Fall 2017

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

GAME 332 RS—Story Design for Computer Games

Policy Sheet & Course Overview
Fall 2017

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Course Section #: 003

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Analysis of current computer game story design theory. Focusing on, but not limited to, narratology, ludology, critical theory, psychology, philosophy, and other related topics, students will engage various techniques in analyzing and refining game narrative. Use of narrative structure and new media for designing computer game scenarios and stories. Traditional narrative techniques (text stories, novels, films) will be examined, as well as translations of the traditional to interactive, non-linear modes of communications.

Prerequisites: 30 credits within game design major or permission of the instructor

REQUIRED TEXTS

• Other assigned readings will be available through Blackboard in pdf format or through the Mason Library.

Overview:
Original work, contextualized, in order to further the possibilities of game narrative
Students will develop an understanding of the aesthetic and intellectual components of game narrative design through critical analysis of major historical game design works, creative work of their own, and conventions in Western literature and film.

Engaging critical and literary theory, students will explore the possibilities of game narrative and implications of historical developments in the field.

Throughout the semester, students will: take responsibility for executing an original project, learn to engage a specific audience while demonstrating the broader implications of their work, and present their work as professionals in the field. Furthermore, students will articulate and refine a question about game narrative today, challenging how it might be “pushed forward” through inquiry and situation in the broader context of historical and current conventions.

Our course will focus writing for and about games. Each day we will write about and discuss how stories are told and what forms they take, with a special eye on genres prevalent in games. Throughout the semester, we will undertake the task of
researching the role of writing in games and research to identify best practices in this emerging field: What does good game writing look like? How does one break into this part of the industry? By the end of the course you will feel more confident in your ability to create and tell an original story, though reflective practice and careful observation of your process. All of our work will be geared toward creating a portfolio of your own design. NOTE: We will be reading one another’s work in class often, so come every day with lots of energy and a willingness to be an active participant.

Writing Across the Curriculum
GAME 332 RS, Story Design for Computer Games satisfies the Writing Intensive requirement for Computer Game Design undergraduate majors and is also an elective for the Film and Video Studies Screenwriting concentration (SCWR).

The following assignments and associated point values account for each student’s final mark in the course. There are 100 points available to students throughout the semester.

Reflecting on Practice, Growth, and Development
10  1st-Half Participation Reflection (Includes attendance)
10  Reading Response #1
  5  Reading Response #2
  5  V1 Design Philosophy
  5  V2 Design Philosophy

GAME Narrative Review—Communicating Knowledge to the Public
10  Game Narrative Review DRAFT + Peer Feedback
10  GNR Digital Story Revision + Peer Feedback
10  Game Narrative Review (4-page)

Original Game Story Design
10  Game Story Outline & Character Outline
10  Sample Quests & Narrative Design Memo
  5  Script / Dialogue Sample
  5  Original Box Copy (Mock packaging)
  5  Visual Story Representation (Poster or Digital Clip)

NOTES:
  o When revised work is submitted it should include a brief “revision memo” that reflects on the challenges you faced and their resolution.
  o Many assignments will be peer reviewed online in lieu of a full class meeting—in some cases, the quality/depth of your peer reviews will be weighted as heavily as your own early drafts.
  o Unless circumstances have been discussed with the instructor beforehand, ALL LATE WORK will receive a reduction in grade.
  o BACK UP YOUR WORK in the cloud/email and whatever hard media you choose. Ask yourself, “Could this possibly hurt?”
  o All submissions must have filenames that identify the author, the assignment, and the date (this is a good habit to develop).
  o Professionalism in terms of editing and efficient writing will be part of all grading criteria.
This course is intended to give students knowledge and understanding of the art of game design through critical and/or historical analysis, theory, and practice. Game courses allow students to utilize varied methods of inquiry and satisfy academic curiosity through research and writing to establish a foundation for ongoing intellectual and creative development.

Statement on RS Designated Courses
This class is designated as a Research and Scholarship Intensive Course, which means that students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the process of scholarship and will make a significant contribution to the creation of a disciplinary-appropriate product. Students will create original content for games while researching best practices for writing in the game industry and reflecting on their own creative process.

