

**University of Waterloo
Stratford Campus
GBDA 302
DRAFT SYLLABUS
Digital Media Project 2
Winter 2015**

Thursdays and Fridays, 1:00-3:00 pm, Classroom

Instructor Information

Instructor: Jennifer R. Whitson, PhD

Office: DMS 2014

Office Hours: Thursday and Fridays, 12:00-12:50 pm

Email: jwhitson@uwaterloo.ca

Email is always the best way to reach me. During the work week, I'll respond within 24 hours. During the weekend and holidays, I'll respond within 72 hours.

Course Description

In brief, this course emphasizes group independent game-making: teams of four to six students work on a focused set of projects during the semester, culminating with a playable and polished game prototype for an overseas client. This game **MUST** be designed to be culturally appropriate for the client's target demographic and suit the region's distribution and marketing context.

This is a project-based course, and as such it will require a substantial amount of out-of-class time investment. Prepare yourselves. You will be working in teams to first research a target demographic and geographic location, then contact and interview/run focus groups with local matching demographics to learn about their digital media consumption habits. Next you will create a marketing and distribution overview based on this data, and ultimately, design and develop a short corresponding game that integrates the feedback from both playtesters and your client partner along the way. You will also be expected to develop an associated business plan. Each week, guest lecturers will hone your design thinking and help you prepare your associated pitches, business plans, and marketing strategies.

This course gives you the opportunity to apply and integrate the different GBDA skillsets you have learned in your project-based courses, as well as GBDA 102, 103, 204, and 304. If you are looking for a course where the instructor is there to hold your hand, spoon-feed you material, and to tell you what to do next, you will have a difficult time in GBDA 302. Your coursework demands self-motivation and self-direction. You and your team will have autonomy over the direction of your project and your interactions with the client. You and your team are responsible for researching and solving your technical and game-development related issues. You and your team will ultimately succeed and fail depending on how well you are able to overcome obstacles, delegate tasks, and work together effectively.

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

There are a number of inter-related learning outcomes for this course. Obviously, the key learning outcome will be making a game for a player demographic that is not your own. But you will learn many other things along the way:

- A. One objective of the course is to further develop experience working on self-directed teams:
 - You will improve your techniques for collaboration and problem-solving.
 - You will work with an external client and consultants, thus developing best practices for future projects.
 - You will learn how to pivot in response to client feedback.
- B. Another objective of the course is to further hone your game-making skills. The best way to do so is through continued practice.
 - You will deepen project management skills related to game development.
 - You will learn to scope and schedule a set of inter-related projects and provide them on time.
 - You will learn to iterate your game mechanics, art-style, and interface in response to playtesting.
- C. A third objective is to integrate user-focused thinking into your game design practice.
 - You will carry out background demographic, market, and geographic analysis,
 - You will summarize and present business and design considerations that are contextually and culturally appropriate.
 - You will practice integrating user-studies into your design practice.
 - You will experience planning and running both focus groups and playtests.

Required Text

There are no required texts for this course, all your readings are available online or through LEARN. However, some books are highly recommended if you want to teach yourself how to make games and playful systems of engagement that are enjoyable. And let's face it, most student game projects are *not* enjoyable to play. The game you develop in this course will represent you (and by extension the Stratford Campus) to the outside world, including professional game-makers and potential employers, so I strongly suggest you buy Schell's text: it's the bible for many game developers.

Schell, Jesse. 2014. *The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses*. 2nd Edition. Natick MA: A K Peters/CRC Press.

Fullerton, Tracy. 2014. *Game Design Workshop: A playcentric approach to creating innovative games*. 3rd ed. Burlington MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. 2004. *Rules of Play: Game design fundamentals*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press. (early drafts of this book have made their way online).

I also really enjoy this book in terms of trying to operationalize what makes something “fun”. It’s a quick read, and not a textbook like the others: Koster, Raph. 2013. *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*. 2nd edition. Scottsdale, AZ: Paraglyph Press.

Please come see me if you’re looking for guides on specific subjects such as gamification, game writing and narrative, world-building, programming, level design, mechanics, advanced game design, and game “feel”.

Readings Available on LEARN

Please see the course schedule for the required readings. Note that these readings may change throughout the semester. When in doubt about what readings are assigned, refer to the announcement section of LEARN.

Course Requirements and Assessment

For this course, you will predominantly be assessed on the quality of the game your produce (in terms of growth and iteration along the way, cultural and contextual suitability, and the game itself). However, many smaller assignments are structured to set deadlines, provide early feedback, and keep you on schedule and pinpoint any problem areas.

Assessment	Date of Evaluation (if known)	Weighting
Solo: Deconstruction of Assigned Game	January 15	5%
Solo: Summary Design Brief	January 22	5%
Group: Market Analysis Video	January 29	10%
Group: Focus Group Insight	February 5	10%
Group: Game Design Doc & Storyboard	February 13	10%
Group: Playtest Reflections and Pivot Strategy	March 19	10%
Group: Game and Pitch Presentation	April 2	20%
Solo: Postmortem and Team Evaluation	April 13	10%
Solo: Collaboration and Team Cohesion	Throughout semester	20%
Total		100%

For group assignments, you will receive a group mark. Your collaboration grade is derived entirely from the post-mortems and peer-evaluations, so working well with a team and carrying the weight of the project equally (and avoiding either under-contributing or over-contributing) is essential if you want to do well in the course.

