COMP 585: Serious Games

Bulletin Description
Concepts of computer game development and their application beyond entertainment to fields such as education, health, and business. Course includes team development of a game.

General Course Info
Term: TERM SPRING 2016
Department: COMP
Course Number: 585
Time: MW 12:20-1:35
Location: SN011
Website: http://www.cs.unc.edu/Courses/comp585-s16

Instructor Info
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Office Hours: Open Door Policy

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Textbooks and Resources
There are no required or recommended textbooks. All recommended or required readings will be available or referenced on the class website. The website is at http://cs.unc.edu/Courses/comp585-s16. This is considered the primary source of information though class announcements take precedence and may take time to be reflected on the website.

Sakai will be used for the submission of assignments and the returning of comments and grades. Do not worry about the title on Sakai. It is the same site for COMP 585, 585H and 185H and Sakai has chosen to use the first course it found, 185H, as the name of the course.

Game development will use freely available software that the student will be expected to download.
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Course Description

Serious Games are training, learning, or propaganda games used in schools, the military, companies, and the public service sector. The premise behind studying serious games is three-fold:

- First, games are a legitimate artistic media and just as we teach and preach through other forms of art, we can do so through games as well. Because people learn through doing, it is a way for players to absorb concepts in an efficient and memorable manner.
- Second, games are a natural way for "digital natives" to interact with concepts. If we want to engage this population, we should do so in a media that interests them.
- Finally, if people are going to play games, perhaps we can give them some games with additional value beyond entertainment (think classics vs. romance novels).

This course is intended as a broad introduction to the field of serious games. We will look at a number of examples of existing serious games in order to learn through case studies. The focus will be on game design but we will also look at development issues. We will explore serious game development and how the components of games may be applicable to other areas.

In order to study serious games, however, we need to study games. We will therefore look at the design of games in general.

The course project this semester is a game that is developed for an outside client. These are people with identified needs. They will be your domain experts who understand the needs, the objectives, the audience and the way to evaluate the result. They are also the people who will need to be adding content to the game

Target Audience

COMP 585 is intended for computer science majors who are interested in the area game development and have the requisite background to be pursuing advanced topics in the field.

Prerequisites

COMP 410 or 411. (We are changing the prerequisite to both COMP 410 and 411 because the course requires the student to learn a new technology on their own and it is the combination of these two courses that assures that he or she has had experience in at least two languages.)
Goals and Key Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, each student will

- Understand all elements of good game design at a general level and understand at least one element in significant detail
- Be able to design elements of a game and explain the benefits of those design decisions
- Be able to identify elements of an existing game and critique the decisions
- Understand the interdisciplinary nature of game design through their team experience
- Understand the elements of games that are universal and those that are unique to video games
- Understand the basics of computer game development
- Be able to use a game development platform for basic tasks
- Be able to instrument a game in order to evaluate its effectiveness
- Be able to critique serious games as games and in their effectiveness

Course Requirements

The major project of COMP 585 is the instructor-mentored team design and implementation of a serious game. Teams will meet regularly with the instructors (alternating weeks between the professor and the teaching assistant). Project grades are based on design, implementation, documentation, effort, teamwork, and accomplishment.

Additional assignments include a research presentation and a game critique. These assignments include a mix of team and individual activities. Class presentations require preparation meetings with the instructor.

The final exam will be take-home and will be the design of a game to meet a specific need (for example, to teach people about the importance of privacy or helping a patient with rehab). During the final exam period students will present their games in a gamefest mode.

Key Exams and Assignments

Besides demonstrating your team game to the instructor on a regular basis, demos of it will be made in class. This will give you the opportunity to gain valuable feedback from classmates and judge your progress compared to other teams. Other key dates will be critique and research presentations; there will be 6 critique dates and research presentations will be scheduled individually.
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Grading Criteria

Course grading weights are as follows:
Team game: 50% (divided evenly between the game and the design)
Research presentation: 25%
Game critique: 15%
Final exam: 10%

Presentation grades include both content and style. While not everyone is a natural speaker, communication is a critical skill and students are expected to master the basics.

Course Policies

Attendance: While attendance is not taken in the COMP 585 class, I expect student attendance at all peer presentations. For other classes, I only point out that there is no textbook in this class because the content is not available in any simple form. If you are interested in the content, you need to listen to lectures. We also have a number of outstanding not-to-be-missed outside speakers during the class.

The course final is given in compliance with UNC final exam regulations and according to the UNC Final Exam calendar.

Honor Code

Collaboration and peer-learning are necessary for team projects. Only the individual assignments are not to be done collaboratively. These are open book, open notes, and open network.

Example Topics

Topics typically covered in the class include the following. Specific topics will be determined by class interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is a game?</th>
<th>Virtual reality</th>
<th>Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serious games</td>
<td>Landscapes</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a critique?</td>
<td>Environments</td>
<td>Augmented Reality Games</td>
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<td>Elements of a game</td>
<td>Game as a business</td>
<td>Game instrumentation</td>
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<td>Game genres</td>
<td>Game addiction</td>
<td>Evaluating effectiveness</td>
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<td>Gameplay</td>
<td>Modding</td>
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<td>Emergent play</td>
<td>Simulations</td>
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<td>Balance in games</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Games and the brain</td>
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<td>Game mechanics</td>
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<td>Graphics</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
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Schedule

The schedule for the class will be published on the web and will be based on the topics of interest to the students.
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Disclaimer
This syllabus may not be updated during the semester. Updated information will be published on the class website. If there are discrepancies between the information here and on the website, the website information is considered definitive.

Last updated 25 January 2016