

GAME 2005 Interactive Writing II

In many ways, Interactive Writing is the continuation of storytelling traditions that date back to Neolithic times. Long before there was written language, stories were told around camp fires to interactive audiences who took part in the telling. These audiences eventually became the Choruses in Greek drama and can still be seen today as the interactive audiences at dinner theaters and comedy shows. In the digital age, new technologies allow us to separate interactive stories from live performances and greatly expand the audiences for these experiences and to record and transmit them in ways that ancient storytellers could not dream of. In this class, the students will work together to create a single, large interactive experience which incorporates writing, scripting, character and level design, programming, and project management into a vital and dynamic experience for others to enjoy.

Spring 2005

This syllabus is for the class taught by Jeremy R. Gibson and Vernon Reed

Revised: 01/22/05

Class Schedule: Jan 25 - mar 10, TTh, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Room: HBC 221.0

Class Unique ID: 76640

Instructors: Jeremy R. Gibson (jgibson@austincc.edu)
& Vernon Reed (vernon@vernonreed.com)

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description: This class brings the subject to life by focusing on Interactive Writing within the context of game production. You will write, edit and produce a game of your own design, using the popular Neverwinter Nights game engine. You will face the challenge of developing a game with an appealing story, strong characters and engaging game play—all while the development clock is ticking. Besides teaching writing, this will be a valuable introduction to team production methods, with each person filling an important role and reporting to the team as a whole. You will walk away at the end with an actual Neverwinter Nights game module for your portfolio and useful experience for your resume.

Prerequisites: GAME 2010 Interactive Writing I or instructor approval

Approved Course Text: Character Development and Storytelling for Games by Lee Sheldon.
ISBN: 1592003532

Instructional Methodology: Lecture and Discussion. Supervised team production environment.

Course Rationale: This course is designed to introduce the student to interactive writing as a team process, situated in a standard game production work flow.

Course Objectives / Learning Outcomes: The students will learn to work in a production team and to create a real game within a limited time frame. This will require learning a wide range of skills, from writing and editing to time management and effective communication strategies. While students will be mentored and guided by the instructors, all decisions about the game will ultimately rest with the student production team, giving the project a sense of both immediacy and reality. The students will leave this class with a strong understanding of the kinds of work required to take a game from idea to shipped product.

Who Should Enroll in this Course?: This course is intended for students with basic skills in Interactive Writing who wish to hone their skills and acquire experience in writing and production.

Course Outline:

Module 1-

- Day 1) Review of interactive writing principles
 - Introduction to course project
 - Selection of team roles
 - Brainstorming about game ideas
- Day 2) Team meeting (guided by Lecturers)
 - Focused brainstorming, resulting in direction for game
 - Assignment of duties
 - Wrap up

Module 2-

- Day 1) Team meeting
 - Focused brainstorming, resulting in
 - Plans for new material
 - Work on new material
 - Wrap up
- Day 2) Team meeting
 - Review and critique of material generated so far
 - SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis
 - Plans for new material
 - Work on new material
 - Wrap up

Module 3-

- Day 1) Team meeting
 - Review and critique of material generated so far
 - SWOT analysis
 - Plans for new material
 - Work on new material
 - Wrap up
- Day 2) Team meeting
 - Review and critique of material generated so far
 - SWOT analysis
 - Plans for new material
 - Work on new material
 - Wrap up

Module 4-

- Day 1) Team meeting
 - Review and critique of material generated so far

- SWOT analysis
- Plans for new material
- Work on new material
- Wrap up
- Day 2) Team meeting
- Review and critique of material generated so far
- SWOT analysis
- Plans for new material
- Work on new material
- Wrap up

Module 5-

- Day 1) Team meeting
- Review and critique of material generated so far
- SWOT analysis
- Playtest (internal)
- Plan modifications based on testing
- Work on modifications
- Wrap up
- Day 2) Team meeting
- Review and critique of material generated so far
- SWOT analysis
- Playtest (internal)
- Plan modifications based on testing
- Work on modifications
- Wrap up

Module 6-

- Day 1) Team meeting
- SWOT analysis
- Playtest (external) – Alpha release
- Plan modifications based on testing
- Work on modifications
- Wrap up
- Day 2) Team meeting
- SWOT analysis
- Playtest (external) – Beta release
- Plan modifications based on testing
- Work on modifications
- Wrap up

