Course: COM596 The Design of Play	
Term: Spring, 2014	**Meeting Time**: Wednesday, 8:55-11:35
	Location: Benton 9
Instructor: Lindsay Grace	
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Office Hours: Wednesday Noon-3:00pm	
Best way to reach me: *email*	
Class Sites: http://gameclasses.com/	Blackboard as needed
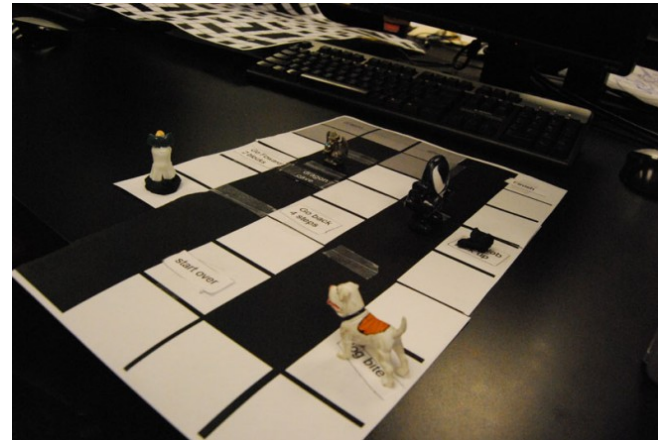
This course develops theoretical foundations and skills in understanding how fun and play is created. Students will study and design a variety of interactive situations that engage participants through the construction of playful experiences. The understanding and design of fun and play is informed by a variety of disciplines that include psychology, art and science. It never hurts to have a little bit of magic. Students will build and critique a variety of constructed experiences which serve as foundational work for the construction of computer games in subsequent courses.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Appropriately articulate game designs informed by theories of entertainment and engagement
- Realize game designs in non digital prototypes
- Understand, articulate and emulate leading philosophies and theories in contemporary and historical ludology.
- Synthesize and communicate entertaining ideas through the appropriate use of writing and applied arts
- Apply theories of entertainment to a variety of situations, including business, education, and technology.
- Research and evaluate designs based on author stated objectives and a design's ability to engage its intended audience
- Contextualize current and historical play trends to inform future designs
- Employ design thinking, iterative processes and other common means of producing innovative, appropriately designed solutions.
- Identify historically significant game designs, designers, and game theorists
- Employ fun as a technique to increase audience engagement

Required Textbook:

No text is required for this course; instead we will be drawing on historical and contemporary resources in game design theory and practical game building. Students are expected to read excerpts from the digital course packet provided by the instructor. Readings include Huizinga's Homo Ludens, Zimmerman's Rules of Play and other influential analysis of play.

Resources will be provided in class and when appropriate, through the following websites:

* http://www.GameClasses.com
* American University Blackboard

Required playing:

In lieu of some reading, students will be required to play a variety of games in and out of class. Much like a film course requires viewing; this course requires "playing." Even if you have played the required games, you must play them again for the class. In-class discussion and reading should help re-contextualize your game playing experience.

Required playing will be available online or through loaned games or print to play games. I encourage you to go in small groups.

Please review the list of games to play when provided. It is best to give yourself plenty of time to setup each game.

Suggested Texts:

If you are particularly eager to develop your library of game design related reading, I would suggest the following text:

Rules of Play, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, MIT Press

This is not a technology course. Play has existed before computer technology and will continue to do so. Students are expected to be creative designers and critics, examining what engages specific audiences and how to improve on the content delivered.

As with most education, this course is about finding opportunities, taking them and learning from the experience. I encourage you to consider submitting your work for critique through conferences, contests and exhibitions. In the past my students have published or competed in contests using games from this class.

Assignments:

20% Design Summary (2 presentations x 10% each): The design summary allows you to practice formal evaluation of game design by deconstructing a game into its basic units. The design summary is a succinct list of game elements for a specific game. It also summarizes the key success of the game relative to course content and theories in ludology. Design summaries are to be completed by a group of 3 or 4 students.

Design summaries will be presented in class in 5 minutes or *less*. Students should expect to field questions after their 5 minute presentation. Design summaries will be evaluated on a **PASS/FAIL** basis. Incomplete or poorly constructed design summaries will yield a failing grade. All Designs summaries must be emailed to the instructor by the start of class on the date they are due. Presentations should be emailed in PDF form, to be posted on the class website for others to review. **Please review the design summary rubric and example provided on the course website for more information.**

10% Design Topic Lecture/Case Study: Each student will be responsible for collecting information on a specific topic of ludology and the design of play (e.g. educational game design, advergaming, etc). The student will present the key concepts, hot topics, and relevant design concerns for their topic. Each presentation should include a brief demonstration of 2-4 relevant games (video, photo, screenshot) that best exemplifies their topic. Students must explain the design topic and argue how the described games are exemplary models of the design topic. The design topic case study is an individual in class presentation of no more than 10 minutes. Each student will have a specific date on which to present their design topic brief. Presentations must PechaKucha styled (fast, 20 seconds per slide or less), clear, engaging and deeply informative.

