

## LMC 4725/6325: Games Design as Cultural Practice

**Instructor:** Dr. Sarah Laiola • **Location:** Skiles 346 • **Time:** MW, 3:00 - 4:15

**Website:** <http://www.gtgamesandculturef17.net/>

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### Instructor Information

**Instructor:** Dr. Sarah (Lozier) Laiola

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**Office Location & Hours:** Stephen C. Hall 121-7; Wednesdays 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm and by appointment

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### Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course combines cultural studies with critical games design. As such, students can expect to engage with games on two fronts: first, as objects of critically-engaged, cultural production that will be played with an eye toward analysis; second, as objects that may be made so that they engage with critical topics of contemporary, American culture. That is, students will both play, analyze, and read contemporary criticism about games, and design, prototype, and produce their own games. Throughout the semester, students will critically play a series of independent games that, as media objects of interactive cultural storytelling, respond to, disrupt, or otherwise explore contemporary issues of race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and national/global interest. Complementing this critical play is a series of critical design projects, in which students prototype five games of their own design in response to the aforementioned series of cultural studies topics, one of which will be fully developed by the end of the semester.

Through these combined practices, students can expect to achieve the following learning objectives by the end of the semester:

Students will be able to:	
<b>Analyze</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Contemporary digital games in terms of their formal designs (visual, sonic, interactive); their narrative structure; and their engagement with cultural studies issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation, and globe;</li></ul>

Students will be able to:	
<b>Critique</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>In professional terms, their own and their peers' prototyped games in terms of their formal design (visual, sonic, interactive), narrative structure, and engagement with cultural studies topics (race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nation, and globe);</li></ul>
<b>Prototype</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>As a critical design practice, a series of games in response to a given prompt;</li></ul>
<b>Produce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A single, complete, fully realized game from one of their prototypes;</li><li>The relevant technical and professional communications that accompany the production of a game (including: play-tests, rules/objectives of play, videographic and live demos of play, and a release trailer).</li></ul>

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## Course Texts

### Textbook:

Katie Salen Tekinbas and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

### Primary Texts (Games):

Playdots Inc., *Two Dots* (2014).

Snowman, *Alto's Adventures* (2015).

Jonathan Blow, Number Nine Games and Hothead Games, *Braid*, (2009).

Inkle, *80 Days* (2014).

Opertoona, *Strange Rain* (2010).

Tale of Tales, *The Path* (2009).

The Chinese Room, *Dear Esther* (2012).

Fullbright and Majesco Entertainment *Gone Home*, (2013).

Nicky Case, *The Coming Out Simulator* (2014).

Carly A. Kocurek and Allyson Whipple, *Choice: Texas* (2017).

Mattie Brice, *Mainichi* (2012).

Erik Loyer, *Chroma* (2001).

Merritt Kopas, *Lim* (2012).

Lucas Pope, *Papers, Please* (2013).

E-Line Media and Upper One Games, *Never Alone* (2014).

Nesta, *Superbug* (2016).

Red Redemption, *Fate of the World* (2011).

### **Secondary Texts (Criticism):**

In addition to the primary textbook listed above, other critical readings will be assigned. These will be single articles, blog posts, or single book chapters, and will be made available to students as needed.

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## Course Assessment

Students grades will be determined based on the following descriptions and breakdown of assignments\*:

**Game-Play Vlog (4725 & 6325):** Throughout the semester, students will be responsible for keeping a video-based blog (vlog) of their game-play. In keeping with practices of games vlogging on YouTube, this vlog should narrate your game play with an eye to personal, critical, and affective responses, and should include visuals of game play and discussion of mechanics as necessary. In keeping with the courses goals of critical play, the vlog should also address connections between the game itself and the secondary criticism read in conjunction with the game.

For students in 4725, the game-play vlog is worth **20% of the course grade.**

For students in 6325, the game-play vlog is worth **10% of the course grade.**

**Personal Game Workshop (6325 ONLY):** Students enrolled in 6325 will be responsible for leading half of a class period (45 minutes) once during the semester. For 25-30 minutes, students will present one of their prototyped games to the class, talking the class through inspiration, goals, design decisions, play-testing, and development thus far. The remaining 15-20 minutes, will be reserved for Q/A and constructive feedback from the class to aid in the improvement of the game.

The personal game workshop is worth **10% of the course grade.**

**Game Prototypes (4725 & 6325):** Students will produce 5 game prototypes over the course of a 10 week period. Prototypes will be due every two weeks, and will be produced in response to a provided prompt. Each prototype will be accompanied by the results of an in-class playtest, and a 500-word designer's / developer's statement.

Each prototype and accompanying documents is worth **8% of the course grade, for a total of 40%.**

**Complete Game Production (4725 & 6325):** The final 3 weeks of the semester will be given to the production of one of students' prototyped games. Students will produce their game via Unity (<https://unity3d.com/>), and will be responsible for conducting play-tests, producing a release trailer, and presenting a live demo of the game to the class.

The final game and accompanying communications is worth **40% of the course grade.**

**\*NOTE:** With each of these assignments, students will receive a detailed assessment rubric alongside the specific prompt.