Module 7-

- Day 1) Team meeting
- SWOT analysis
- Playtest (external) – Beta release
- Plan modifications based on testing
- Work on modifications
- Wrap up

Day 2) Team meeting
Gold!
Roll-out party
Project postmortem

Grading and Examinations:

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 in this industry. 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 how grades will be 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 learning and 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, the standard rounding convention will be used – meaning that scores with a fraction of $\frac{1}{2}$ or greater will be rounded up, while a score of less than $\frac{1}{2}$ will be rounded down. The following 100-point grading scale will be used to calculate your letter grade:

How points and percentages equate to grades

A (90+) = Excellent performance. Work is exemplary and worthy of emulation by others. Student is in full attendance and constructively contributes to the learning environment.

B (80-89) = Above average performance. All assignments are complete and exhibit a complete understanding and an ability to apply concepts.

C (70-79) = Average performance. Accomplishes only the minimum requirements. Oral and written communication is at an acceptable level for a college student.

D (60-69) = Demonstrates understanding at the most rudimentary level. Work is minimally passing.

F (59-) = Work is not passing, characterized by incompleteness, lateness, unsatisfactory demonstration of understanding and application.

There will be no traditional exams in this course. Your grade will be based on the quality of both your participation in the production team effort and the quality of the product resulting from that effort. All students will receive the same grade for the project, but each will receive individual grades for peer and instructor evaluation. Each assessment will be graded on a 4-point scale (with 4.0 as the maximum value). A letter grade will also be given for clarity (e.g. 3.6 = "A-"). The breakdown for the four areas of the student's final grade is as follows:

Peer evaluation	30%
Instructor evaluation	30%
The project	40%

Total:	100%

Grade Policy and Scale: Your final grade for the class will be calculated by averaging the points received for each of the four areas and then weighting that area average according to the table above. Once this weighting and averaging has occurred, the following table will be used to determine the your final grade for the class. It is possible that a curve may be applied to the final class grades.

3.5 - 4.0	A
2.5 - 3.4	B
1.5 - 2.4	C
0.5 - 1.4	D
0.0 - 0.4	F

Late Assignment Policy: For each class day that an assignment is late, 1.0 point (10 percentage points) will be deducted from the grade for that assignment. Since assignments are graded on a 4-point scale, this represents the loss of a full letter grade per day that the assignment is late. The maximum number of points deducted in this way will be 3.0 (30 percentage points). This deduction will occur after the grade is given for the assignment. So an assignment which deserves a 3.25 (B+) but is 3 class days late will receive a 0.25 (F+).

Freedom of Expression Policy: It is expected that faculty and students will respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions. As a course with a high level of discussion, it is imperative that everyone in the class feel comfortable expressing their views.

Academic Integrity: A student is expected to complete his or her own projects and tests. Students are responsible for observing the policy on academic integrity described in the Current ACC Student Handbook.

“Acts prohibited by the college for which discipline may be administered include scholastic dishonesty, including but not limited to cheating on an exam or quiz, plagiarizing, and unauthorized collaboration with another in preparing outside work. Academic work submitted by students shall be the result of their own thought, research or self-expression. Academic work is defined as, but not limited to tests, quizzes, whether taken electronically or

on paper; projects, either individual or group; classroom presentations, and homework.”

The penalty assessed for violations will be in accordance with the current ACC Student Handbook policy. See <http://www.austincc.edu/handbook/policies4.htm> for more information.

Attendance and Participation Policy: The official college policy states that students are expected to attend classes and will be held responsible for all material covered in class. Regular attendance helps ensure satisfactory progress towards completion of the course. Participation in this case means actively participating in the class assignments and discussions. As you can see above, Attendance and Participation will account for 20% of your final grade in the class.

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. Over the last 20 years, both the process of game development and the video games industry have undergone significant changes. Today's games are rarely developed by small teams working in isolation. Now games are often developed by teams of 50 to 200 people over 2 to 3 years with budgets of \$10M to \$20M. Large publishers like Electronic Arts and Sony now drive game development funding and schedules. Consequently, it is critical that personnel in the industry communicate and collaborate effectively. It was these realities which drove the certification requirements of this program.

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.