Materials:

No Text – all reading and other assignments will be given in class or via Blackboard.
Access to a PC Desktop/Laptop – For project and coursework outside of class.

Details on presentation requirements and course schedules are available on Blackboard under Course Content.

Recommended Materials:

USB Flash Drive – 2 GB for storing and transporting project data
Google Drive Account

Grading

Grading will be based on a number of assignments culminating in the completed game design and presentation.

Participation in weekly status updates and demonstrations (10%)
Developing a game design treatment (5%),
Developing a style guide (look and feel) for the design (10%)
Developing an asset list/schedule (10%)

Developing a prototyping plan (5%)
Prototype development and analysis (10%)
The completed game design document and prototypes (20%)
Presentation of the vertical slice and game design document (10%)
The completed vertical slice of the game (20%)

Presentation is an important part of the grade. The midterm and final both require students to pitch their projects. Generally this is done in front of the class to allow peer participation through questions and answers. As noted above, the final presentation may be given before other faculty or industry professionals. The presentations are recorded for review of content and presentation style. This footage is viewed only by the instructor and the student or group involved, who receive a copy of the footage for their own evaluation.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Mason is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else's work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt (of any kind) please ask for guidance and clarification.

MASON EMAIL ACCOUNTS

Students must use their MasonLIVE email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See <http://masonlive.gmu.edu> for more information. All digital communication with the professor must be made using your "masonlive" email account.

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS. <http://ods.gmu.edu>

OTHER USEFUL CAMPUS RESOURCES:

WRITING CENTER: A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200;
<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES "Ask a Librarian"

<http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS): (703) 993-2380;
<http://caps.gmu.edu>

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