Assessment 1: Deconstructor of Fun Blogpost

In order to design a better hidden object game (HOG), it helps if you’re familiar with the genre and have played well-designed HOG games before. The best way to learn this is to play *both* successful and unsuccessful games, breaking down the design elements for each. No one will have time to play all HOG and Adventure Games, so this is a way of crowdsourcing knowledge to the class blog.

In the first week of class you will be tasked with playing and evaluating a number of games for their design and monetization strategies. You are assigned with writing and creating a “deconstruction” blogpost, complete with screenshots that you must forward to the course web-masters (self-nominated in class) by January 15th. Length and format should follow that of the “Deconstructor of Fun” website.

Assessment 2: Research and Design Brief

Each of you will conduct preliminary research on general demographic trends, digital media consumption and purchasing habits, and distribution strategies for XXXXXX (geographic area). This will draw upon skills developed in GBDA 102 and 301. You will summarize your key findings in a short form, 1 page briefing, accompanied by a 500 word document with a HOG design idea that is adapted from your research. We'll be going over these ideas in class, but students interested in being the "vision holder" (aka project lead) for the group work will also be asked to provide quick informal pitches of their ideas to the class during a generative feedback session.

Assessment 3: Market Analysis Video

This is your first group project, geared to help you get a sense of your teammates, assign tasks, and publish a product on tight deadline. You are tasked with combining the individual briefs from the previous week, adding more refined and in-depth research material and creating a short video (3-5 minutes long) summarizing your findings. You may follow the model of Extra Credits (<http://extra-credits.net/episodes/global-games-brazil/>) if you wish. These videos will be shown in class, posted on our course blog, and forwarded to our client for feedback on considerations that the teams might have missed. This is your first chance to impress your client.

Assessment 4: Focus Group Insight Blogpost

In order to design a product that suits your users, it is essential that you talk to and learn from your target demographic first. Integrating potential users at an early stage of your development is essential in designing a tailored game. Each group will be required to run either a set of 5 skype interviews with individuals in XXXXXXX or 1 in-person focus group with local users to learn about their leisure time activities, their interests, their digital media usage and consumption patterns, and their knowledge of games and play (not just video games).

For this assignment, I will help you with the necessary ethics requirements, consent procedures and, interview schedules. Your team will be responsible for locating and contacting your interviewees, conducting the interview, and then writing up the results in a detailed blogpost (minimum 1000 words) to be submitted to the class web-masters) about your general findings – including any patterns, surprises, or details that would impact your game design or distribution plans.

Assessment 5: Game Design Doc & StoryBoard or Prototype

From GBDA 301, you know what a game design document looks like. In the industry, game design documents are useful for scoping and scheduling development and building a shared vision for the game amongst team members. But design docs can also "lock in" design trajectories, and prevent teams from pivoting towards more promising directions (e.g. in response to user feedback, or to follow up on promising mechanics). Thus, equally important are paper prototypes and/or storyboards to help your team rapidly test multiple development trajectories.

Detailed instructions for this deliverable (and the game deliverable) can be found in the attached handout.

Assessment 6: Playtest Reflections and Pivot Strategy Blogpost

In lab, we will have developed playtesting protocols and conducting formal playtests with different user

populations (i.e., your classmates, other Stratford students, and invited guests). Each team is tasked with writing a detailed blogpost on their selected playtest method, their observations of the process, and a list of the changes to the game that will be made in response to these playtests.

Assessment 7: Game and Pitch Presentation (will be posted online)

During the final week of class, you will formally present your games to invited guests during a showcase event. The event will include 3-5 minute pitch presentations from each team, followed by open play. 3 days following the event, you must submit the following documentation: 1) your powerpoint pitch deck, your game code, and your business plan briefing. Feedback from the client will contribute to a segment of this grade.

Assessment 8: Postmortem and Team Evaluations

Each of you will write a post-mortem report reflecting on your game development process. These reports will be structured to include details of 5 things that went right and 5 things that went wrong, following the model of Gamasutra’s game post-mortems.

Along with this post-mortem, you will be asked to submit your private evaluations of your team members, which will be collated and used to determine the 20% grade for “collaboration and team cohesion”.

Assessment 9: Collaboration and Team Cohesion

This peer-assessment is collated from the individual team evaluation documents. It measures your participation in terms of how well you worked with others, completed your tasks, helped your teammates, responded to conflict/critique, and demonstrated community-minded behaviour. Both ends of the spectrum- from “absentee” members to overbearing members - will be penalized.

