FILM6721 Games Arts I
Instructor: Professor Craig Caldwell, Ph.D.
Email: craig.caldwell@utah.edu
Class Time: TH 6:00pm to 9:00pm
Class Location: Building #36, Gallery 9
Office: CIDAT 105A, 803-8668
Office Hr.: 2:30-3:30 (MW) and 4:30-5:30 (TH)
Credit: 4 credit hours

No Pre-requisites
Web Site: http://fs.finearts.utah.edu/~ccaldwell
Grade Site: http://www.eClassInfo.com/home.asp?id=ccaldwell

BRIEF COURSE DESCRIPTION

The tools and techniques required to understand and use the components of design, story, drawing, and storyboarding for games. This course looks at the creative aspects of pre-production, examining the common practices and processes that tie story, gameplay, mood, character and environment design to create a seamless whole in animated and game productions. To this end, this course introduces colour theory, lighting, composition, design and audience psychology.

COURSE CONTENT

* This course emphasizes the acquisition of demonstrable skills in drawing, design, and story. In the past few years we have seen the appearance of reliable, productive game engines. These systems enable students to produce more games; unfortunately, these systems will also enable people to produce games that are not engaging visually. Much of this low level design is due to unfamiliarity with the fundamental elements and principles that have been used in art and movies. Understanding and implementing these principles is essential to producing solid games.

* This course will provide a foundation in the fundamentals of pictorial design. In a sequence of hands-on exercises and projects, students I are introduced to the concept of the picture plane, figure/ground relationships, scale and proportional transformation, patterning, composition, value, color, methods for conveying time, and spatial illusion. Using a wide variety of traditional and non-traditional materials and methods, students are encouraged to develop their own design vocabulary and repertoire of practical techniques. In addition to introducing formal design strategies, the course emphasizes content issues and the historical and cultural context in which works of art are produced. Regular slide lectures and critiques are structured informally to encourage dialog and to provide the student with an opportunity to translate visual evidence into words.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Game Arts I is the first in a three-part sequence of the visual and temporal components that goes into game creation. It is important that students be fully versant with not only the software tools and menus, but also the skills that have their grounding in the fundamentals of good game design. The course also aims to encourage students to undertake continued self-directed learning in this field, which is a vital component of successful CG studies due to the constant advances in technology and software. It provides an opportunity for students to develop and employ critical evaluation skills and problem solving strategies. This is achieved by researching additional resources to trouble-shoot technical problems and to expand their knowledge of the software and methods of practice.

COURSE METHODOLOGY

Lectures present the core content and knowledge while the tutorials work will be with smaller groups in practical studio work. Lecture material to reinforce and clarify expectations for assignments. In order to achieve the course objectives, it is required that students attend each weekly class (5% reduction of course mark for each absence (i.e. 1 = 5% reduction, 2 absences = 10% reduction). Late or leaving class
early, twice, is equivalent to an absence. Attendance taken at the beginning of class. Students should expect to spend 10 hours per week working on assignments.

The students will be issued with a number of files and handouts that provide support for the tools and ideas presented in class. Attendance at each class is required in order to obtain sufficient understanding of the concepts and tools presented.

Students are expected to work in groups as well as alone. The group projects represent an important part of the course in terms of encouraging and guiding students to contribute ideas, make decisions and to cooperate and communicate effectively with other team members. Additionally, the group projects provide an opportunity for students to enhance their professional skills in areas such as responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, and communicating effectively and harmoniously with colleagues.

**ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION:**

Attendance is required at all lectures, tutorials, and studio classes. Class attendance is a part of the participation grade. Lack of attendance will lower the final grade.

**COURSE EVALUATIONS METHODS AND CRITERIA**

Evaluation will include images researched, animatics ... Quizzes may be given at anytime to test retention of previous weeks material.

- Images created 30%
  - Exams are designed to further test your understanding of and ability to apply course concepts and will consist of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and short essay questions.
- Assignments 60% (4x 15%) More details will be given for each assignment: Images, Storyboards and Animatics
- Participation and Quizzes 10%

Grading Scale: 93-100% = 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% = E

The above grading scheme weighs final course grades according to the following priorities:

**Criteria:**

"E" is given for an assignment that fails to meet the mechanical or conceptual requirements of university work. Mechanical requirements would be matters such as turn-in times, length of assignment, grammatical concerns, focus of assignment, etc. Conceptual matters would revolve around the comprehension of ideas and relationships between ideas.

