

## ACC Video Game Program,

### **Art Track,**

#### **Art Direction and Design Class:** *Creating a look and feel*

Course: GAME 1028

Number of Hours: 42

Semester: Fall 2004

Campus: Highland Business Center (HBC)

Room #: 212

Class meets: Saturday 8:30am-12:30pm

Prerequisites: 2D graphics experience

Lab hours: As posted on classroom door

Instructor: Al Nelson

Office Hours:

Saturday: TBD

Office Location: HBC Rm. 215

Phone:

Email: [alnelson@judybox.com](mailto:alnelson@judybox.com)

### **Synopsis**

This course of study will involve the students in creating an art direction strategy, a coherent look and feel and the needed, supporting documents for refining, pitching and ultimately implementing the visual aspects of a video game concept. The focus of the class will be on the intellectual and creative skills required rather than a mere overview of graphics software tools.

### **Goals**

The key goals for students will be:

1. To gain command of a set of methods that will allow them to solve design problems, refine and enhance preliminary design concepts, document these solutions and communicate complex design criteria and inspiration to both artists and non-artists ranging from technical to marketing people.
2. To apply these skills to a specific game concept and stand responsible for the production of materials to document the results. The documents will include pitch materials for promoting the game and design guidelines for implementation. The documents will then be evaluated for a major portion of the grade.
3. To leave the class with new skills and a set of portfolio work demonstrating each student's abilities.

To facilitate meeting our goals, the class will be tasked with frequent, smaller milestones leading to the larger goals. The milestones are listed below, in the class outline.

### **Schedule**

The class will meet once per week on Saturdays, from 8:30am until 12:30pm. The class will begin on September 17<sup>th</sup> and end on December 4<sup>th</sup> for a total of 10 4-hour sessions and 1 2-hour session.

### **Grading**

#### *Grading Policies*

College work must exhibit higher order thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Mere knowledge about a situation or demonstration of comprehension of the material is not sufficient to prepare you for employment consideration. As a Video Game Development student, you must consistently apply higher order thinking in order demonstrate mastery of the material covered in this course. Grades are given for results not for effort. Read the definitions for each grade noted below, as this is really how grades are determined.

Grading is based on an absolute scale - you are not competing with anyone else, but you will be challenging yourself. There are no distributions of grades; hence, all of you can earn an A in this course. Note: Students earns grades, faculty members do not give them. Your final grade will be based on both individual and learning team performance.

Your final grade will be based on the points that you earn during the course. You may receive “fractions” of points on some assignments. When calculating your final grade, I will use the standard rounding convention – meaning that scores with a fraction of ½ or greater will be rounded up, those with a score of less than ½ will be rounded down. I will use the following grading scale to calculate your letter grade.

The grading scale is based on a 100-point (or percentage) scale:

**How points and percentages equate to grades**

|          |              |  |
|----------|--------------|--|
| <b>A</b> | 90 and above | <b>A</b> = Excellent performance. Work is exemplary and worthy of emulation by others. Student is in full attendance and constructively contributes to the learning environment. |
| <b>B</b> | 80-89        | <b>B</b> = Above average performance. All assignments are complete and exhibit a complete understanding and an ability to apply concepts.  |
| <b>C</b> | 70-79        | <b>C</b> = Average performance. Accomplishes only the minimum requirements. Oral and written communication is at an acceptable level for a college student.                      |
| <b>D</b> | 60-69        | <b>D</b> = Demonstrates understanding at the most rudimentary level. Work is minimally passing.  |
| <b>F</b> | < 59         | <b>F</b> = Work is not passing, characterized by incompleteness, lateness, unsatisfactory demonstration of understanding and application.  |

This class will be graded on a traditional 100-point scale. Each of the 8 milestone deliverables will count for a maximum of 10 points each. Up to 10 extra points will be awarded for each student’s presentation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> party review committee. 10 additional points can be earned for superior art and design talents as judged by the instructor. Incomplete or late deliverables will be graded as a 5. This methodology will simulate real industry pressures and time limits. Moderate participation will result in a mediocre grade. Only full effort, talent, timelines and successful presentations will insure a top grade.

