IST 400/600 Transformative Game Design, Spring 2013

When: Blackboard and February 16-17; March 23-24; April 27-28
Where: Hinds Hall

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-12 and by appointment

Short Description:
This is a project-based class about the design of games designed to transform, influence, or educate in non-profit or commercial settings, with a primary focus on non-digital games.

Longer Description:
Transformative games are forms of play with goals and structure designed to change the player. Transformative games are a subset of “serious games” and can be used for education, marketing, advocacy, behavioral change, or social change. These games can be created for a non-profit setting such as a school, library, or museum, or a commercial setting as a tool for marketing or advocacy. At the heart of a transformative game is providing the player with information embedded both explicitly in the game and implicitly in the mechanisms of the game.

To create a game, a designer must develop an idea, create a structure, select mechanisms that help players engage with information and with each other, develop the components that will enable players to engage with the information and with each other through those mechanisms, develop rules, and playtest the game.

This class will take a traditional non-digital game design curriculum and apply it to transformative games. Students will select a topic and apply course concepts to that topic throughout the semester with the goal of having a complete tabletop or digital game. This is not a programming class, although students with a programming background may choose to create a digital game.

During this class, the focus will be on game-based learning, where the game is self-contained to meet certain outcomes. It will not be focused on gamification, or the creation of a game layer on top of a real world activity.

Learning Outcomes:
Students will explore a variety of transformative games and build their toolkit of transformative game mechanisms

Students will develop a transformative game by determining an audience, developing desired outcomes, selecting mechanisms, integrating information and
game mechanisms, creating a prototype, engaging in playtesting and iterative design, and presenting their game to the class.

**Class Meetings:**
This class will have two major components:

*In-Person*
There will be three mandatory weekend-long class meetings:
February 16-17
March 23-24
April 27-28

During each of these weekends, the class will meet all day Saturday and Sunday for hands-on activities. During the final weekend, students will be presenting their own games and playing the games created by everyone else.

Students will also be encouraged to join the Game Designers’ Guild meetings, which (in theory) will be held the Friday night before each of the weekend.

*Online*
Between the weekend-long class meetings (and before the first meeting), students will be required to check in to Blackboard weekly. There will be regular assignments, and students will be creating their own game and keeping a public design log through Blackboard. There will be regular milestones for students to meet in order to ensure that their game is completed by April 27.

Students will be required to develop and playtest their games during these months, so will need to locate local volunteers to help with this process, as there will not be playtesting time during the weekend meetings.

**Textbooks**
(You will need to order these online; they will not be in the bookstore.)

Required:

**Attendance and Participation:**
It is expected that students will be in class and will participate in class activities. If you know you have an excused absence on a due date, you need to turn in or present your assignment in the class meeting *before* it is due. Given the number of assignments in this class, it will be difficult for both of us if you don’t keep up with the class. Late assignments
are not accepted; students not turning assignments in at the start of class will have to turn in assignments on the re-do day.

There will be In-Class Challenges that will award points offered during classes. These points can not be made up, as the activities will not be replicable outside of class. Students with excused absences should consult the instructor for an additional assignment to earn the missed points. Attendance in class is important; students who miss class regularly will see their grade suffer as a result.

**Academic Integrity:**
Syracuse University sets high standards for academic integrity. Those standards are supported and enforced by students, including those who serve as academic integrity hearing panel members and hearing officers. The presumptive sanction for a first offense is course failure, accompanied by the transcript notation “Violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.” The standard sanction for a first offense by graduate students is suspension or expulsion. Students should review the Office of Academic Integrity online resource “**Twenty Questions and Answers About the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy**” and confer with instructors about course-specific citation methods, permitted collaboration (if any), and rules for examinations. The Policy also governs the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. Additional guidance for students can be found in the Office of Academic Integrity resource: **What does academic integrity mean?**

**Disabilities**
If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), [http://disabilityservices.syr.edu](http://disabilityservices.syr.edu), located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters,” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

**Educational and Research Use of Student Work**
I intend to use academic work that you complete this semester for educational purposes in this course during this semester. Your registration and continued enrollment constitute your permission. I also intend to use academic work that you complete this semester in subsequent semesters for educational purposes. Before using your work for that purpose, I will either get your written permission or render the work anonymous by removing all your personal identification. In addition, since my research is on transformative games, I may also use work from this class in my
research presentations and publications. If I do this, I will render the work anonymous first.

Major Milestones for Game Development:
(Note that there will be required readings and games to play distributed online through Blackboard.)

January 14 – 24
- Select the organization that is “funding” this game.
- Determine the audience for the game
- Develop the learning outcomes for the game.

January 25-27 Global Game Jam, Hinds Hall. Please consider participating or coming for some of this.

January 28-Feb 15
- Refine specific outcomes with instructors
- Develop storyline for game
- Create preliminary descriptions of game experience

**February 16-17 Class Session #1 – Game goals and mechanisms**

February 18 - Mar 5
- Explore game mechanisms that will allow for desired game experience
- Develop first prototypes of game mechanisms

March 9-17 Spring Break

March 18-22
- Refine mechanisms and explore how information can be integrated
- Continue developments of prototype

**March 23-24 Class Session #2 - Putting together mechanisms into a game - moving into game balance and flow**

March 25 - April 7
- Work on game balance and game flow
- Continue playtesting
- Write rules

April 8 - April 22
- Playtest game with different people
- Blind playtesting
- Continued development and iteration
- Create design document
April 22-26  Crunch Time! Finish Game!

April 27-28  Class Session #3
- Games must be complete and ready to play
- Play everyone’s games and critique.