"D" is given for work, which meets the requirements established, but demonstrates significant problems either in conceptual formation or mechanical limits.

"C" work is marked by timely completion of the assignment, demonstrating a solid grasp of the material. "C" work shows me that you understand the material under consideration. "C" is the standard grade, and all assignments are made with this in mind.

"B" work is marked by a timely completion of the assignment, demonstrating not only a grasp of the material under consideration, but the ability to synthesize the material rather than simply repeat what you have learned. "B" work goes beyond minimum requirements outlined in the assignment, and represents work, which is above average.

"A" work constitutes superior handling of the mechanical and conceptual material covered in class. Not only will "A" work synthesize materials covered, but will also demonstrate a very high degree of clarity in expression, and an ability to contextualize ideas, execute assignments, explore implications, and/or raise meaningful questions.

**Responsibilities and Expectations**

**University Policies**

1. The *Americans with Disabilities Act*: The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in this class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in an alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

2. The *Drop/Withdrawal policy* is available on the University’s website and from Student Services.
Briefly, you may drop a course during the first seven calendar days of the semester and withdraw (with a “W”) during the next five days without tuition charges (last day to withdraw at all is in mid-October). After that, withdrawal is possible only “in cases of compelling non-academic emergencies” through petition to the dean of your college.

3. The Student Code spells out specific rights of students in the classroom (http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10.html). The code also specifies proscribed conduct, including cheating on exams, collusion, and plagiarism. Plagiarism is submitting someone else’s work as your own as well as quoting others without giving credit. I do not tolerate plagiarism in any form. Students found guilty of plagiarism will receive an “E” for the course.

Course Policies

1. Course Material: Throughout this semester, we will be watching relevant clips and sections of games. Any instances of the above will be relevant and appropriate to class discussion and learning. If you do not feel as though you wish to view certain media you will have the option to request an accommodation. Most likely, you will be assigned alternate material to view or experience and comment upon.

2. Attendance: Students are expected to fully participate in the class. Attendance of lectures, participation in discussion, as well as completion of all assignments are expected, and required for satisfactory competition of the course. Registered students must attend class in the first days of class in order to retain their spots in class. Students who do not attend class in the first week will forfeit their positions and may be dropped from the class.

3. Webpage You will need to regularly check our WebCT page on-line throughout the semester. To do this, go to www.webct.utah.edu and type in your student ID and password. On this page you will find our syllabus, assignments, handouts, and other materials. Rarely will you receive paper assignments and handouts in class; while we will go over all assignments in class, you are responsible for the WebCT material and for printing it out if you want a hard copy or if it needs to be turned into the instructor. Also, the syllabus and course calendar are subject to change based on the needs of the class. I will inform you of any changes and you will be able to find the updated changes on the WebCT syllabus.

4. You will also be accessing clips from the web. You will need to view clips through a high-speed connection such as cable or DSL, so begin to think about where you can do this (home, school, city library). Computer access at school and most libraries is free, but you may need to sign-up for a computer or wait for access – plan ahead!

5. Due Dates Are Firm All work is to be completed by the dates given in the syllabus or on the dates we have agreed to as a class. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Papers and assignments etc., submitted after the beginning of class on the due date can be given credit, but docked 10% of the total possible points beginning that day and each day after that it is late. Failure to complete all graded assignments will result in a substantially lower course grade and may result in a failing grade for the course. Prior arrangement to take an exam early or to modify our presentation schedules is possible in cases of a documented University-related or medical scheduling conflict, and as tests are scheduled in advance and are posted on this syllabus, it is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor of any arrangements that need to be made.

6. Your Current E-mail Address Each student is asked to update and maintain a current email address on the University website. This will allow me to send class or individual emails via WebCT regarding assignments, any cancelled classes, changes in schedule, and other notices of importance. To update or add your current email address, go to the Campus Information System site (https://gate.acs.utah.edu), sign on with your uNID and password, click “My Student Profile,” and finally click “Change Email.”

