The Illinois Institute of Art, Chicago

Course Title: Scriptwriting and Storytelling for Games

Course Number and Section: GAD120   **Term:** Spring
   Year: 2006

Number of Contact Hours: 6   **Time:** Monday, Wednesday
Weekly Homework Hours: 3-4   Section A: 8:00 – 11:50 PM

     Place: 180 N. Wabash (Loop), Room 229

Instructor: Lindsay D. Grace

Office Phone / E-mail: LG3311@fac.aii.edu, LG3311@ameritech.net
Course Website: http://aii.lgrace.com
Office Hours: As needed

Course Description:

Good games are engaging. They are interactive experiences that encourage players to invest time, energy and emotion. The traditional techniques of scriptwriting employed by fiction and film fall short of the requirements for games. This course endeavors to teach the fundamentals of writing good video game scripts.

Students will learn the techniques of traditional storytelling as they relate to the particulars of writing game scripts. The class will complete exercises in analyzing video game storytelling, creative writing, and the process of turning good ideas into a great script.

Although this is mainly a writing class, students will have opportunities to produce supporting visual material, including character sketches, environments, and storyboards.

Required Reading:

     No text required, handouts and supplements provided weekly.
     Some reading also available for download at http://aii.lgrace.com
     Suggested reading
         Character Development and Storytelling for Games, 1-59200-353-2
         Creating Emotion in Games, 1-5927-3007-8
         Pause and Effect: The Art of Interactive Narrative, 0735711712

Required Materials

     Three-Ring Binder (2)
     Notebook with Perforated Edge (1)
     Pocket-sized notebook (1)
     8.5" x 11" sketchpad (1)
     Pens, Pencils, Markers (as needed for artwork)

Course Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Develop ideas for entertaining and successful games.
- Develop a critical framework to analyze existing examples.

- Understand how games differ from other storytelling media.
- Understand linear, branching, and modular systems in storytelling.
- Understand how authorial control can be applied in emergent storytelling.
- Identify and evaluate when cut scenes are necessary.

- Develop interesting and engaging characters.
- Write convincing dialogue for characters.
- Understand character-specific dialogue.

- Write an effective plot synopsis for a game.
- Script a cut scene.
- Script an interactive scene from a game.

- Use drawing as a tool to express ideas.

Course Requirements and Policies

There will be a lecture and discussion for nearly every class session.

Many classes will involve workshop activities that seek to enhance your writing abilities through practice and guidance. Some workshop activities evolve into homework assignments.

All assignments must be handed in at the beginning of class.

Students should always keep a backup copy of their work.

No late assignments are accepted. Every working professional is expected to provide their work on time. Failing to do so reflects poorly on that person's performance. Repeated failure to meet deadlines often results in firing. It is best to learn to meet deadlines now.

In this course, each assignment will build on the previous. Failure to complete the prior week's assignment will make each subsequent week more difficult. It is in your best interest to complete each assignment on time and to the best of your ability. Always hand in what you have, even if you want to revise it. **Partial credit is better than no credit at all.**

Grading System:

Point Score range	Letter Grade
93 and above	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D
Below 60	F

Score Breakdown:

Assignments, Workshops, and Quizzes:	70%
Participation and Preparedness:	5%
Final Project:	25%

Attendance / Absences:

Students are expected to attend each class and arrive on time. It is a student's responsibility to contact the instructor when they know they will be absent or have missed a class session. Students should notify the instructor of their planned absence as soon as they are capable. It is best to send an email.

Makeup exams and acceptance of late assignments will only be granted in the following circumstances; Medical excuse, emergencies, campus-sponsored activities.

All issues of attendance and tardiness will be handled as school policy dictates and at the discretion of the instructor.

Student Needs:
The Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago has a special needs coordinator, Jamey DiVietro, who organizes services for qualified students requiring reasonable accommodations. Notifying the Illinois Institute of Art-Chicago that you have a disability or special needs is optional and confidential. However, in order for the school to accommodate your needs, we need advance notice of the services you require. For more information please contact Jamey DiVietro at 312-777-8616.

Cheating and Plagiarism:

Any student that cheats or plagiarizes will be reported to the academic standards committee and may be dismissed from the course.

All homework is to be completed independently (except when instructed otherwise). Any student who is caught or suspected of working in conjunction with any other student will be penalized.

Weekly Schedule*

Week 1: Story
>> Overview of Storytelling
>> Analyzing Storytelling in Games
>> **Assignment 1:** Present a strong game story concept

Week 2: Story and Game Concepts
>> *Writing Workshop*: *Turning your ideas to writing*
>> Basics of Plot, Character, Perspective, Setting, Style and Theme
>> **Assignment**: Outline Your Game: Concept

Week 3: Character
>> Developing Character and Non-Player characters
>> Writing Dialogue and Dialogue Script
>> **Assignment**: Complete 2 Character Descriptions and Dialogue

Week 4: Character
>> Scriptwriting Character
>> Advanced Character Technique
>> **Assignment**: (**Revise)** Character Sketches and one Scene Dialogue
>> **Assignment**: Create NPC dialogue lists

Week 5: Plot
>> Plot Synopsis (Away from Cliché)
>> Plot Scripting and Scenario Scripting
>> **Assignment**: Script a Parallel Paths or Object Oriented Plot

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Midterm (No Exam)

Week 6: Cinematics and Scene
>> Cut Scenes/Cinematic Sequences and the Language of Camera
>> Cut Scene Scriptwriting Continued
>> **Assignment**: Script a Cinematic Sequence

Week 7: Interactive Scripting and Emergent Techniques
>> Interactive Scriptwriting
>> Developing an Interactive Script
>> **Assignment**: Script Non-Linear Sequence

Week 8: Describing Setting and Style
>> Communicating Setting and Style
>> Final Projects Introduced
>> **Assignment:** Create an Introductory Treatment for Final

Week 9: Team Writing and Concept Critique
>> Treatment Presentations and Peer Review
>> **Assignment**: Create a Writing Inventory

Week 10: Work Week
>> Studio Work Week

Week 11: Project Review and the Future of Game Stories
>> Final Projects Due (complete and with full documentation)

*Schedule subject to change at the instructor's discretion.