25% Midterm project: Game Design Document or Game Design:

> **Game Design Document**: The design document is one of the game designer's most basic tools. As such, students can write one small game design document (4-5 pages, with bullet points, excluding pictures). Materials on how to write a design document are provided on the class website.

> **Game Design**: If you are more inclined toward production than documentation you may create an original game design for the midterm project. Play them with an audience outside of the class. All game designer's must document and present their games and game playing experiences for critique in class. Documentation can take the form of video, in class demonstration, or an instructor approved archive (e.g. audio recording or photograph if appropriate).

35% Final Game Prototype or **Academic Research Paper**:

> Each student or student group can construct a final game prototype (with paper, cardboard, wood, software or hardware) as a final project for the course. The game must incorporate lessons learned from the course. The final projects may be displayed for the entire school to view. Final game prototypes can be done individually or as a group. The final game may be a derivation of the midterm project (i.e. refinement, revision, execution of document, etc). Maximum group size is four students. Students with successful games may be invited to continue their game development as an independent study and may receive support for further development and/or exhibition.

Each student may choose to write an academic conference paper instead. The paper should be of student publishable quality, offering new research in the study of play or games. The paper should be approximately 1500 words and must follow either the CHI Extended Abstract or the ACM SIG proceedings template. All **paper topics and research must be approved by the instructor by week 7** of the course (or sooner). Students with effective research papers may be supported in publishing their research, which may include travel support to the appropriate conference.

10% Participation: Participation is evaluated by a student's in-class communication, teamwork and attendance. Students will accrue a weekly score of high participation (asks thoughtful questions, attempts to answer other student questions, offers new references), average participation (responds when asked, occasional seeks new knowledge in class) or no participation (are you "in the class"?). These scores will be averaged to calculate a final participation score.

Please review the supplied individual assignment grading rubrics for more details on how your works is graded.

Additional Requirements for Graduate Students (research paper):

All registered graduate students must complete a final academic research paper worth 20%. The paper must meet the requirements for academic research papers stated above (e.g. 1500 words in ACM format). Graduate final grades will be calculated at 5% discount for the design summary, midterm and final projects. For graduate students design summaries are worth 5% each, midterm 20%, and final project 30%. If a graduate student elects not to produce a game with a team as their final project, the student **may not have to create two separate papers**. Instead, after a conversation with the instructor, the graduate student may be allowed to design a research project and paper worth 50% of their grade (20% graduate paper, 30% project supporting research).   Graduate students are encouraged to do cross-disciplinary study based on their graduate focus. **All research paper topics and plans must be approved by week 7 of the course.**

Score Breakdown:

	Undergrad	Grad
Design Summaries (group work)	**20%** total (2 @ 10% each)	10%
Design Topic Case Study: (individual)	**10%**	10%
Midterm: Game Design or Design Document	**25%**	20%
Final Game Prototype or Research Paper:	**35%**	30%
Participation:	**10%**	10%
Graduate paper (graduate students only)		*20%*

Point Score range	Final Letter Grade
93 and above	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
64-66	D
Below 64	F

Extra Credit Policy: Generally, there will be no extra credit.

Estimated Homework Hours:

Between, designing, reading and playing games expect 3-6 hours a week. Depending on your abilities and the nature of the game your team chooses to create, this class may take more time.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

Any student that cheats or plagiarizes will be reported to the academic standards committee and may be dismissed from the course. A student may be considered in violation of cheating and plagiarism policy if they present the work of others as their own, even if the work is provided through multiple online and print resources. Much like a writing course, students involved in developing, programming and related activities should attribute their work by stating the resource from which the work was derived. This is common practice in industry. Examples of such attribution are provided below:

```
/*  Derived from Craig Reynold's Boids Flocking Behavior as specified on pp. 48-52 of Great Game Algorithms, ISBN 1233131321  */
```

```
At the start of your game: This game is a modified version of the Zorkster computer game released by Sarah Smith.  The images and storyline were changed; all other content was authored by Sarah Smith.
```

All homework is to be completed independently (except when told otherwise). Any student who is caught or suspected of working in conjunction with any other student will be penalized. Using lines of code borrowed from any source other than the prescribed book for this course will be considered plagiarism unless the student clearly credits their source. Do not use websites, message boards, chat rooms, or other related resources to solve homework problems with attributing your source.