Weekly Outline

Week 1 "What is Concept Design?" (Lecture): An introduction to pre-production. The tutorial sessions will cover Story Breakdowns, action and gameplay as well as a brief introduction to this course’s assessment items.

Week 2 "Character Design 1" (Lecture): The essential elements of Character Design. Tutorial time - character design workshops, centred on a choice of three "stories". Initial Character Design Assessment piece begins.

Week 3 "Character Design 2" (Lecture): Refining your designs. Tutorial Time - Refining the characters and key props, Q&A session with a veteran concept artist. Initial Character Designs Due this week.

Week 4 "Introduction to Colour Theory" (Lecture): Tutorial Time - Colour Theory, Physics and Reproduction Technologies. Stories for final assessment piece will be revealed, pairs allocated. Grisaille Exercise is due by end of week.
Week 5 - "Colour 2 - Composition and Atmosphere" (Lecture): Integrating the needs of the story, mood and character of a piece into colour schemes. Tutorial Time - the symbolism and history behind colour choices. Sprite Character Challenge begins.

Week 6 "Environments 1 - Beyond Backdrops" (Lecture):
Tutorial Time - Treating your environments and settings as characters with their own personalities.

Week 7 "Lighting, Colour and Composition" (Lecture): Environments planning continued. Tutorial Time: Storyboard and Environment Plan begins. Pixel Character Sprite Sheet due this week.

Week 8 "Camera, Layout, Composition – Story part 1: Your audience will have expectations born of a lifetime of media consumption. Here, we discuss ways of leveraging that accumulated background knowledge. Tutorial Time: Integrating your character and colour tests with storyboard.

Week 9 "The Story, part 2" (Lecture):
Tutorial Time - Group consultations - progress check, problem solving, etc.

Week 11 “Story Arcs” – Until recently story arcs didn’t have much of a place in games. That has all changed with the symbiosis between games and movies today.

Week 11 "Vertical Slices & Test Sequences" (Lecture): How to test if all your elements fit together? Tutorial Time - Group consultations - progress check, problem solving, etc.

Week 12 Upper Level Design Principles - Planning out an effective game space in 3D taking into account camera perspectives and emphasis, scale & player navigation. Tutorial includes introduction to Unity's UI, navigation, terrain editor. Final Assessment will be discussed.

Week 13 Introduction to Unity's asset pipeline. Preparation, structuring your project, creating pre-fabs and importing assets. Tutorial time will focus on developing Assessment Item #1 (the Environment Concept) into a navigable 3D environment.

Week 14: Lights, Particles, Animation and Sound. How simple scripting can enhance the mood and aesthetic appeal of a game environment. Tutorial exercises will allow students to try some of these techniques as well as continue developing their environments.

Week 15 Individual consultations - Students will bring in their work to date for critique. The goal is not to assess the work at this time, rather it's to pick up on and help students amend and improve their environments.

Assessment Details

Assessment is according to the criteria specific to each item. All student work is to be submitted for assessment on or before the due date, and submitted at beginning of class time.

Students are required to submit all assessment items to qualify for a passing grade. Extensions will only be granted on the provision of a medical certificate or a letter from the student counsellor.

The assessments are designed to contribute to the learning outcomes stated earlier, and to the skills appropriate for the graduate level. The final assessment goal is the development of a look and a style for a given project. Students must develop techniques for keeping that style consistent, both within the project and within a production unit or development team.

- Possess a greater understanding of the process for game Art Directors / Lead Designers
- Implement the skills of the Art Director / Lead Designer
- Employ colour, proportion, and composition to convey moods, sense of place and an overall tone for their productions
- Develop a more refined sense of effective design, analyze their own work and enhance it accordingly
- Refine their understanding of the elements needed to create more thematically connected characters and environments
- Acquire the 'soft skills' needed to work and problem solve within a small, non-hierarchical group of peers
- Prepare 'Audience Appropriate' presentations of their work
- Analyze and debate the major elements, themes and mechanics of their work, particularly with respect to differences and similarities to other similar works in popular culture
- Prepare cogent, inventive and well-thought out elements of a Design Concept and its Story components

Late submissions:
All assessment items will incur a penalty of 15% per week off the total result for that item not turned in on due date. Unless otherwise stated in the individual assessment criteria, assessment items must be submitted to the dropbox on the due date so that files can be assessed.