

## CSAT 3370 – VIDEO GAME PRODUCING

SPRING 2015

MWF

11:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.

Lab Fridays 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.

BAB 303

Marjorie Scott, Adjunct Instructor

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Office hours by appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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The video game producer's job is to oversee all aspects of a game project and to manage the duties of the various artists, programmers, designers, and engineers who bring the game to life. The producer is the one responsible for seeing a project through to completion, all the while staying on schedule and within budget.

This course explores the stages of the video game production process –from concept to completion- focusing on the producer's role in each phase. As producers, you'll be expected to lead your team through the process of completing a game, all the while continuing to pitch new ideas, staying current on what's happening in the games industry through daily research, and practicing your networking skills.

### **PREREQUISITES**

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All students must have junior or senior standing.

### **PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES** *The graduating student will demonstrate:*

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1. Competency for appropriate oral communication in public presentations.
2. Competency for appropriate use of presentation software -- specifically power point.
3. The ability to analyze arguments including identification of the major elements of the argument such as claims, warrants, data, and backing.
4. Competency in appropriate discipline specific written communication.
5. The ability to apply communication theory to the analysis of communication situations.
6. Competency in the use of media technology including video, audio, and web technologies.
7. General knowledge of communication concepts and terminology.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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By the end of this class, students will:

- Articulate a working vocabulary of video game terminology
- Demonstrate knowledge of a producer's responsibilities in the production cycle of a game
- Beginner knowledge of budgeting and scheduling a video game production
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of marketing a video game

- Demonstrate proficiency with pitching game concepts
- Develop and articulate a sense of personal aesthetic and style with regard to games
- Analyze and critique current trends in the video game industry

**COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

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- 1) Pitches of new game ideas (Pitch topics are outlined in the calendar section of the syllabus)
- 2) Presentations of current game industry news (one student presents at the beginning of *each* class)
- 3) Q & A Skype interviews with video game professionals. Each student is required to arrange for a professional video game producer, artist, designer, or programmer to meet with the class via Skype for 20-30 minutes. **Your appointment must be set by Wednesday, February 11th.**
- 4) *Reality is Broken* papers (3)
- 5) Final Project - Each student will produce a computer game using Unity 3D. You must include the following: a high-level pitch document, a schedule, a budget, a game design document with graphics and detailed sound design, and a marketing/monetization proposal. Producers are also required to bring in playtesters to offer feedback on their digital prototypes.
- 6) Full participation in class discussions and exercises

**MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

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- 1) A Sul Ross e-mail account and mobile phone;
- 2) A working blackboard account;
- 3) Unity 3D software, which is accessible for free online
- 4) Excel software

**REQUIRED READING:**

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- 1) Fullerton, Tracy. *Game Design Workshop: A Playcentric Approach to Creating Innovative Games*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. 2014, CRC Press. Taylor & Francis Group.
- 2) McGonigal, Jane. *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. 2011, Penguin Books.
- 3) Additional handouts provided by instructor.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

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**Pitches** – Often producers have to pitch, or sell, their games before they can actually make their games. Therefore, you need to know how to pitch, or sell, your ideas. The pitches must be for video (mobile, PC, online, console) or board games. You are required to bring a **one-page** executive summary outlining the basic info about the game and you must also give a 5-minute verbal pitch. Please provide enough copies of the executive summary for everyone in the class (including the instructor). **For your final computer**

**game projects, you are required to bring in a high-level pitch document outlining as much detail (including images!) about your game as possible.**

**Industry Updates/Presentations** – At the beginning of each class, **one** student will present a piece of industry news to the rest of the class. These pieces of industry news can come from web articles or hardcopy newspaper or magazine articles and must be *no older than one month*. The games industry is changing so rapidly and as producers you all need to stay abreast of what’s happening now. Students will present in rotation and we will determine this order on the first day of class. If you are going to be absent on a day that you are required to present, you must arrange to swap with another student, otherwise you will receive an “F” on the assignment for that day. Other presentations are TBD and you’ll receive ample notice regarding those.

