RTF 344M:
WRITING AND NARRATIVE DESIGN FOR VIDEO GAMES (08255)

INSTRUCTOR : Sheldon Pacotti
TA: _____

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Janet Murray, <u>Hamlet on the Holodeck</u>,
Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman: <u>Rules of Play</u>

REQUIRED SOFTWARE:
Build Your Own Blocks; free download: http://byob.berkeley.edu/#download

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Video games and other interactive media increasingly require well-crafted storylines and strong characters.   This workshop is designed to give aspiring game writers the skills, knowledge and techniques needed to write successfully for the games industry.   Through the creation of original interactive games, students will focus on such fundamentals as premise, character development, story structure, and the creation of multi-level worlds.

COURSE EVALUATION:
This course will be primarily project-based. Therefore, most of a student's grade will derive from timely, thoughtful completion of assignments. Since students will also be expected to play each other's work and provide feedback in a workshop setting, class participation will be an important component of the final grade.

The specific breakdown:

1. Class Participation: 20%
2. Quasi-weekly Projects: 60%
3. Final Project: 20%

LATE WORK:
Workshops depend on having work to critique. Late work puts an extra burden on the other students or – worse – disrupts the class

schedule. For that reason, the following automatic penalties apply for all late assignments:

- -10% for more than one hour after the end of the class for which the assignment was due.
- -20% for more than one class day late – "class day" meaning a day on which the class meets.

If there are extenuating circumstances that will cause you to miss a deadline – sickness, family emergency; etc. – please notify the instructor beforehand.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
Given the range of techniques and technologies covered during the course, attendance at every class will be critical. Later segments will depend heavily on mastery of earlier segments. If you must miss a class, talk to me when you return.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

NOTE: For each of the BYOB-based projects described below, students will be expected to submit a one-paragraph description of the thinking behind the work, using terminology from the course.

Wednesday, August 29:
Introductions. Course overview. Introduction to BYOB.

Monday, September 3: LABOR DAY

Wednesday, September 5:
Discussion: Huizinga, Homo Ludens, pp 1-27
Instruction: building a branching encounter in BYOB

Monday, September 10:
Project Due: interactive encounter (checkpoint – no workshop)
Work Day: continue working on encounters; instructor will meet with each student

Wednesday, September 12:
Lecture: game state and conversation; emotes (i.e one-liners)
Lecture: demo past projects

Monday, September 17:
Project Due: game branch

Discussion: Janet Murray, <u>Hamlet on the Holodeck</u>, pp. 13-38.
Lecture: Writing a Game Pitch

Wednesday, September 19:
Workshop: game branches (All Groups and Sections)

Monday, September 24:
Discussion: Janet Murray, <u>Hamlet on the Holodeck</u>, pp. 68-94, 185-213.
Lecture: Janet Murray's Aesthetics: Immersion, Agency, Transformation

Wednesday, September 26:
Project Due: game pitches (these are groundwork for the final project)
Film: Rashomon (multiform story)

Monday, October 1:
Discussion: Rashomon
Workshop: game pitches (All Groups, Section 1)

Wednesday, October 3:
Workshop: game pitches (All Groups, Section 2)

Monday, October 8:
Discussion: <u>Rules of Play,</u> pp. 31-36, 93-105, 363-373 ("Meaningful Play")
Lecture: Writing Story Treatments

Wednesday, October 10:
In-class Exercise: Play Zork!

Monday, October 15:
In-class Exercise: Nonlinear Beats

Wednesday, October 17:
Project Due: story treatment
Discussion: <u>Rules of Play,</u> pp. 377-419 ("Games as Narrative Play")
Lecture: designing level progression
Instruction: creating levels in BYOB

Monday, October 22:
Workshop: story treatment (All Groups, Section 2)

Wednesday, October 24:
Workshop: story treatment (All Groups, Section 1)

Monday, October 29:
In-class Exercise: Multiform Scene Design

Wednesday, October 31:
Discussion: M. M. Bakhtin pp 84-110, 224-229, 243-252 (chronotope in the novel)
Understanding Comics: 94-106 ("Time Frames")
Meanwhile Excerpt
Lecture: narrative design for game levels

Monday, November 5:
Project Due: game skeleton in BYOB (Midterm Review)

Wednesday, November 7:
Discussion: dialogue excerpts
Lecture: Writing an Interactive Script

Monday, November 12:
In-class Exercise: Nonlinear Dialogue

Wednesday, November 14:
Discussion: Doug Church's "Formal Abstract Design Tools"
(http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/3357/formal_abstract_design_tools.php)
Lecture: Secondary Story Devices

Monday, November 19:
Project Due: interactive script
Lecture: Multiform Story Structures (choice/consequence, machine-generated, simulation)
Instruction: Advanced scripting in BYOB

Wednesday, November 21:
Workshop: interactive script (All Groups, Section 1)

Monday, November 26:
Workshop: interactive script (All Groups, Section 2)

Wednesday, November 28:
Project Due: secondary story devices (on paper and in BYOB)
Guest Lecture: TBD

Monday, December 3:
Workshop: secondary story devices (All Groups, All Sections)

Wednesday, December 5:
Project Due: Final projects & presentations

The University of Texas Honor Code:
The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Scholastic Dishonesty:
The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at http:www.utexas.edu/depts./dos/sjs/.

Services For Students With Disabilities:
The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY.

Religious Holidays:
Religious holy days sometimes conflict with class and examination schedules. If you miss a work assignment or other project due to the observance of a religious holy day you will be given an opportunity to complete the work missed within a reasonable time after the absence. It is the policy of the University of Texas at Austin that you must notify each of your instructors at least fourteen days prior to the classes scheduled on dates you will be absent to observe a religious holy day.

University Electronic Mail Notification Policy:
All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that email be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html.

In this course e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your email regularly for class work and announcements.

Use of Blackboard
This course uses Blackboard, a Web-based course management system in which a password-protected site is created for each course.