Overview

Game Design 2 is a one-semester course that builds directly on Game Design 1. Like the introductory course, the focus in the class is the creation of several non-digital games. While Game Design 1 focused on the basic fundamentals, Game Design 2 emphasizes skills that are used by professional game designers. The course goes into advanced and complex topics, such as level design, creating narrative worlds, complex game economies, and concept development. The class will cover both the craft and the culture of making games, and has a particular emphasis on how designers communicate their ideas, with some assignments and exercises focused on the visual communication of dynamic systems. Although most of the projects will take the form of non-digital design, the course will address the application of ideas and procedures to digital games.

Goals of the course

- Gain a deep understanding of games as systems and practice skills related to systems thinking and analysis.
- Gain the experience of actually creating several playable games using an iterative design process.
- Explore advanced topics in game design, such as the creation of complex games with dynamic economies, systemic storytelling, level design, and balancing and tuning complex games.
- Learn how to visually communicate dynamic systems and design ideas.
- Link the principles of the course to computer and video games on a variety of platforms.

Required Readings

Some of the readings for the course will be taken from the following two books. All students are required to purchase both. Other readings will be handed out in class or distributed in digital format.

A Game Design Vocabulary, Anthropy & Clark
Characteristics of Games, Elias, Garfield, & Gutschera

Two sections, one class

Game Design 2 will be team-taught by two instructors. Although you have registered for a particular section, during the semester the two sections will be mixing and mingling from week to week. You may be working with students from both sections on your group projects and either one of the instructors might review a given project and give you a grade on it.
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<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
<th>MAIN CLASS ACTIVITY</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION TO CLASS \ WHAT IS A “UCG”?!</td>
<td>UCG</td>
<td>EX: SYSTEM+CONTENT</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>DESIGNING FOR PLAYER CREATIVITY</td>
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<td>EX: FIXING A BROKEN UCG</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>CARDS AS A GAME INTERFACE \ BALANCING VALUE IN A SYSTEM</td>
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<td>EX: BALANCING A UCG \ EX: CARD DESIGN</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION TO LEVEL DESIGN</td>
<td>level design</td>
<td>CRITIQUE \ EX: PHYSICAL LEVEL DESIGN</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>EDUCATING THE PLAYER</td>
<td>PLAYTEST &amp; CRITIQUE</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>COMMUNICATION DESIGN</td>
<td>PLAYTEST &amp; CRITIQUE</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>WORLD-BUILDING</td>
<td>CRITIQUE \ NARRATIVE DEMO &amp; EX</td>
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<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
<td>nar game</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>NARRATIVE THEME + MECHANICS</td>
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<td>EX: THEMING A SYSTEM</td>
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<td>WRITING AND STORYTELLING</td>
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<td>EX: WRITING EXERCISES</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>CONCEPTING &amp; PROTOTYPING</td>
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<td>CRITIQUE \ FINAL PROJECT CONCEPTS</td>
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<td>DESIGNING REAL-WORLD IMPACT</td>
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<td>EX: CREATE DESIGN BRIEF</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>WORKING AS A GAME DESIGNER</td>
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<td>EX: RESPOND TO A RFP</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>DRIVEN BY STUDENT INTERESTS</td>
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<td>EX: BASED ON INTEREST</td>
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<td>CRITIQUE</td>
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Schedule

Week 1  
Class: Tue Jan 28  
Lab: Thu Jan 28  
TOPICS: Introduction to class, What is a UCG?  
EXERCISES: System and content in a UCG  
ASSIGNED: UCG Game. Students will form into groups in order to explore the idea of a “User Customized Game” – a game that requires some degree of customization on the part of the player.

Week 2  
Class: Tue Feb 2  
Lab: Thu Feb 4  
TOPICS: Designing for player creativity  
READINGS DUE: Characteristics of Games, p29-70 (Ch1-2)  
Game Design Reader: “Beyond the Rules of a Game,” Linda Hughes  
EXERCISE: Fixing a broken UCG, supporting user creativity  
DUE: Prototype & Rules for UCG Game

Week 3  
Class: Tue Feb 9  
Lab: Thu Feb 11  
TOPICS: Cards as a game interface, balancing complex systems  
READINGS DUE: Characteristics of Games, p101-136 (Chapter 4)  
Excerpt from The Non-Designer’s Design Book by Robin Williams  
EXERCISE: Redesigning a CCG card, tuning an economy of value

