Transformational Game Design Studio
05-499C / 05-899C
12pm-1:20pm Tuesdays & Thursdays
Professor Jessica Hammer

Course Overview
Are you interested in making games that change how players think, feel, and behave? This class will give you the chance to get hands-on with transformational games for real-world clients who have real-world problems. If you want to spend your semester making awesome games and understanding how players experience them, then this is the class for you.

Important notes:
- No prior knowledge of game design is required for this class. It will help if you have at some point in your life played at least one game.
- Except for the introductory assignments, all projects for this class are group projects. However, the assignments are designed so that you can split up the work to some extent. I encourage teams to find the right strategy for them.
- The games you'll make are primarily *non-digital*. While you can use simple technology, like having players snap photographs on their phones, programming is out of bounds. If you are looking for a technical class, you should look elsewhere.
- We'll be spending as much class time as possible working with the games you make. To get the most out of this class, you should be ready to do substantial independent reading and playing.
- We are partnered with three real-world organizations that have problems they would like to address through games. You should be prepared to communicate professionally with members of these organizations, whether during class time or outside it. If your professional communication skills are weak, consider this a chance to practice and learn!

Be aware that this is a difficult and time-consuming class. As game designers, you must be prepared to work with an iterative design process, to take the time to play-test, and to re-work ideas that just aren't fun. If you hope to make transformational games, you must also take the time to learn about your players and to understand how they experience your game on their own terms. But, hopefully you think all these things are also fun!

By the end of this class, you will know how to apply transformational learning theories to game design; how to decompose a real-world problem from a game design perspective; how to instantiate your ideas in a well-crafted game that aligns its mechanics and goals; how to playtest and iterate a transformational game; how to work effectively in an interdisciplinary team; and how to share back your work to stakeholders. You'll also have three great pieces for your game design portfolio.

Communication and Resources

All resources and course materials will be linked from this document and/or from the [detailed course schedule](#).

For questions about assignments, course administration, or logistics, please contact the course assistants:

Rajat Gupta - rajatg1@andrew.cmu.edu, 412-628-7284 - Office Hours: Thursdays 2 - 4pm
Ricardo Tucker - rftucker@andrew.cmu.edu, 571-439-0085 - Office Hours: Tuesdays 2 - 4pm

For questions about course content, you can reach out to a TA, or you can attend my office hours. You can see open hours, and sign up for a slot, at https://bit.ly/HammerOfficeHours

I can also be reached by email (hammerj@andrew.cmu.edu) or phone (412-463-4875), but please see the course policies for my availability.

Workload and Grading

The required elements for this course are class participation and preparation, and the three projects. Each of these is worth 25% of your grade, as follows:

Class participation and preparation	25%
Assignment 1 (Phipps Conservatory)	25%
Assignment 2 (Philips Sleep)	25%
Assignment 3 (Group Project)	25%

Class participation and preparation

This is a hands-on class based around discussion, design activities, and in-class workshops. You are expected to participate actively and meaningfully during class sessions. While I recognize that participation will look different for different students, this course's philosophy is about learning by doing; if you don't do, you won't learn.

Here are some of the things I will look for:
-   Doing the reading and gameplay assignments
-   Contributing to class discussion
-   Volunteering to playtest your peers' games in class
-   Trying new games and sharing what you thought about them
-   Helping other teams outside of class hours
-   Keeping and sharing a designer's notebook
-   Sharing your research about a client's target domain

You do not have to do *all* of these things to participate successfully in class, and there are certainly things that you will get credit for that I haven't listed here. However, this should give you a taste of what participation means.

Game projects

You will design three non-digital games during this class, working in small groups. By "design" I mean that you will create a set of rules for players, rules that invite fruitful interactivity and interesting play. You will also create prototypes of any materials needed to play your game.

At the end of each project, each *group* should submit the following:
- A theory paper. What is your game trying to accomplish? What course materials or external research are you building on? What did you learn from other games your team played? How are these insights instantiated in your design decisions?
- A process document. How did you do your research? Where did you begin with your design? What changes did you make as you went along? What did you learn from your play-testing? What work did you do that might otherwise be invisible to me?
- A prototype. The prototype should include a copy of the rules of your game, written clearly enough for a stranger to pick them up and play. You will also need to hand in any materials that are needed to play the game, unless those materials are ubiquitous (such as playing cards or dice).
- An independent study proposal. If you were going to work on this game for another semester, what would you do with it? You should incorporate feedback received in your final presentation for the project.
- A credits page listing all support they received, both from other students in the class and from outside sources.

At the end of each project, each *individual* should submit the following:
- A team review. We will ask you to write a short paragraph about the contributions of each team member, including yourself. This is your chance to let us know if there were any issues in how the team worked together, and whether there's anyone whose work you really appreciated.
- A participation summary. If you did anything special outside of class that we might not otherwise be aware of, let us know. For example, if you prefer design journaling to class discussions, submit a substantive excerpt from your journal here. Or, if you spent time helping other teams playtest their games, you can share the feedback you gave them.