RS Student Learning Outcomes
As an RS course, the class includes the following student learning outcomes:
Students who successfully complete GAME 332 RS will be able to...
1. Create an original scholarly or creative project (GNR and Original Game Narrative)
2. Communicate knowledge from the project through public presentation or the publication.
   Engage in scholarly inquiry by:
   • Articulating and refining a question: How do my experiences and knowledge inform my perception of narrative in games? In light of current trends in the games market and popular culture, what is considered “good” writing for games and how might we define it? How do storytelling, collaborative writing, and narrative design enhance the skills I hope to use post-graduation?
   • Applying appropriate conventions of the discipline: What is game writing in terms of rhetorical genre study? What does good game writing do and who is producing it? How is this work identified/recognized? What does this recognition indicate?
   • Situating the creative work within a broader context: What are the cultural implications of narrative in games today? To what extent do social constructs, ideology, identity, and current events affect content in game narrative?

Please come see me with questions about your own research, my research, and/or other possibilities for you to do work with OSCAR.

POLICIES & IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Professionalism
Many of the policies below relate to professionalism. Being courteous to the professor and other students is mandatory. All guidelines for assignments must be followed. If unsure about a policy, contact the professor immediately. This is the same for late work, absences, etc. Sending notice after the fact just doesn’t look good; unless, of course, your absence is due to illness or other factors beyond your immediate control. Be professional.

All work should be cleanly edited: free of careless mistakes. Any questions you have regarding the use of the English language or other conventions should be researched thoroughly before taking them to the instructor—we will follow MLA format in the headings of assignments and with citation unless noted otherwise.

Formatting
All projects must be submitted in the format dictated by the assignment. Documents should be submitted as PDFs and video files as MP4. To be accepted, all electronic
student work must have a file name that identifies the author, the assignment, and the date.

**Assumptions**
It is assumed that students have regular access to email and the Internet, so they will be able to receive updates and participate electronically when necessary. It is also assumed that students will diligently back up their work, rendering technical difficulties harmless. Failure to turn work in on time due to this type of issue will be treated like all other late work. When hard copies are required, they are *required*.

**Late Work**
Late work will only be accepted without penalty in the case of a documented medical illness or another situation that is out of your control. Late work will be reduced by a letter grade for each class period it is late. *WHEN IN DOUBT notify the instructor if the situation is tenuous.*

**Writing Center**
The Writing Center is available for writers of all levels. Tutors in the Writing Center (Robinson A114, Enterprise 076, Johnson Center 136) will talk with you about how you can improve your revision and editing strategies; they will not, however, edit or proofread your work—professionalism, once again. You can make an appointment online: [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/)

**Writing Assignments**
Due dates and revision guidelines will be clearly outlined at the outset of each assignment. Digital copies of assignments will be available on Bb. Some writing assignments will be assigned in class and completed in our time together, calculated into your grade via class participation.

**Class Participation**
Many of our sessions will operate like a traditional writing workshop. You will be expected to read others' work aloud and give thoughtful input to aid their revision process. The best way to get a good mark for class participation is to participate meaningfully every day. Respecting each other's opinions and work is crucial. Attendance will be taken via the 'Qwickly' tool in Bb—you will check in every day with a unique code given at the beginning of class.

**Online Participation**
Blackboard (Bb) will be your friend in exchanging ideas and communicating with one another during the term, as will individual student websites. Students may be randomly assigned to Bb Groups. These groups will be responsible for peer review and weekly discussion periodically throughout the semester. The frequency and depth of online participation will factor into your grade.

**Mason Policies of Note**

**Email Policy**
Students must use their MasonLIVE or gmu.edu email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. See [http://masonlive.gmu.edu](http://masonlive.gmu.edu) for more information.

**Mason Emergency Information**
You may want to sign up for emergency alert messages. If so, go to [https://alert.gmu.edu](https://alert.gmu.edu). You’ll also find information about emergency procedures at [http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert](http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert).
Students With Disabilities
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Honor Code
George Mason University has an Honor Code that requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee.

University Catalog
Students are to be aware of the policies listed in the University Catalog: http://catalog.gmu.edu/. University dates concerning withdrawal are not negotiable by the professor. Other questions regarding university and program policies can be directed towards the Assistant Director outside of class time.

Thoughts:
Please come talk to me about your work for this course—I am your resource. For our purposes, it is vital that you think of yourself as a writer and a member of the design community in general; you are creating important, original work. Take pride in this fact and bring passion to every assignment. This mandate goes for all class meetings as well—each of you will develop a critical voice that will help shape the class and each other’s work. Embrace this solemn responsibility. I look forward to getting to know you and enjoying your work.