Week 4  
Class: Tue Feb 16  
Lab: Thu Feb 18  
TOPICS: Introduction to level design  
Class: work time on CCG  
Lab: UCG Game Due – play and critique HALF of UCGs  
READINGS DUE in lab: A Game Design Vocabulary, Ch. 2 & 3  
ASSIGNED in lab: Level Design, Part 1. In lab, students will be shown a software tool and in pairs will create two levels. The first level will teach the player a gameplay concept or mechanic, and the second level will use that mechanic in a more challenging setting.  
EXERCISE in lab: teaching the player through level design

Week 5  
Class: Tue Feb 23  
Lab: Thu Feb 25  
TOPICS: educating the player through level design  
READINGS DUE for class: A Game Design Vocabulary, Ch. 5 & 6  
READINGS DUE for class: “Secrets in Donkey Kong Country” by David Sirlin  
DUE IN CLASS: Draft of Level Design. Students will playtest each others’ levels and give feedback.  
EXERCISE: Designing puzzle levels  
IN LAB: worktime + finish UCG critques  
Final Level Designs DUE on SUNDAY to give time for everyone to play levels.
Week 6  
**Class:** Tue Mar 1  
**Lab:** Thu March 3  
TOPICS: communication design  
READINGS DUE for lab: Excerpt from *Thinking in Systems* by Donella Meadows  
**DUE in class:** Play everyone’s final Level Designs for critique and discussion.  
**ASSIGNED:** 1-page design document. Individually, students will take the game they are creating in Studio 2 (or game project they are currently creating) and will create a 1-page design document that illustrates one or more major game systems.  
**LAB:** Illustrator page design demo

Week 7  
**Class:** Tue March 8  
**Lab:** Thu March 10  
TOPICS: game design as world-building  
READINGS DUE for LAB:  
- "Writing for Comics" by Alan Moore  
- Excerpt from *Storyteller* by Kate Wilhelm  
**DUE in class:** Draft of 1-page design doc. Class will discuss and critique each others’ 1-page design documents.  
**EXERCISE in class:** demo of narrative system  
**DUE in lab:** Final version of 1-page design doc. Class will discuss and critique each others’ 1-page design documents.  
**EXERCISE in lab:** world-building for games  
**ASSIGNED in lab:** Narrative Game. In groups, students will use an existing tabletop storytelling system to create a narrative game experience. The focus of this assignment is narrative world-building and the integration of storytelling with game design systems thinking and design.

*** SPRING BREAK – Week of March 14 ***

Week 8  
**Class:** Tue Mar 22  
**Lab:** Thu Mar 24  
TOPICS: theme and mechanics in narrative games  
READINGS DUE: *A Game Design Vocabulary*, Ch. 7  
**EXERCISE:** Theming a narrative game system  
**DUE in lab:** Draft / Prototype of Narrative Game

Week 9  
**Class:** Tue Mar 29  
**Lab:** Thu Mar 31  
TOPICS: storytelling as emotional experience  
READINGS DUE: Selections from *A Poetry Handbook* by Mary Oliver  
*Other readings TBD*  
**DUE:** 2nd Draft of Narrative Game  
**EXERCISE:** writing for emotional impact  
**EXERCISE in lab:** matchmaking final project ideas
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<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Class: Tue Apr 5</th>
<th>Lab: Thu Apr 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DUE:</strong> Narrative game – play and discuss in class</td>
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| READINGS DUE in lab: “Advanced Prototyping,” Chaim Gingold & Chris Hecker  
  *Play Machines* by Colleen Macklin & John Sharp, Ch. 5 & Ch. 8 |
| ASSIGNED: **Final project.** Based on the concepts that were discussed last week, we will finalize groups for the final projects. Final projects can be completed on or off the computer, and groups can be of any size. Final projects can be new project ideas, or they can be continuations of projects that students have created previously in the program. The final project should build from the semester to create a design that is innovative, playable, well-balanced, and well-presented. |

