

Designing News Games

Fall 2016

Course Description

Students will learn how journalists can use games to tell complex stories. The class will focus on the fundamentals of game design theory, analyzing existing games that tackle serious topics, and creating newsgame prototypes to be played and tested by the entire class. Students will be creating their own non-digital games, which may include card, dice and board games, all in the service of journalistic storytelling.

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Understand the fundamental concepts behind all games, regardless of the medium.
2. Create multiple types of games and have experience in the iterative design process and how to playtest games for further development.
3. Evaluate games critically and be able to analyze what makes a game effective
4. Understand what games have to offer journalism and what differs news games from other forms of storytelling, and create their own news game.

Course Readings and Materials

There is one required textbook and three required games for this course.

Textbook Rules of Play

(https://www.amazon.com/Rules-Play-Design-Fundamentals-Press/dp/0262240459/ref=mt_hardcover?_encoding=UTF8&me=), by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman

Games **Blackbar** (iOS (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/blackbar/id672002602?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D4>) and **Android** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.colinpcornaby.blackbar&hl=en>)) **Lifeline** (iOS (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lifeline.../id982354972?mt=8>) and **Android** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.threeminutegames.lifeline.google&hl=en>)) **Paper's Please** (iPad or Desktop (<http://papersplea.se/>))

Time Commitment

Expect to spend on average, 10 hours per week outside of class on your readings and homework. Additionally, since this is a seminar course, we may take one or two field trips outside of class together, depending on the gaming events that occur this fall. I'll schedule those with all of you as they come up.

Course Schedule and Assignments

Here is a rough estimate of schedule for the semester. I expect that some of this will change, which I'll announce in class.

Date	Topic	Assignment
WEEK 1 8/30	Introduction Course overview. What is game design. What makes games meaningful. What are newsgames. Creating and playtesting your first game in class.	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RoP Chapter 3: Meaningful Play Modification Game: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play and critique in class on 9/6
WEEK 2 9/6	Design, Systems and Interactivity What does it mean to design a game. How to think about systems. How to create meaningful play. Play and critique modification game in class.	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RoP Chapter 4: Design• RoP Chapter 5: Systems• RoP Chapter 6: Interactivity Abstract Game: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prototype and rules due on 9/13• Play and critique in class on 9/20
WEEK 3 9/13	Understanding Uncertainty How games utilize probability and randomness. Differences between actual probability and perceived probability. How games give feedback and how to use feedback.	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RoP Chapter 15: Games as Systems of Uncertainty• RoP Chapter 18: Games as Cybernetic Systems
WEEK 4 9/20	Social Games How games can create social and emotional experiences. Important: No class next week (9/27)	Read: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• RoP Chapter 19: Games as Game Theory Systems Social Game: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommended: Prototype and rules done by 9/27

<p>WEEK 5 10/4</p>	<p>Game Theory</p> <p>Psychology of player interactions from a game theory perspective. Prisoner's dilemma.</p> <p>Play and critique Social Game.</p>	<p>Story Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototype and rules due on 10/11 • Play and critique in class on 10/18
<p>WEEK 6 10/11</p>	<p>Simulation and Representation</p> <p>What it means to represent reality in a game. Types of simulation. Using simulation for storytelling.</p>	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RoP Chapter 27: Games as the Play of Simulation
<p>WEEK 7 10/18</p>	<p>Conflict, In and Out of Games</p> <p>How conflict is involved in games. Types of conflict. Breaking the rules. Flow of a game.</p> <p>Play and critique Story Game</p>	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RoP Chapter 20: Games as Systems of Conflict • RoP Chapter 21: Breaking the Rules • RoP Chapter 24: Games as the Play of Pleasure
<p>WEEK 8 10/25</p>	<p>Games and Culture</p> <p>How games can change the way we see the world and interact with our surroundings</p>	<p>Intervention Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play and critique in class on 11/1
<p>WEEK 9 11/1</p>	<p>Evaluating Games</p> <p>Lessons learned from games that could have been made for news</p> <p>Play and critique Intervention Game</p>	<p>Game Critique:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to start playing the games this week. Otherwise it will be difficult to both play the game and write your critique. • Turn in paper at the start of class on 11/15
<p>WEEK 10 11/8</p>	<p>Storytelling through Games as Journalists</p> <p>What newsgames have worked and which have failed. How to tell real stories through gameplay itself, not content injection.</p>	
<p>WEEK 11 11/15</p>	<p>Work on Final Project Elevator Pitches</p> <p>Discussion of Game Critiques</p> <p>DUE: Game Critique papers</p> <p>Important: No class next week (11/22)</p>	<p>Final Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevator pitch to the class on your news game concept and get feedback on 11/29

WEEK 12 11/29	Final Project Elevator Pitches	Final Project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototype and rules for final game on 12/13
WEEK 13 12/6	Work on Final Projects	
WEEK 14 12/13	Work on Final Projects, Playtest with other groups during class Fill out online course ratings survey	Final Project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play and critique in class on 12/20
WEEK 15 12/20	Play and Critique Final Projects	

Throughout the course, you'll be creating five different games. You'll always be working collaboratively with others and this will make up the majority of the work for the class. Generally, you'll get two weeks to create a game. After the first week, a prototype and version of the rules is due in class, and then after the second week, we do a playtest and group critique in class.

When turning in your games on the due date, please print out and turn in the following:

Basic Information:

The name of the game itself. Names of everyone in your group, listed as the creators of the game. The semester and class number
 Abstract: A 200-300 word summary of the game
 Rules: A complete list of all the rules in the game
 Physical Materials: A complete list of all materials required to play the game
 Images: Up to five images of the game itself, after setup
 Design Process Statement: In one page or less, describe your design process. When creating and iterating on the game, what are some of the obstacles or struggles you encountered, and how did you overcome them?

Grading

Grades will be determined by the following:

Participation + Peer Grades: 20%

Modification Game: 5%

Abstract Game: 10%

Social Game: 10%

Story Game: 15%

Intervention Game: 5%

Game Analysis and Critique Paper: 15%

Final Newsgame Project: 20%

Participation

Your participation grade will be composed of your participation during in-class discussions, playtesting and game critiques. Additionally, since most of your work in this class will be in a group, your participation grade will also be influenced by confidential peer grades.

Peer grades and feedback

There are two parts to this: giving your peers grades (which will happen in private) and giving your peers feedback (which will be public).

Grades: After each group assignment, use the Assignments section in Canvas to submit peer grades for each member of your group. If you grade someone at a C or below, make sure to give an explanation. Otherwise, explanations are optional. Use the following rubric for your peer grades:

A = Fully participated and contributed ideas, worked hard and was a great teammate

B = Participated and had valuable contributions. No complaints.

C = Participated somewhat, but could have contributed more

D = Barely participated, or was counter-productive in some way

F = Did not participate, no contributions whatsoever

Feedback: In addition to grades submitted through Canvas, also write an email to everyone on your team and CC me. Feedback doesn't have to be long, but it should be thoughtful. The format is below:

For each member of your team, point out two positive observations from working together. For example, this can be about how s/he positively contributed to the team, particular responsibilities s/he volunteered to take on, or how s/he helped other members of the group. Similarly, for each member of your team, point out two areas that s/he can improve upon. These points should be constructive. For example, this can be suggestions on how a team member can better collaborate with everyone next time, or suggestions for a better workflow or processes that would help this team member better organize his/her time

Rubric

All of the Game assignments will be grading on the same rubric: (originally created by Eric Zimmerman, who also wrote your textbook!)

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?