Course Policies

Academic integrity policy

This is a team-based class. Collaborate as much as you like; you can't go wrong! Additionally, you are welcome to use any sources you like in your research, including other people. However, **you must credit all sources and collaborators**. Failure to do so will be considered cheating and treated accordingly.

That said, groups should be cautious of borrowing their game mechanics too closely from familiar games. Just as a writing class wouldn't let you copy from Hemingway, this class discourages games which are too similar to Monopoly, Scrabble or other popular pastimes. While this is not an academic integrity violation per se, it will likely hurt your grade.

Attendance policy
This is a hands-on, studio-based class. Attendance is critical to your learning experience. That said, you are an adult and we trust you to be in charge of your own learning.

If you must miss class, no need to ask permission from us. However, you should work it out with your team so that you aren't letting them down. If you are concerned about your participation grade, we offer several out-of-class options for engagement.

If you arrive late, don't disrupt the class. If we are in the middle of a group exercise or playtest, that may mean you have to wait until we are at a stopping point to catch up with what is going on.

Device policy
This is an activity- and discussion-focused class. Do not expect to use your laptop or mobile device during class sessions, except during specific activities such as taking notes on playtests. If you need to take a call or send an urgent email, please step outside so that you don't disturb others.

If you would like to request an exception to this policy, please submit a one-paragraph statement to the course assistants explaining a) what you will use your device for and b) how you will manage the risk of distracting yourself and others from the class activities.

Disabilities policy
My goal is to help all students succeed in this course. If you have a disability and have an accommodations letter from the Disability Resources office, I encourage you to discuss your accommodations and needs with me as early in the semester as possible. I will work with you to ensure that accommodations are provided as appropriate. If you suspect that you may have a disability and would benefit from accommodations but are not yet registered with the Office of Disability Resources, I encourage you to contact them at access@andrew.cmu.edu.

Diversity policy
Designing transformational games means being intellectually, emotionally, and personally committed to understanding the variations of human experience, both inside and outside of games. In this class, we will behave respectfully to one another and to our players. We will examine and disassemble our own preconceptions around factors including, but not limited to, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, sexuality, religion, and culture. At the same time, we will pay careful attention to the realities of the world we live in, and recognize that people may be coming to the (game) table with very different prior experiences. My personal commitments and pedagogical choices are meant to create a classroom culture where

we bravely, lovingly, inclusively and respectfully take risks together. If we encounter problems, I am committed to addressing the issue in collaboration with the students affected.

Email policy
Emails will get the fastest response from me if they have an informative subject line. I also suggest identifying yourself as a student in this course the first time you email me.

I do not respond to course-related emails in the evening, over the weekend, or on Jewish holidays. Plan accordingly.

I will not under any circumstances discuss student grades via email.

Grading and submission policies
All assignments must be submitted to the course assistant at the beginning of the class in which they are due. Digital files may be submitted by email; all non-digital materials, including any printouts, must be submitted in person at the beginning of class.

I do not recommend taking an extension on projects in this class. Your team will still be required to present your work to the client along with your peers, and it will be difficult for you to progress on two projects at once. However, if an extension becomes necessary, please let the course staff know as early as possible.

If you submit your project late without a granted extension, your project will still be graded. However, you will not receive any written feedback for the project, nor will the independent study proposal for that project be approved.

In addition, groups are expected to have playable drafts of their games for the workshop classes. Every group's game will be shown in class as part of a game workshop, whether or not it is complete. If you are not prepared to playtest when your group is called, you may not receive another opportunity to get feedback from your peers.

Except under truly exceptional circumstances, I do not revisit grades once they have been assigned. If you are concerned about your grade in this class, I am always happy to provide more opportunities for participation. For example, you may provide extra playtest feedback for other student groups or begin keeping a design journal. These materials must be submitted along with one of your game projects, so plan ahead.

Recording policy
Creating a classroom culture in which we can do our best creative work is challenging. Some students may benefit from recording the class, while others may be concerned about their privacy. To balance these concerns, the course policy on recording is that no one may record *secretly*, and recordings must remain *private*. If you are going to record a class, inform the instructor and the recording will be announced. Additionally, students who record classes will be

asked to sign an honor contract committing not to share their recordings outside this year's student group.

Student wellness policy
This class is awesome, but it is not and should not be the most important thing in your life. Please make sure that you are taking care of yourself. If you notice that you are experiencing issues such as significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems related to eating/sleeping, I hope that you will seek support. If you believe that these issues are related to your coursework, please speak with me so that I can help. However, problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance. Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) offers free, confidential services to help you manage personal challenges.

More information and resources are located at http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/. Immediate support is always available (24/7): 412-268-2922.