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<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Class: Tue Apr 12</th>
<th>Lab: Thu Apr 14</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOPICS:</strong> designing games for real-world impact</td>
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<td><strong>READINGS DUE:</strong> TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EXERCISE:</strong> creating a game concept brief</td>
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<td><strong>DUE IN CLASS:</strong> Final project prototype &amp; rules</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Class: Tue Apr 19</th>
<th>Lab: Thu Apr 21</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOPICS:</strong> being a working game designer</td>
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| **READING:** selections from *Design is a Job*, Mike Monteiro  
  selections from the *Valve Employee Handbook* |
| **EXERCISE:** responding to a client RFP |

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<tr>
<th>Week 13</th>
<th>Class: Tue Apr 26</th>
<th>Lab: Thu Apr 28</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>READING &amp; TOPICS:</strong> Determined by student interest</td>
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<td><strong>EXERCISE:</strong> determined by student interest</td>
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<tr>
<th>Week 14</th>
<th>Class: Tue May 3</th>
<th>Lab: Thu May 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASS:</strong> Work on final projects</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Due in Lab:</strong> FINAL PROJECTS</td>
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Assignments

Below is a description of class assignments. Written components of class assignments, such as game rules, design process statements, etc, should be printed out and brought to class on the day that the assignment is due.

Readings

Many weeks during the semester, readings will be assigned. Students are responsible for completing these readings every single class, and for being prepared to discuss them each class. Failure to participate in discussions and demonstrate that the readings have been completed will affect the participation component of your grade.

Game Design Assignments

There are several game design assignments over the course of the semester. These assignments involve the collaborative creation of a playable game and will constitute the bulk of the out-of-class work during the semester. These assignments will vary in how long students are given to work on them, from short one- and two-week assignments to projects that have a month or more of time. Generally, the week after a design is assigned, a playable prototype version of the game is due in class, along with the current ruleset. On the due date of the project, the final design is due, which will include rules, a design analysis, and all game materials.

These design assignments are completed in groups. It is essential that you attend your group meetings and fully participate in the design and creation of your games. For most group design assignments, every group must turn in the following as a single digital document (a paper version can be turned in as well):

- **Abstract**: The name of the game, its creators, semester and class, and a 200-300 word summary overview of the game.
- **Rules**: A complete description of the game rules.
- **Materials list**: List of all physical game materials.
- **Images**: 1-5 images of the game.
- **Design Process Statement**: A one page or less description of your design process. What were the design challenges you encountered and how did you solve them?
- **Private Peer Grades & Group Evaluations**: You will grade each of your peers on their participation. These peer grades will be emailed directly to the instructor.
Grading

Evaluation of work

Any given project will be evaluated by one of the two class instructors. The instructor evaluating your project may vary from assignment to assignment and might not be the instructor for whose section you have registered for the course.

Each project will be evaluated with the following criteria:

- **Functionality.** Has the student made a playable, enjoyable game that can be completed and does not have any obvious structural problems?
- **Balance.** Beyond basic playability, are the systems of the game well-balanced and does the game provide multiple, meaningful choices for players?
- **Creativity.** Does the project evince innovation and uniqueness? Does it show a creative imagination that does not solve the given design problem in an ordinary way?
- **Appropriate for the assignment.** Each project is a response to constraints given by the instructor. Has the project properly addressed these constraints?
- **Presentation.** Each game is presented in material form, along with its rules and a written process statement. Are these materials well-written, well-organized, and easy to use?

Students will be given grades based on a 100-point scale. Each assignment will be graded on a point scale, and these points will be added up to determine the final grade, according to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>98-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92-97</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-91</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>82-87</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>etc.</td>
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The following are the components of the grade:

- UCG Game: 15
- Level Design: 10
- 1-Page Design Doc: 10
- Narrative Game: 15
- Final project: 25
- Participation: 25
- **TOTAL:** 100
Late penalties
All assignments must be turned in on time. If an assignment is not turned in by the class for which it is due, its grade will drop by 20%. If it is a week or more late, its grade will drop by 50%.

Attendance & Participation
The attendance and participation portion of your grade is based on the following:
- Your attendance in class and tardiness
- Participation in group discussions and critiques
- Peer evaluations received and participation in the peer evaluation process

Attending and arriving on time to all class sessions is required and expected. This includes all labs, recitations, and critiques. If you will be missing a class due to illness, or unavoidable personal circumstances, you must notify your professor in advance via email for the absence to be excused.

Unexcused absences and being late to class will lower your final grade. Three unexcused absences lower your final grade by a letter. Each subsequent unexcused absence will lower another letter grade. Two tardies will count as one unexcused absence. Arriving more than 15 minutes late to class will also count as an unexcused absence.