**Class Syllabus Outline**

**Session 1 – Getting started, finding inspiration**

- Part 1 – Intro, getting set up, paperwork, file/naming conventions,
- Part 2 – Review of exemplary commercial products, art and design examples
- Part 3 – Finding evidence of inspiration, clarity and cohesion - \*Milestone 1: favorites list
- Part 4 – Tools for recording interactive concepts, like scripts and storyboards

**Session 2 – Solving design problems**

- Part 1 – Technical limits: engine, delivery system, UI, ratings, storage, localization
- Part 2 – Overcoming problems with humans, characters, environments, effects
- Part 3 – Fixing the fringe, type, UI elements, packaging, ads,
- Part 4 – Concept to image, image to implementation – plotting a path

**Session 3 – Skill building exercises**

- Part 1 – “Chess set” character design exercise

- Part 2 – “weapon classes” design exercise
- Part 3 – “stages” design exercise - \* Milestone 2 : 3 concept drawings
- Part 4 – Evaluating the drawings

#### **Session 4 –Translating for engineers, artists and marketing**

- Part 1 – Technical – collecting specs and conforming, size, colors, fonts, frame rate, naming, transparency
- Part 2 – Artists – referential materials, influences, intangible qualities, work methods, tools
- Part 3 – Marketing – tight sketches, splash, the “why” list, sales ammo, gaining support
- Part 4 – Document examples, boilerplates, pitches and slideshow - \*Milestone 3: surprise ad & T-shirt design

#### **Session 5 – Starting the project**

- Part 1 – Selecting concept, platform and style keys
- Part 2 – Roughing in goals and limits
- Part 3 – Searching for design inspiration - \*Milestone 4 – your inspiration folder
- Part 4 – Begin splash image design roughs

#### **Session 6 – Making the concept better and bottling inspiration**

- Part 1 – Amping up the game concept visually
- Part 2 – Making an image that sells it
- Part 3 – Analyze your image for time, tools, appeal - \*Milestone 5 – splash image
- Part 4 – Making estimates of time and resource requirements

#### **Session 7 – Establishing design guidelines for artists, working on pitch materials**

- Part 1 – Complete the guideline boilerplate for your project
- Part 2 – Package the guidelines w/ support material, Duplicate and turn in your guidelines (\*Milestone 6)
- Part 3 – Creating a pitch document for a specific audience
- Part 4 – Create your pitch outline and talking points

#### **Session 8 – Making your final materials**

- Part 1 – Create a slide show to match your outline
- Part 2 – Continue to work on slide show
- Part 3 – Duplicate, turn in slide show (\*Milestone 7)
- Part 4 – Practice your pitch, refine your strategy

#### **Session 9 – Making your pitches** (guests as review board)

- Part 1 – Pitch for team members
- Part 2 – Pitch for funding / approval
- Part 3 – Evaluating pitches
- Part 4 – Giving out “feedback from management”

#### **Session 10 – Surprise edits, iteration**

- Part 1 – Develop strategy based on feedback
- Part 2 – Make changes based on feedback
- Part 3 – Submit revision document (\*Milestone 8)
- Part 4 – Judging changes

#### **Session 11 – Post partum**

- Part 1 – Reviewing all materials created
- Part 2 – Discussion of individual projects
- Part 3 – Exchange contact information to build resource network

#### **Example game concepts:**

**Above and Below** - (Mad Max meets Tank Girl on the Boy and His Dog planet) When the world is covered in 60 feet of volcanic ash, you must dig for goods while fending off heavily armed scavengers, claim jumpers and robbers. It is just you, your machine gun, humvee and shovel. Can you survive to discover the ancient secret that could renew life on the barren land? The answer lies in the underground maze that was once the world.

