Syllabus for CSC281 Fall 2013. The permanent course homepage is here.

Course Overview

This course focuses on the elements that make computer games compelling — from their rules and simulated worlds to their stories and social experiences. Over the semester, students will collaborate in two-person teams to design and implement several working computer games. Readings will include work by influential game designers and game studies theorists. Lectures are designed to invite student discussion. The course will teach the use of the Game Maker game development environment, as well as provide a place to discuss design ideas, game analysis concepts, and related subjects. No programming experience is necessary.

Student learning outcomes for you include the ability to:

1. Delineate issues in the design of computer games, including
   1. games as systems of rules involving concepts such as emergent systems, rules and their relationship with uncertainty, the role of game rules in the creation and manipulation of conflict
   2. games as systems of play, including the development of meaningful play, simulation and play, narrative and social play
   3. games as cultural systems, including games as cultural representations, gender issues and games, games and violence and games as ethical systems.

4. Discuss the concepts and apply the skills needed to formulate novel game concepts and implement the ideas in a game built on top of an existing game creation toolkit. This will involve
   1. writing specifications for games based on design concepts
   2. using storyboards and flowcharts to represent game play and the control of game entities
   3. specifying algorithms for control of game play based on designs
   4. using game creation tool kits to build and test games
Textbooks

The textbooks for the class are:

- The Game Maker's Apprentice: Game Development for Beginners, Jacob Habgood, Mark Overmars, APress, 2006.

Some readings for the class are not found in these texts. These readings will be available in digital form from the course website and via online reserve.

Note: some dates below are still being revised. Consider these dates tentative until this comment is removed.

Important Dates and Final

- Assignment One: project one team details, September 4
- Assignment Two: game log 1, September 9
- Assignment Three: project one design document, September 9
- Assignment Four: project one work schedule, September 9
- Assignment Five: game log 2, September 18
- Assignment Six: project one game final version, September 25
- Mid-term One: September 30
- Assignment Seven: project two team details, September 30
- Assignment Eight: game log 3, October 2
- Assignment Nine: project two design document, October 14
- Assignment Ten: project two work schedule, October 14
- Assignment Eleven: game log 4, October 16
- Assignment Twelve: game log 5, October 28
- Assignment Thirteen: project two first playable, October 28
- Assignment Fourteen: game log 6, November 11
- Mid-term Two: November 15
- Assignment Fifteen: project two game final version, November 18
- Assignment Sixteen: game log 7, December 2

Grading

Grading is based on class participation, two major projects, written game logs and analysis, two mid-terms and a final exam. For all assignments, it is expected that the deadlines determined by the course schedule will be met.

Circumstances such as computer crashes, unexpected software incompatibilities, various equipment failures and so forth will be taken into consideration, but only those that were unanticipated and occurred at the last minute will be considered reasons for mercy. Beyond hardware and software issues, no excuses for missed examinations and any other assignments will be accepted other than those approved by the University.

Students with excused absences must arrange to make up work with the instructor. Unless an explicit excuse is granted, no assignments will be accepted late.

Grade distribution

- Lecture component: 33% of final grade
- Class discussion/participation: 13%
- Mid-term one: 10%
- Mid-term two: 10%

- Analysis component: 24% of final grade
- Game logs: 14%
- game log 1, 2%
- game log 2, 3%
- game log 3, 3%
- game log 4, 3%
- game log 5, 3%
- Multi-game analysis
  - game log 6: 5%
  - game log 7: 5%

- Group project component: 30% of final grade
  - Project 1: 10% of final grade
  - Concept document: 2%
  - Work schedule: 1%
  - complete game, instructions, demo and presentation: 7%

Project 2: 18% of final grade
  - Concept document: 3%
  - Work schedule: 2%
  - Progress report: 2%
  - First playable: 4%
  - complete game, instructions, demo and presentation: 7%

- Final exam – 13% of final grade

A significant portion of each grade for all group projects will be derived from peer evaluations provided by your team members. Each assignment will be given a numeric grade from 0 to 100, inclusive. Final course grade will be computing by combining these numeric grades with the weights given above to obtain an overall course grade also ranging from 0 to 100.

CSC 281 will use a plus/minus grading system. If \( X \) is the overall weighted average accumulated on projects, tests and finals, then the final course grade will be guaranteed as follows:
Range

Grade

98 \leq X \leq 100

A+

92 \leq X < 98

A

90 \leq X < 92

A–

88 \leq X < 90

B+

82 \leq X < 88
B

$80 \leq X < 82$

B-

$78 \leq X < 80$

C+

$72 \leq X < 78$

C

$70 \leq X < 72$

C-

$68 \leq X < 70$

D+
After receiving a grade for an assignment, you have one week to appeal the grading of any project or test. You must submit the regrade request in email to the instructor. Grades may be curved up, but will never be curved down. Your class participation grade depends on several factors, including attendance as well as participation in in-class activities. Attendance is required for all classes.
Experimental participation

Note that half of your class participation grade (that is, 5% of your overall course grade) is based on your participation in one of a number of experiments that are run each semester at NCSU as part of our ongoing research activities in computer game development. To fulfill this requirement, you can either a) schedule a time with a researcher to participate in a research study (about a one hour time commitment) or b) make arrangements with the instructor to participate in an alternate activity (see below). Either choice fulfills your experiment participation requirement.

Students selecting to participate in an experiment will make arrangements with the individual researcher running the experiment. Experiments typically involve playing a game prototype and answering questions about the gameplay experience (though details will vary across different research projects). Students selecting the alternate activity will typically be required to watch a video discussing some aspect of game design (about an hour's duration) and write an essay about the design issues discussed.

Writing quality

Please make note of the fact that any text that you provide as part of your assignments will be graded for spelling, grammar and formatting as well as clarity, coherence and completeness. This is especially relevant for your game reviews, as the written component is 100% of what you will be turning in. Effective written communication is a central part of the communication of design, whether you are describing game design, software design, product design, etc.

Classes

Class during the Fall 2012 semester meets Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9:10AM to
9:50AM in Daniels 434. Class structure will vary from seminar format, instructor lectures, discussion of readings, guest lectures, or presentations of relevant systems, demos or student work and design discussions relating to your game projects.

Requirements:

1. Attendance at all classes and active participation in discussion
2. Completion of two game projects and supporting documentation and demos.
3. Completion of two midterms and the final
4. Completion of game logs and game analysis write-ups

Additional Policies

The Web, The Net, Email, et al.

I'll have a class mailing list and several discussion forums set up using Moodle, and am hoping to make as much of the course materials and notes available on the class' web server, course wikis and blogs, etc. Often, timely news will be sent out to the class via the course mailing list. You're expected to check your email at least once a day to read any important messages. Make certain that you regularly read the email sent to your official email address listed with NCSU.

Office hours

Michael's office hours for Fall 2013 are Mondays from 1aAM to 11:50AM in EB2 Room 2258 or by appointment.

TAs: Justus Robertson and Robert Loftin
The TA's office hours for Fall 2012 are:

Justus: Tuesdays, 9AM in EB2 Room 2246

Robert: Fridays, 2PM in EB2 Room 2246

You can also contact the TAs via email to make an appointment outside of these times as necessary.