Private peer evaluations
Private peer evaluations will be completed via a web form. You will give an evaluation of each member of your group. You can add a short explanation if you like, and you must add some explanation when giving an evaluation of 3 or 4.

1 - Outstanding: excellent teammate
2 - Good: no complaints
3 - Satisfactory: some problems or inconsistencies
4 - Difficult: hindered the progress of the project

Public peer evaluations
In addition to the private peer grades, students will also write an evaluation of each team member for each project. Only the member of your team being evaluated will receive these evaluations.

- Positive observations. Mention one or two things that make them a great collaborator.
- Areas for improvement. Provide one or two pieces of thoughtful criticism. Be fair, direct, and honest. Do not focus on circumstances outside of their control or on making general statements about their personality. Instead, focus on how they can be a better collaborator.

NYU STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as though it were your own. More specifically, plagiarism is to present as your own: A sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer or a paraphrased passage from another writer's work or facts, ideas or images composed by someone else.

ACCESSIBILITY AT NYU
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212 998-4980 for further information.
**Tips for Working Successfully in a Group**

From the Building Virtual Worlds class at Carnegie Melon’s ETC Program

**Meet people properly.** It all starts with the introduction. Then, exchange contact information, and make sure you know how to pronounce everyone’s names. Exchange phone #s, and find out what hours are acceptable to call during.

**Find things you have in common.** You can almost always find something in common with another person, and starting from that baseline, it’s much easier to then address issues where you have differences. This is why cities like professional sports teams, which are socially galvanizing forces that cut across boundaries of race and wealth. If nothing else, you probably have in common things like the weather.

**Make meeting conditions good.** Have a large surface to write on, make sure the room is quiet and warm enough, and that there aren’t lots of distractions. Make sure no one is hungry, cold, or tired. Meet over a meal if you can; food softens a meeting. That’s why they “do lunch” in Hollywood.

**Let everyone talk.** Even if you think what they’re saying is stupid. Cutting someone off is rude, and not worth whatever small time gain you might make. Don’t finish someone’s sentences for him or her; they can do it for themselves. And remember: talking louder or faster doesn’t make your idea any better. Check your egos at the door. When you discuss ideas, immediately label them and write them down. The labels should be descriptive of the idea, not the originator: “the troll bridge story,” not “Jane’s story.”

**Praise each other.** Find something nice to say, even if it’s a stretch. Even the worst of ideas has a silver lining inside it, if you just look hard enough. Focus on the good, praise it, and then raise any objections or concerns you have about the rest of it.

**Put it in writing.** Always write down who is responsible for what, by when. Be concrete. Arrange meetings by email, and establish accountability. Never assume that someone’s roommate will deliver a phone message. Also, remember that “politics is when you have more than 2 people” – with that in mind, always CC (carbon copy) any piece of email within the group, or to me, to all members of the group. This rule should never be violated; don’t try to guess what your group mates might or might not want to hear about.

**Be open and honest.** Talk with your group members if there’s a problem, and talk with me if you think you need help. The whole point of this course is that it’s tough to work across cultures. If we all go into it knowing that’s an issue, we should be comfortable discussing problems when they arise -- after all, that’s what this course is really about. Be forgiving when people make mistakes, but don’t be afraid to raise the issues when they come up.

**Avoid conflict at all costs.** When stress occurs and tempers flare, take a short break. Clear your heads, apologize, and take another stab at it. Apologize for upsetting your peers, even if you think someone else was primarily at fault; the goal is to work together, not start a legal battle over whose transgressions were worse. It takes two to have an argument, so be the peacemaker.

**Phrase alternatives as questions.** Instead of “I think we should do A, not B,” try “What if we did A, instead of B?” That allows people to offer comments, rather than defend one choice.
HOW TO WORK BETTER
1 DO ONE THING AT A TIME
2 KNOW THE PROBLEM
3 LEARN TO LISTEN
4 LEARN TO ASK QUESTIONS
5 DISTINGUISH SENSE FROM NONSENSE
6 ACCEPT CHANGE AS INEVITABLE
7 ADMIT MISTAKES
8 SAY IT SIMPLE
9 BE CALM
10 SMILE

Peter Fischli and Davis Weiss