

Schedule: Fridays, 2:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Location: Tower 603 (meeting and critique) and Tower 306 (workshops)

Credits: 3.00

Instructor: Abraham Evensen Tena

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Office Hours: Fridays, 1:00 pm - 2:00pm, or by appointment

Course Description

Fundamentals of Game Design is a class for those who seek to understand the principles of game production, as well as the role that games have in contemporary culture. Using traditional and digital art methods, you will create game prototypes in the exploration of system, character, and narrative design. This class focuses on games mechanics and their relationship to art, story and technology. This class serves as a primer for the creation of games and other interactive experiences as studio practice.

The main objective of Fundamentals of Game Design class is to change your relationship with games, from a consumer to a producer of games. This shift in perspective will open exciting new ways to express your ideas, but also demand a critical eye on a mass-media phenomenon. It is the goal of this class to challenge your empathy and attitude of service, as you learn how to make games for others, and grow your awareness of your own role as a player.

You will explore game design through the development of three analog game prototypes, based on specific prompts and techniques, and one final game of your own creation. By participating in class exercises, instructor presentations, and homework assignments, you will earn a critical language for games. By conducting play-testing sessions, you will test your design conclusions and help your classmates improve their own. By the end of the term, you will be able to understand general game production, and the role of the game designer.

Course Objectives

1. To introduce students to the principles of game production through the creation of analogue games, including:

- Using basic art materials to create and test complex game systems
- Play-testing and iterating on design ideas, based on player's feedback
- Creating approachable modular systems, with the capacity to scale in scope and complexity
- Engaging with foundational technological and conceptual solutions to discover novel and expressive game mechanics

2. To introduce students to the centrality of game mechanics, and their relationship to other game components such as visuals, stories, and technology, including:

- Building worlds through the creation of their basic rules, as well as the characters, environments and props implied by them
- Reinforcing the aesthetics of your game systems, by the use of art, technology and story
- Identifying and developing the personal themes that animate all components of your game

3. To facilitate and foster the student's critical engagement with the medium, particularly in its social-cultural dimensions, including:

- Earning a critical language for both the analogue and video game forms
- Analyzing the moral dimension of game mechanics
- Discussing current trends in game design, both from a formal and thematic perspective

Departmental Goals

Fundamentals of Game Design introduces students to the general competencies expected in a growing and influential venue of illustration art. By understanding the principles of game design, illustrators may not only meaningfully contribute to team-based productions, but also express their personal voice through independent game design. Concordant with the multidisciplinary character of illustration, students in the Fundamentals of Game Design class are expected to venture past their comfort zone and expand their technical and conceptual reach. As with other Illustration Department classes, students are expected to conduct basic research and concept development, as well as practice the visual principles of composition, value, color and technique.

The learning outcomes for the illustration department pertinent to this class are:

- Understand and use of a range of drawing/ painting materials & methods
- Understand relationship between word and image
- Understand implied & sequential narrative
- Understand conceptual thinking in the making process
- Value and use experimentation, investigation, & risk taking
- Embrace innovation in long term explorations
- Develop strong personal voice
- Understand importance of active studio practice
- Understand and appreciate richness of cross-cultural influences
- Understand and value practice of effective creative collaboration
- Understand and value self-evaluation and critique
- Understand and value strong visual, written & verbal presentation skills (portfolio, artist statements)
- Understand and value professional ethics and practices
- Understand the role of artist/ illustrators (historic & contemporary)

Class Structure

Every class will start with a brief lecture about the day's topics. It is your responsibility to show up on time, ask questions, and participate in the discussion. Be prepared to enrich the class with your favorite examples and personal experiences; Given the scope of the class, it is not possible to account for every analog or digital game out there. Therefore, your point of view can greatly enrich the class if delivered with respect and inclusiveness. Most of the class time will be spent playing example games, testing games made by you and your classmates, and

designing and troubleshooting games. Since testing games is the core of Game Design, you and your classmates are expected to follow basic play-testing protocols:

Rules of play-testing:

1. All conversation, critique, and feedback during testing must be constructive, respectful, and to the point.
2. There should always be clearly demarcated roles in testing: Players must play the game and provide feedback when appropriate. Designers must conduct gameplay, help players understand the rules and mechanics, take notes for future game iterations, and generally be responsible for the session. A third role, Monitor, can be added to keep scores, emulate systems or other miscellaneous tasks, depending on the game's needs.
3. The Instructor reserves the right to stop or modify a testing session if it isn't meeting the class objectives. The instructor will coordinate with the designer in such circumstances.
4. All materials, art, document, and technology needs are the responsibility of the designer. The instructor may have certain materials on hand, but it is the designer's job to have everything ready at the beginning of the session.
5. Due to the amount of games, the instructor will maintain a tight play-testing schedule. Make sure to rehearse your session in advance so that it can be completed in the allotted time. If you wish to test your game beyond scheduled times, ask the instructor for availability.
6. All testing sessions should result in tangible, well-documented observations. The designer must present these notes to the instructor, implement necessary changes, and test the outcomes in the next iteration. This process is an important part of your grade.