***Reality is Broken*** – We will read and discuss *Reality is Broken* by game designer Jane McGonigal. The book is divided into three parts and you’re required to write a brief (1-2 page) paper in response to **each part** of the book. The due dates for the papers are outlined in the calendar portion of the syllabus. In addition to writing your papers, you must be prepared to discuss the book in class on the same date the papers are due. All papers must be typed, in 12-point font, double-spaced, and are due at the beginning of class.

**Guest Speakers** - Producers have to make things happen and often this means they have to get on the phone. As producers, each of you must get on the phone and contact a working professional (producer, publisher, designer, artist, or programmer) in the games industry and request a 30 minute Skype interview with him/her. The interview should take place during one of our class periods (MWF 11:00 – 11:50 am). Lab hours (Fridays 2-5 pm) are an option too if the person is unable to meet during our allotted class time. Feeling a little panicked? That’s okay. The goal of this exercise is twofold: 1) You need to get over that fear, get on the phone, and get what you want; and 2) You need to start networking. You won’t be in college forever. You eventually want to get a job in this industry, right? Guest speakers are not required to prepare a presentation. It is simply an opportunity for you, as students, to ask them questions about their careers in the games industry.

**Computer Game** – Your final project, which you will work on throughout the semester, is a produced computer game. You, as the producer, are required to hire a team consisting of a designer, an artist, and a programmer and you must lead your team through the process of delivering a game. You are required to deliver the following to the publisher (me!) by the dates indicated in your milestone schedule: A high-level pitch document, design documents, a production schedule, a budget, a marketing proposal (including a detailed analysis of your target audience), and the game itself. All games should be made using Unity 3D.

**Final Paper** – You are required to write and 2-3 page paper explaining what a games producer does and whether or not you plan to pursue producing as a career choice. If you

do not plan to pursue producing, how do you see yourself fitting into the games industry and which producing skills do you think would be useful in your chosen area?

**RULES & EXPECTATIONS:**

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**Late work** will not be accepted.

**Plagiarizing, cheating, or any other dishonest behavior in the classroom will not be tolerated.** Rules and regulations regarding plagiarism, dishonesty, and other issues concerning classroom participation can be found in University Rules and Regulations and Student Handbook. This course will abide by these established policies. A student found to be engaging in these activities, will be penalized to the full extent of Sul Ross State University policy.

Please turn off all cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices upon entering class. If you break this rule, you will be required to turn in your electronic equipment for the duration of the class period.

**COURSE EVALUATION**

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Assignments are valued as follows:

1) <i>Reality is Broken</i> papers (3)	15%
2) Pitches	15%
3) Guest Speaker	15%
4) Industry Updates/Presentations	20%
5) Computer Game	25%
6) Final Paper	10%

**Grading Criteria:**

A = Exceptional. Demonstrates mastery of material beyond expectation. Professional quality of work. Highest level of scholarship.

B = Above average. Demonstrates mastery of material. Work is of better-than-expected quality, but not quite professional. High level of scholarship.

C = Average. Demonstrates proficiency with material. Work is of amateur quality. Ordinary level of scholarship.

D = Below Average. Less than proficient with material. Work shows errors, careless mistakes, or is just plain wrong. Poor scholarship

F – Failure. Material incomplete. Work grossly negligent or incomplete. No evidence of scholarship present.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

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Attendance is **mandatory**. If you must miss a class for a school-related activity, the absence must be discussed (and arrangements made regarding coursework) **prior to the absence**. If you must miss a class for an emergency or illness, please contact me **by**

**email or phone as soon as possible.** Nine (9) absences will result in you being dropped from the course with a grade of “F” as per Sul Ross State University policy.

Arriving to class **on time** is also essential – **arriving late more than two times will be counted as one absence. Leaving before class ends will result in you being marked absent.**

Absence Policy, from the Sul Ross State University 2012-2014 Course Catalogue:

**CLASS ATTENDANCE**

Regular class attendance is important to the attainment of the educational objectives of the University. Each instructor will keep class attendance records, and the instructor's policy on class attendance will be explained at the beginning of the semester or term.