Social Networking Policy:

It is my general policy not to friend or otherwise engage with students through social networking sites until they have matriculated out of the institution. I am generally happy to add you to networks to facilitate job searches and other networking opportunities once you have graduated. This prevents any tensions between students, and facilitates a fair teaching environment for all students. In some special cases, I will add students to social networks to complete student objectives, typically temporarily (e.g. technical need for student group, student research need). If you have such a need please talk with me before sending requests.

Please do not be offended if your request is ignored, it's just my policy to keep a fair and equitable classroom environment.

Course Schedule (subject to change at instructor's discretion)

	Topic(s)	Reading Covered (complete reading before class)	Assignment due
Week 1: 1/15	The Value of Play	The Power of Play, Psychology Today Play, Anderson	
Week 2: 1/22	The Value of Fun Games, Play and the In between	Fun, Play and Games, M. Prensky Definition of Play (Callois), Salen,Zimmerman)	
Week 3: 1/29	Designing Play: The Anthropology of play and Games Analysis	The Ambiguity of Play, Brian Sutton-Smith Playing Research: Methodological approaches to game analysis, Aarseth	
Week 4: 2/5	Designing Play: The Psychology of Play, the Brain's and Society's Need for Play	The American Acad. Of Pediatrics-Importance of Play Play as Organizing Principle, Stuart Brown Understanding Fun, Theory of Natural Funativity (excerpt)	Design Summary 1
Week 5: 2/12	Designing Mechanics	MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design	
Week 6: 2/19	Designing Mechanics	PlayCentric Design, Fullerton Game Design Document Resources	
Week 7: 2/26		Midterm Projects Due 3/5 - Presentations	
Week 8: 3/5		Chapter 1-Newsgames, Bogost	

Week 9: 3/12 Spring Break			
Week 10: 3/19	Game Developer's Conference - Final Project work week TA Session		
Week 11: 3/26	Fun and Rhetoric – Designing Critical Play and Critical Gameplay	Anxiety and Activist Games, Flanagan Software Studies in Game Design, Grace	
Week 12: 4/2	Game Rhetoric – education and social action		Design Summary 2
Week 13: 4/9	Rhetoric to sell - where education meets business	Advergaming and Rhetoric	
Week 14: 4/16	*Student Chosen: Fun or Play Topic*		
Week 16: 4/23	Final Project Showcase: Final Projects Due - Presentations		

Course Policies

All students must adhere to the guidelines set forth by the American University handbook.

All assignments are due at the beginning of the class. Assignments are typically shared in class, so failure to complete your assignments effects the entire class.

Students should always keep a backup copy of their work.

Late Assignments

No late assignments will be accepted. In this course, assignments build on the previous. Failure to complete prior assignments will make each subsequent assignment more difficult. It is in your best interest to complete each assignment on time and to the best of your ability. Always hand in what you have, even if it does not work. **Partial credit is better than no credit at all.**

Attendance / Absences:

Students are expected to attend each class and arrive on time. Any student arriving late for an exam or quiz may not be given a chance to complete it.

Late assignments are not accepted unless they result from an excused absence. Excused absences are limited to documented medical emergencies and events for which the instructor has given approval. All students are expected to communicate planned or unplanned absence to the instructor's email as soon as possible.

Any student accruing more than a 20% unexcused absence rate will receive a full grade deduction. If, for example, a class meets 10 times during a semester, the student's third absence will result in a best potential grade of "B." A student who accrues 30% or more unexcused absences will fail the course.

Makeup exams and acceptance of late assignments will only be granted in the following circumstances; Medical excuse, emergencies (as understood by American University Administration), campus-sponsored activities.

All planned absences should be clearly explained in an email sent to the instructor before the student misses the class. The instructor will reply indicating whether or not the absence is excused.

All issues of attendance and tardiness will be handled as school policy dictates and at the discretion of the instructor.

Correspondence:

All students are expected to check their American University supplied email daily, or forward email to an account they do check daily. The instructor's email address is Grace@American.edu.

In Class Conduct:

In-class web surfing, email, electronic chat, text messaging, or related behavior is prohibited during class meetings.

Please be attentive to people comments and engage yourself in class.

We will likely play a few games in class.   Please participate when asked, and stop playing when instructed to do so. Most games will be made available for students after class if they are interested in playing them further.

If you are uncomfortable with the behavior, language, content, or the classroom environment please address the instructor personally or through email at your earliest opportunity. The world of game design includes a variety of "hot button" topics, open discussion of these topics may contribute greatly to your education. The classroom environment should remain an open, engaging environment in which all students are encouraged to learn.

No recording (audio or visual) of this class may be made without the prior written consent of the instructor.

Statement of Community and Non-Discrimination:
American University is committed to fostering a supportive learning environment for all students irrespective of individual differences in gender, race, national origin, religion, handicapping condition, sexual preference or age. Students should expect, and help create, a learning environment free from all forms of prejudice. If disrespectful behaviors occur in class, please seek the assistance of your instructor or the department director.