**The Hidalgo Incident** - (Quake in buckskins, cowboys and aliens; spaghetti sci-fi) Many people wonder if a UFO fell to earth in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. Few realize that 28 years earlier on a bleak Christmas Eve in Hidalgo, Texas an expeditionary force of aliens disturbed a dinner party hosted by famed Texas Ranger, Lone Wolf Gonzalles. Among the guests were the last gunfighting lawmen of the west. Though aging and outmoded, Jelly Brice, Col. Elmer Askins, Bill Jordan and Elmer Keith turned back the invaders with cool heads and hot lead.

**Powder Wagons** -(Console arcade – light cycles meets Rocketeer) Pilot your leaky truck full of gun powder, nitro or aircraft fuel through crowded city streets to the waiting defense plant, leaving a trail behind you all the way. Hurry Mack, we're at war. Avoid sparks, cigarette butts, downed power lines and anything else that could cause the dreaded fuse effect - KerPow! Drive over grates, puddles and other players' powder trails to break your own trail and prevent spectacular explosions. Deliver your cargo and collect money for upgrades.

**The Resistance** – (Sci-fi 3D Prince of Persia plus Delicatessen & the French underground of WWII) When a occupying army of killer robots sets down on your sleepy planet, your little band of flea-bitten circus performers are out of a job. Unless a strong man, an acrobat, a conjurer, a knife thrower and a clown can turn the tide. Use your team's unique skills to vex the enemy, run raids, set traps and finally defeat them.

**Book of the Dead** – (1<sup>st</sup> person, 3D, head-to-head, fantasy fighter) The Tibetan book of the dead perfectly describes a fighting game full of eye-popping boss monsters, minions and various levels of play. In this game, you are the ancient world's greatest hero, robbed of your life prematurely by an evil sorcerer. You are tasked with fighting your way through several cultures' underworlds (Egypt, Tibet, Norse, Greek, etc) to escape death, return to Earth and smite your killer.

## **Video Game Development Program Philosophy**

The Video Game Development Program has been designed, developed and implemented in partnership with leading video games studio managers and directors in Austin. The video games industry has undergone significant changes in how games are developed. They are rarely developed by few persons working in isolation. Today's games are often developed by teams of 50 to 200 on schedules from 2 to 3 years with budgets of \$10M to \$20M. The large publishers drive the game development funding and schedules. Consequently, it is critical that personnel in the industry communicate and collaborate effectively.

This drove the certificate requirements definition. Students are required to successfully complete courses in four categories:

1. The base industry courses: Video Games Industry, Business of Video Games and Video Games Development.
  - a. Students will understand what drives the industry, why games are developed, what is needed for success and how to get from idea to delivery.
2. The course specialization courses: Video Game Programming, Video Game Art, Video Game Design and Video Game Production.
  - a. Students will understand the requirements, objectives, limitations and goals of the different disciplines in a studio. This is essential for communication and collaboration.

- b. Students in these core courses will be cross-discipline in order to build an understanding and appreciation of how different discipline teams collaborate and contribute to the final product.
3. The five specialization electives.
  - a. Students will develop skills in the discipline in which the student will seek employment.
4. Non-specialization electives
  - a. These are optional courses that will give you a deeper understanding of what other disciplines do and how they function. They will help you understand how to work with others on the team and to get the 'big picture.' These courses do not count towards the Video Game development certificate.
5. Capstone Project
  - a. This multi-person team project will simulate the real video game development environment. Students will develop a concept, turn it into a design, implement the programming and art required and produce it on the committed schedule. Go/no go milestones and final "publisher" acceptance reviews will mimic the industry. The students will have a deliverable for their portfolio that can be used for employment purposes.

Throughout the program each course will focus on knowledge transfer, skill building and teamwork. There will be a heavy emphasis on projects that will broaden and deepen each student's portfolio development. Portfolios are critical to demonstrating an individual's capabilities. Some projects will individual, many will be team based. How much a student gets out of each course will largely be determined by how much the students puts into the course. Video game development is highly complex, difficult work. The courses are designed to prepare students for that environment. So, come expecting to work hard.

The program is designed to reinforce key concepts such as teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation across all disciplines in the games development and management process. Many concepts are repeated throughout the program because they are extremely important to successful game development.