Grades will be determined according to the following grading scale:

Letter	Number	Description (from the GT Registrar)
A	100 — 90.00	Excellent
B	89.99 — 80.00	Good
C	79.99 — 70.00	Satisfactory
D	69.99 — 60.00	Passing
F	59.99 — 0	Fail

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## Classroom Policies

### Attendance

Students are expected and required to attend class. Because Life Happens, students will be given three (3) free absences that will NOT affect their grade in anyway. No excuse need be given, but students should be aware that these freebies include, but are not limited to, personal days, vacations, job interviews, and illness (not including those which require extended hospitalization). The following absences will not count as one of the Freebies:

- Institutionally-approved absences (including athletics) with appropriate documentation;
- Holidays marked for National, Institutional, or Religious observance.

Upon the fourth absence (4), students grades may be negatively effected and they can expect to lose 1/3 of a letter grade for the 4th and each subsequent absence.

## **Non-Discrimination**

This class does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, disability, or status as a veteran. Alternative viewpoints are welcome; however statements that are deemed racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, or otherwise discriminatory towards others inside the class or out, will not be tolerated.

## **ADAPTS / Disability Services**

This course strives to maintain accessibility for all students, and as such, follows all accommodations provide day the ADAPTS/Disability Services Office at Georgia Tech. Students who use these services are required to present the instructor with appropriate documentation of their accommodations as early as possible, in order to ensure that everyone's needs are met, and the course remains accessible to all.

For more, please see The Office of Disability Services (<http://disabilityservices.gatech.edu/>).

## **Resources**

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the following Resources:

On-Campus:

**The Communication Center** (<http://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu/>) in Clough 447 provides students assistance with developing, drafting, and revising their communications. As well, they can provide spaces for oral presentation practice, and the staff includes tutors professionally trained in working with students who are English language learners.

**The Multimedia Studio** (<https://www.library.gatech.edu/services/multimedia.php>) in the Georgia Tech library provides access to software for creating multimodal projects including a plotter, color and b&w printers, scanners, and recoding equipment.

Online:

**Lynda** (<http://www.lynda.gatech.edu/>) is a valuable resource for learning how to use software with which you are not familiar.

**Unity** (<https://unity3d.com/learn/tutorials>) includes their own set of tutorials that cover a number of important topics for learning to design games with this engine.

NOTE: Learning to use unfamiliar software is primarily the students' responsibilities.

## **Academic Honesty**

Students in this course are expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Honor Code (<http://osi.gatech.edu/content/honor-code>), as put forth by the Office of Student Integrity.

One particular kind of misconduct that will not be tolerated in this course is plagiarism, which occurs when a writer, speaker, or designer deliberately uses someone else's language, ideas, images, or other original material (including code) without fully acknowledging its source by quotation marks as appropriate, in footnotes or endnotes, in works cited, or other ways as appropriate (modified from the WPA statement "Defining and Avoiding Plagiarism").

If students engage in plagiarism or any other form of academic misconduct, they will fail that assignment and be referred to the Office of Student Integrity, as required by Georgia Tech policy.

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the following:

**The Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code** (<https://policylibrary.gatech.edu/student-affairs/academic-honor-code>)

**The Office of Student Integrity** (<http://www.osi.gatech.edu/index.php/>)

**The Process for Academic Misconduct** (<http://osi.gatech.edu/content/academic-misconduct-process>)

## **HB 280 / "Campus Carry"**

On July 1, 2017, the House Bill 280 commonly referred to as "Campus Carry," went into effect for all USG campuses, including Georgia Tech. This Bill legally allows those with concealed carry permits to carry a handgun in a concealed manner in certain areas of campus. Students who are licensed handgun owners and desire to bring them to class are responsible for ensuring that they do so in compliance with the law.

Please note that, though it is permitted to carry concealed, licensed handguns in many classrooms on campus, it is not permitted in faculty or staff offices. In other words, handguns will not be permitted at office hours meetings with the professor or TA.

For more information on HB280 / "Campus Carry," please see the following:

- Information from GTPD: <http://police.gatech.edu/campuscarry>
- Statement and information from the USG: <http://www.usg.edu/hb280>
- Chancellor Wrigley's statement to the USG Community: [https://www.usg.edu/assets/usg/docs/USG\\_HB\\_280\\_Guidance\\_%28003%29.pdf](https://www.usg.edu/assets/usg/docs/USG_HB_280_Guidance_%28003%29.pdf)

## Final Instructional Days & Reading Periods

In keeping with University policy, this course observes **The Final Instructional Class Days** of December 4-5, 2017. On these days:

- No tests or quizzes are to be administered;
- Graded homework or assignments, course projects, demonstrations, and presentations may be due provided they are listed on the syllabus at the start of the semester;
- All quizzes and tests should be graded and reported to students on or before the last of these days

**Reading Periods** will be held Dec. 6, 2017 (all day); Dec. 7, 2017 (8 am - 2:20 pm); Dec. 12, 2017 (8 am - 2:20 pm). During these periods:

- No classes meet;
- No assignments, projects, presentations, or other graded activities can be due or take place;
- Instructors may schedule optional study review sessions for students, but no credit or extra credit may be attached to these sessions.