A student will be dropped for excessive absences in remedial courses after nine absences.

An absence is defined as non-attendance in fifty minutes of class; for example, non-attendance in a one and one-half hour class will constitute one and one-half absences and non-attendance in a three-hour class will constitute three absences. An absence because of participation in an official University activity is considered to be an authorized absence.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1973. It is the student’s responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility services. Students seeking accessibility services must contact the Counseling and Accessibility Services, Ferguson Hall, Room 112. The mailing address is P.O. Box C-171, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832. Telephone: [432-837-8203](tel:432-837-8203).

**CLASS DATES: Assignments and Deadlines**

*Note that these dates and the details of each class are subject to change at the instructor’s discretion*

Day	Date	Topics and Assignments
Wed	Jan 21	Review syllabus, assignments, and deadlines. <b>Assign industry updates.</b> <i>Homework DUE 1/23: Read handout (Producer Packet) and be prepared to discuss on Friday.</i>
Fri	Jan 23	The Role of Producer <b>Industry Update:</b> <i>Homework DUE Mon 1/26: Read and be prepared to discuss the following handouts: “The Role of the Game Designer” from <u>Game Design Workshop</u> by Tracy Fullerton and “The Game Industry” from <u>Understanding Video Games</u>.</i>

*Complete exercises 1.3 and 1.5 (“The Role of the Game Designer”).*

- Mon Jan 26 The Games Industry/Monetization  
 Discuss Reading & Exercises 1.3 and 1.5  
**Industry Update:**  
*Homework DUE Wed 1/28: Read “Conceptualization” from Game Design Workshop by Tracy Fullerton and “The Game Begins with an Idea” from The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell.*
- Wed Jan 28 Conceptualization/Brainstorming  
**Industry Update:**  
*Homework DUE Fri 1/30: Read “The Designer Gives the Client a Pitch” from The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell.*
- Fri Jan 30 Pitching/High Level Pitch Document  
**Industry Update:**
- Mon Feb 2 Pitch Day! Choose an existing video game and pretend it’s never been made, it’s your idea, and you’re pitching it for the first time. Sell it to us! Make us excited about this game! Each pitch must be 3-5 minutes in length. This is a verbal pitch only. No supporting documentation needed.  
*Homework DUE Wed 2/4: Read “The Game is Made For a Player” from The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell.*
- Wed Feb 4 Demographics/Target Audience  
**Industry Update:**  
*Homework DUE Fri 2/6: Read “Stages and Methods of Development” from Game Design Workshop by Tracy Fullerton.*
- Fri Feb 6 The Development Process  
**Industry Update:**  
*Homework DUE Mon 2/9: Read “Team Structures” from Game Design Workshop by Tracy Fullerton.*
- Mon Feb 9 The Development Team (Producers, Art/Animation, Designers, Engineers, QA)  
**Industry Update:**  
*Homework: Read “Your Game Will Probably Have a Client” from The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell.*
- Wed Feb 11 The Client: Publishers  
**Industry Update:**  
**(Guest Speaker Appointments DUE)**