While most assignments are for a single student, sometimes you will be tasked with group projects. It will be the instructor who will decide the composition of the groups, based on the number of students, the different competencies, and other factors. You are expected to not only demonstrate your design proficiency in these assignments, but also your teamwork and communication skills.

For every Game Design assignment you will receive a One-Page Brief with rules, constraints, and specifications. Make sure to get a copy and clarify any questions you may have about your game assignment. Games, for the purpose of this class, are graded in the following categories:

1. Viability: is the game playable from beginning to end? are all elements working together?
2. Presentation: are the rules understandable? Are all elements user-friendly and well made?
3. Theme: is there a clear emerging theme, narrative or aesthetic? How effective or insightful is it?
4. Fun (or engagement): is the game capturing your players' imagination? Sometimes this can take precedent over other categories.

Course Materials

Most games for class will be board or card games, at least for the first part of the semester. This means purchasing materials that are easily available in art supply stores, or creating your own game pieces out of common art materials. The instructor will provide a list of materials needed for special activities, bring some materials to share, and help you decide which materials would work best for your particular game. These are a few supplies that we will use at some point during the semester:

- Illustration Boards
- Blank flash cards and “post-it” notes
- Gridded paper, and/or dry-erase RPG “Battle” Mats
- Dice (as many as you can)
- Playing cards (at least two decks)
- Color markers, color pencils, and drafting pens
- Watercolors, gouache, or acrylic paint
- Access to digital imaging tools (Such as Adobe Suite,) as well as free game creation software (list provided later in the term)

Something important to bring to every class is a sketchbook for note taking, schematic drawing, and general sketching. Documentation is an important part of Game Design, so be ready to translate and present your notes to the instructor and class. Instruction sheets, photo and video documentation, and general presentation materials may be also needed when you show your final game process.

Course Attendance

Students have a responsibility to attend all scheduled class meetings.

Faculty are responsible for clearly stating their expectations for performance and attendance through the course syllabus, and during the first week of classes. This includes their manner of recording attendance and whether any portion of a student's grade is based on attendance and/or class participation. Faculty are obligated to recognize legally protected activities, such as religious holidays, military service, and jury duty.

Students are responsible for making themselves aware of course attendance policies, and for meeting all course expectations as outlined in the course syllabus regardless of missed class time. Students are responsible to communicate in a timely manner in written form (e.g. in an email) with their faculty regarding any missed class time and related class work.

A student who feels circumstances may warrant withdrawal from a single course should contact their Advisor and the Office of the Registrar. A student who wishes to request a medical leave of absence from the College should contact the Counseling and Wellness Center. Non-medical leaves of absence are coordinated through the Academic Resource Center.

A student who misses the first meeting of a class may be dropped from the roster by the instructor.

Fundamentals of Game Design's Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken at each class. You are expected to attend all sessions, and your attendance will be factored in to your course grade. More than two absences will trigger a failing grade in the course. If you miss a class, you are responsible for getting a complete set of class notes, finding out if there have been changes in the Course Syllabus or reading assignments, and finding out if any handouts were distributed. Punctuality is extremely important. Arriving late is disruptive to the class. You are expected to arrive on time at the start of class and after the break. Lateness will be recorded and factored in to your course grade. Two lateness count as one absence.

Students with Disabilities

Massachusetts College of Art and Design is committed to fostering the academic, personal, and professional growth of our students. We are especially committed to ensuring that students with documented disabilities, as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), are provided equal access to all campus resources and opportunities. If you believe you have a disability that may warrant accommodations, I urge you to contact the Associate Dean of the Academic Resource Center (617-879-7280) Tower 811. The Academic Resource Center provides academic support to all matriculated MassArt students through access to academic advisors, academic coaches, professional writing and subject tutors, and training on assistive technology.

Grade Definitions

- A** Exceptional work in all respects. Professional level, or uniquely insightful work.
- B** Above average work, distinguished in certain but not all respects.
- C** Average.
- C-** Below average.

- D** Lowest passing grade. If it is an assignment, a redo is required.
- F** Failing work. No credit is given.

Departmental Academic Progress Statement

A student whose average is below C+ in a semester's required and elective Illustration courses is placed on departmental probation and subject to remediation. Such remedial work may include any or all of the following: a mid-semester review; repeating one or more classes; repeating a semester or an entire year's requirements. A student whose average is below C+ in Illustration courses for a second semester is subject to dismissal from the department. A student who has repeated a year and whose semester average falls below C+ in Illustration courses will be dismissed from the department.