Course Outline

This is a tentative reading list. Please check the LEARN site for any updates.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
1	Jan 8	Course Introduction	Syllabi posted on LEARN
2	Jan 15	Casual Games	<p>Consalvo, Mia. (2009). "Hardcore casual: Game culture Return(s) to Ravenhearst". <i>Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games</i>, Orlando, Florida. ACM Portal.</p> <p>Shira Chess. (2014) Strange Bedfellows: Subjectivity, Romance, and Hidden Object Video Games <i>Games and Culture</i>. November 9: 417-428</p> <p>Game Deconstruction Model: http://www.deconstructoroffun.com/2013/08/growth-hacking-criminal-case.html</p>
3	Jan 22	Games and Culture	Rilla Khaled (2014). "Gamification and Culture" from <i>The Gameful World</i> , eds S. Walz and S. Deterding. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
			Daniel Miller (2011). Chapter TBD from <i>Tales from Facebook</i> , Polity Press.
4	Jan 29	Learning from Focus Groups	TBD on conducting a focus group http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/134870/focus_groups_testing_and_.php
5	Feb 5	Designing Culturally Aware Products	Madeline Akrich. (1992). "The De-Description of Technical Objects." In <i>Shaping Technology / Building Society</i> ed by W. Bijker and J. Law. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press Ralph Borland. (2014). "The PlayPump" from <i>The Gameful World</i> , eds S. Walz and S. Deterding. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
6	Feb 12	Prototyping and Iteration	Jesse Schell. (2014). Chapters 6 and 7 from <i>The Art of Game Design: A book of Lenses</i> . 3rd edition. San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers Inc. http://gamedesigntools.blogspot.ca/2011/01/translating-physical-prototyping-into.html
7	Feb 26	Success and Failures of Gamification	Bogost, Ian. (2008) "The Rhetoric of Video Games." In <i>The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning</i> . Edited by Katie Salen. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 117–140 Katie Salen & Eric Zimmerman. (2004). "Defining Culture" and "Games as Cultural Rhetoric" in <i>The Rules of Play</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 504-535.
8	Mar 5	Playtesting and Pivoting	Jesse Schell. (2014). Chapters 25 from <i>The Art of Game Design: A book of Lenses</i> . 3rd edition. San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers Inc. Fullerton, Tracy. 2014. "Chapter 8 on Playtesting" from <i>Game Design Workshop: A playcentric approach to creating innovative games</i> . 3rd ed. Burlington MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers. http://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/SebLong/20131115/204909/User_Research_for_Indie_Games_Playtesting_on_Morphopolis.php http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/185258/best_practices_five_tips_for_.php (additional readings TBD on UX for games)
9	Mar 12	Postmortems and Case Studies	Harvard Business Review Case Study 1. Khaled, R. and Ingram, G. "Tales from the Front Lines of a Large-Scale Serious Game Project." In the <i>Proceedings of CHI '12</i> , 2012.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings Due
10	Mar 19	Developing a Vision beyond the Game	Harvard Business Review Case Study 2 Brutal Legend Postmortem: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132696/postmortem_double_fines_brutal_.php
11	Mar 26	Crunch	No Readings
12	April 2	Showcase	No Readings

Late Work

- **There are no extensions for late group work.** Welcome to the reality of working with a team and working with an external client – if one of you happens to be sick, the rest of your team members will be there to present for you. Ensure that that you have a system for sharing your slides, research, scripts, other documents and media (like dropbox) so that any team member can theoretically present all material involved, and a backup plan is in place if your key presenter cannot be present.
- You may submit **solo** assignments up to 3 days late without penalty; however, late assignments will not receive extensive written feedback.
- Solo assignments submitted more than 3 days late will be docked 5%/day, up to a maximum of 20%. Unless you provide a doctor's note or suitable documentation for handing in assignment late, assignments handed in more than 7 days past the due date will not be accepted, and will score 0.

Failure to complete or hand in a written assignment earns a zero on that project.

Electronic Device Policy

Laptop computers and other portable technologies should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to play non-assigned games, answer email, surf the web, answer cell phones, text message, or engage in other non-class-related activities. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break this rule.

Why? Not only do these practices negatively affect your learning and participation, but they also distract others and create an environment of disrespect.

Attendance Policy

Lab and class time is perhaps the only time your group will all have time to be in the same space working on your projects. Use this time wisely. Please do not disrupt other students' ability to hear guest lectures, participate in our discussion, or work in lab (e.g., do not arrive late or leave early, begin packing your belongings before class ends, chat while others are speaking, etc.).

You are responsible for knowing the material and announcements presented during class whether or not you attend class. Please arrange with another student to get missed notes and announcements. An excellent way to get in touch with fellow students is on the LEARN Discussion Boards. All

announcements, due dates, etc. will be posted on the LEARN site.

Academic Integrity

In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. See the [UWaterloo Academic Integrity Webpage \(https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) and the [Arts Academic Integrity Office Webpage \(http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility\)](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/current-undergraduates/academic-responsibility) for more information.

Grievance

A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4 \(https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70\)](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70). When in doubt please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline

A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm). For typical penalties check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm).

Appeals

A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals \(http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm\)](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm).

Note for Students with Disabilities

The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.