- Fri Feb 13 Pitch Day! **Pitch an original computer game concept for your final project.** You must bring a high-level pitch document (2-3 pages). Your verbal pitch must be 5-7 minutes and please include as much detail about your game as possible. Please bring enough copies of your pitch document for everyone in the class (including the instructor).
- Mon Feb 16 Pitches (Continued)  
**Industry Update:**
- Wed Feb 18 Assemble Teams for Final Projects/Hiring Talent/Contracts  
**Industry Update:**
- Fri Feb 20 Scheduling/Scrums/Sprints/Milestones. Producers will work in class on their pre-production and production schedules.  
**Industry Update:**
- Mon Feb 23 Budgeting. Producers will work in class on the budgets for their final projects.  
**Industry Update:**
- Wed Feb 25 *Reality is Broken* Part 1 discussion (**RESPONSE PAPERS DUE**)
- Fri Feb 27 Pitch Day! Adapt a licensed property (novel, short story, film, TV show, graphic novel, etc.) into a game and pitch it.  
*Homework DUE Mon 3/2: Read “Communicating Your Designs” from Game Design Workshop by Tracy Fullerton and “The Team Sometimes Communicates Through Documents” from The Art of Game Design by Jesse Schell.*
- Mon Mar 2 Game Design Documents  
Scrum Meeting  
**Industry Update:**
- Wed Mar 4 Prototyping  
Scrum Meeting  
**Industry Update:**
- Fri Mar 6 Guest Speaker (**Nicholas Bellerophon – Independent Game Producer**)
- Mon Mar 9 **Paper Prototype of Computer Games DUE IN CLASS**  
Scrum Meeting
- Wed Mar 11 Managing Your Team  
Scrum Meeting  
**Industry Update:**



*Homework DUE Fri 3/11: Read “Digital Prototyping” from Game Design Workshop by Tracy Fullerton.*

Fri	Mar 13	Digital Prototyping <b><u>Budgets and Schedules DUE IN CLASS</u></b> <b>Industry Update:</b>
Mon	Mar 16	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Wed	Mar 18	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Fri	Mar 20	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Mon	Mar 23	<i>Reality is Broken</i> Part 2 Discussion ( <b>RESPONSE PAPERS DUE</b> )
Wed	Mar 25	Creative Conflict (Role Playing Game) Scrum Meeting <b>Industry Update:</b>
Fri	Mar 27	<b><u>Digital Prototypes DUE IN CLASS</u></b> <i>Homework DUE Wed 4/1: Read “Good Games are Created Through Playtesting” from <u>The Art of Game Design</u> by Jesse Schell.</i>
Mon	Mar 30	Playtesting Round One. Each producer is responsible for bringing <b>two playtesters</b> to class to play his/her game. Producers must observe playtesters playing the games and write down all feedback.
Wed	April 1	Playtesting Postmortem/Iteration
Fri	April 3	Marketing Scrum Meeting <b>Industry Update:</b>
Mon	April 6	Guest Speaker (TBD) <i>Homework DUE Wed 4/8: Read Social Responsibility packet and “Game Ratings: The ESRB and You” from <u>Producing Games</u> by D.S. Cohen and Sergio Bustamante II.</i>
Wed	April 8	Social Responsibility of Game Developers/ Game Ratings (ESRB) <b>Industry Update:</b>
Fri	April 10	<b><u>Second Iteration of Digital Prototypes DUE IN CLASS</u></b>
Mon	April 13	Playtesting Round 2
Wed	April 15	Guest Speaker (TBD)
Fri	April 17	Pitch Day! Pitch someone else’s idea. Students will pair up and pitch game ideas to each other. Each student will then pitch the other



person's idea to the class. Producers often have to sell other people's ideas and they must do it with as much passion as if these ideas were their own.

Mon April 20 **First Draft of Marketing Proposal DUE IN CLASS**

Wed April 22 Crunch Mode/Release/Gold Master Candidate  
Scrum Meeting  
**Industry Update:**

Fri April 24 **Third Iteration of Digital Prototypes DUE IN CLASS.**

Mon April 27 Playtesting Round 3

Wed April 29 Breaking into the Games Industry/Networking  
**Industry Update:**

Fri May 1 Guest Speaker (TBD)

Mon May 4 *Reality is Broken* Part 3 discussion (**RESPONSE PAPERS DUE**)

Wed May 6 Guest Speaker (TBD)

Fri May 8 DEAD DAY – NO CLASS

**COMPLETED PROTOTYPE OF COMPUTER GAMES AND  
ALL SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS DUE SUNDAY, MAY 10<sup>th</sup> by  
5:00 PM**

**FINAL PAPERS DUE VIA EMAIL NO LATER THAN  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 13<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 p.m.**