Plagiarism

In creative work, plagiarism is the inappropriate and unethical representation of another's work as one's own. In those instances where a significant portion of a creative work is intentionally "appropriated," plagiarism is the failure to note, orally or in writing, the source of the appropriation. In expository or academic writing, whenever your work incorporates someone else's research, images, words, or ideas, you must properly identify the source unless you can reasonably expect knowledgeable people to recognize it. Proper citation gives credit where it is due and enables your readers to locate sources and pursue line of inquiry raised by your paper. Students who do not comply may be penalized.

Assignment Description

(1) Digital to Analogue: Choose a digital game and design an analog version of it. Your new analog version can take the form of a **board** game, **card** game, or any other game approved by the instructor. This game can be **single** player, but keep in mind that making it **multiplayer** may be easier. By the end of next class you must have tested your game's **core loop** at least once, with the instructor monitoring. The goals for this assignment are:

- To introduce mechanics as an isolated component of games
- To introduce the concept of core gameplay loop
- To rehearse play-testing protocols, feedback and iteration
- To gain familiarity with analogue prototyping methods

(2) The "Life" Simulation Game: Create a multiplayer, "Race to the End" game that uses both skill and chance mechanics to comment on the life of a character, or group of characters. For skill: think beyond twitch mechanics (throwing things.) Can you create mental, social or alternative physical challenges? For chance: make sure to consider a spread, from pure luck, to risk-and-reward, and to probability calculation. The goals for this assignment are:

- To tie mechanics to an overall theme, a world view
- To design games that elicit "desirable behaviors" in the world built by the game's rules
- To explore the diverse types of skills, beyond kinetic mechanics
- To explore chance dynamics, including probability calculation and risk-reward paradigm

(3) Modular Game (Team-based): In teams, create a single player, "Haunted House" type game using modular level, character, and puzzle design. The instructor will provide core mechanics, which you must develop into a robust, modular system. The final game will be played by the instructor. The goals for this assignment are:

- To introduce modular design as means to construct complex systems
- To rehearse production pipelines for team-based development
- To introduce second order design principles
- To further explore the affordances of digital technologies (intro to video games)

(4) Final Game: Make a game based on what you have learned so far. The instructor will introduce some technology solutions you can use, but you can also go back to a previous mechanics and refine them. Your final game should be playable from start to finish, professionally presented, and engaging throughout. The goals for this assignment are:

- To explore the relationship between analogue prototypes and digital games
- To rehearse professional production values and end-user design
- To discover and express personal voice in the gaming medium
- To rehearse game design as studio practice

(5) Character Wars: This last game is a final day surprise! More on it as the time comes...

Note: Assignments may change depending on class' progress. You will be informed of any particulars through the class blog.

Calendar

Date	Presentation	Class dynamic	Assignment
1/24	Syllabus. Intro to game mechanics	Demo basic prototype mechanics, begin mechanics archive	(1) Digital to Analogue: core loop playable for next week
1/31	Playtesting protocols	Demo playtesting, work in class	Apply feedback to loop, integrate into larger structure, start new AST
2/7	AST as support	Demo aesthetics, story and tech swap	Apply feedback, create new AST
2/14	Mechanics as rhetoric	Demo Chance VS Skill	(2) Chance Vs Skill: core loop and progression charted for next week
2/21	Skills as desirable behavior	Demo skill mechanics: physical, mental, social	Apply feedback, expand on skills, finish progression
2/28	Chance dynamics	Demo probability calculation	Apply feedback: expand on chance dynamics, create visuals/story
3/6	Intro to system design	Demo modular system design, world building through mechanics	(3) Team Modular Game: develop and test core system, write story
3/13		SPRING BREAK	
3/20	Second order design: difficulty	Demo difficulty scaling through variables	Apply feedback, add second order mods to core system
3/27	Second order design: degenerate strategies	Demo cybernetic rules and layered variables	Apply feedback, finish visuals/story
4/3	Demo Twine	Twine for prototypes, or interactive fiction	(4) Final Game: Pitch that includes concept art, general mechanics

4/10	Demo Unity	2D basic platformer	Apply feedback, produce analogue prototype
4/17	Demo Unity 2	3D first person exploration	Apply feedback, produce updated prototype
4/24	Activist games	Work in class	Apply feedback
5/1	Markets of game design	Work in class	Apply feedback. (5) Character Wars: Develop assets for final session
5/8		Final Play Session	

Note: the instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus at any point during the semester. If that is the case, the instructor will outline the changes and provide you with the proper replacement documentation on paper or digitally.

End of semester reviews boards are mandatory for all Illustration majors. For the spring semester, reviews are scheduled from May 13th - May 20th.