

EAE 6900-022 Spring 2019 User Research

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EAE 6900-022: Game User Research/Experience Spring 2019

Note: I might change this syllabus when and if it benefits you.

Instructor: Ashley ML Brown

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Office: EAE Building, 213

Class Time: 14:00-17:00, Mondays

Class Location: TBA

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

This course is designed to educate students about games user research and playtesting. The course has two components: the first is the examination of design practice from the perspective of a user-experience researcher, and the second concerns the methodology of user research. Additionally, students will learn how to test their games, what to test for, when to use which testing method, and how to communicate feedback to development teams.

Required Texts

None- readings are available in the week-by-week description.

Required Materials

- Digital voice recorder
- Portable gaming device

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand core concepts relating to user engagement which direct playtesting and user research;

- Understand which method of generating data is most appropriate in a variety of situations;
- Gain skills in writing for both academic and industry audiences;
- Manage time as related to development cycles;
- Practice the collecting, organizing, and disseminating data.

Assessments:

All assessments are due by 12:01am on the designated due date. This will allow me enough time to grade and pull examples before class. This will always be before class and will always be on a Monday. No late work will be accepted. Assignments must be submitted on canvas.

Evaluation

Participation 20%

Active engagement in the class activities and discussions is expected. Students should expect to read all the materials ahead of time in preparation for the class (approximately 100 pages per week). As a graduate level seminar most of the learning will occur through readings, discussion, critique and activities directly relate to the materials.

Critical Reading Reactions 20%

Students are expected (for 6 of the weeks) to write a one-page paper showing deep understanding of and the relationship between the materials assigned that week. The bulk of the reaction can be an outline or narrative synthesis of the materials. At the end there must be at least two questions listed, one about the materials, and one question about the topic not answered by the materials.

I am amenable to other reaction formats. Instead of writing the above, you may also express your reaction creatively (e.g. comic, game design document, blog post, vlog, interpretive dance) as long as: 1. It shows an **obvious** connection to the reading materials, 2. You present the work to the class, 3. There are still 2 questions listed for discussion- one about the materials and one about the topic not answered by the materials.

Focus Group (5%)

To demonstrate what has been learned in class, students are expected to conduct a focus group with other students from the programme. The focus group should last no more than 15 minutes and be centred on topics relating to general game ideas in pre-development or ideation phase. The focus group should be audio recorded and then transcribed. A half-page report of the main thematic findings of the focus group should be written. The transcription and half-page analysis should be turned in together.

Observation (5%)

Students will need to observe one another playing a game for not more than 15 minutes. Students should turn in observation notes and a half-page report of the main findings of the observation. The report should include the following information: the experience level of playtester; the part of game played; any trouble players encountered (e.g. where did they get stuck? Were controls unintuitive?) as well as noting when players seemed to have fun?). Finally, the report should conclude with specific recommendations for changing the game.

Thinkaloud (5%)

Students will need to watch and audio (or video) record another student playing a game using the thinkaloud method. The session should not exceed 15 minutes. The session should be transcribed and the transcription submitted along with a half-page report which includes the following information: the experience level of playtester; the part of game played; any trouble players encountered (e.g. where did they get stuck? Were controls unintuitive?) When did they have fun? Finally, the report should conclude with specific recommendations for changing the game.

Survey Part 1 and 2 (5%)

Part 1: Students need to develop their own survey (can be pre-/post-game or during play), and include a copy of survey questions. The survey should be administered to as many peers as possible.

Part 2: The survey and results need to be analysed and written up. A half-page report of the findings should be submitted. The half page report should end with actionable points on how to revise the game.

Playtest Portfolio (40%)

This is an overall presentation of the tests which were conducted over the semester as well as an explanation of all future tests that would be conducted on the game moving forward. The overall goal of this assignment is to give students best practice in documenting their playtests from beginning to end. This documentation not only helps keep record of the data-driven decisions which change the thesis game overall, but also are useful for illustrating the return on investment Games User Research provides.

The playtest plan for each team must contain the following elements. If there are multiple students in each team, we will discuss how to move forward in class:

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"Playtest Plan for {game name}", team name, date, and version.

- Playtest manager.

Which team member(s) will be assigned the task of performing playtests, and recording the results from playtests? If this varies by week, a week-by-week listing should be given.

- Recruiting play-testers.

How will the team attract other people to play the game? Give me a number and a strategy (e.g. recruitment posters, forum posts, evidence you have contacted crimson gaming, your D&D group, or an explanation/justification of why you are only testing internally).

- Playtest logistics.

When and where will the team conduct its weekly playtest sessions? The lab is one possible location. For teams making games for specific devices (iPad/iPhone/Windows Phone 7/PS 3), gameplay testing needs to take into account the number of devices available to the team.

- Testing focus.

For each playtest (past and proposed future) what was the focus of the test? Learnability? Usability? Fun?

- Test script.

What is the sequence of steps that will be performed during playtest sessions? This typically takes the form of a welcome, asking about gameplay experience, having the play-tester play the game (with observation/thinkaloud), then some form of post-play questionnaire or interview. This does not need to provide exact text that play-testers say (it's not a film script), but it does need to provide sufficient detail so that playtests can be performed uniformly over time, to ensure results are comparable across weeks.

- Questionnaire/focus group guide.

For pre- or post-test interaction with players, what specific questions will be asked? Are these free-form questions, or will a questionnaire be used with a predefined range of possible answers? How long do you expect this to take?

- Playtest report.

The playtest report should be an industry-facing document which briefly covers the playtest results. In terms of format, there isn't an industry standard. These reports vary greatly by company with some even doing video reports. Overall, they should be brief and direct. They should focus on what was done, how it was done, and what the results are. The outcomes should be made explicit for dev teams. For those interested in seeing an example template, you can find one [here \(Links to an external site.\)](#)[Links to an external site. \(Links to an external site.\)](#)[Links to an external site. \(Links to an external site.\)](#) from the GUR SIG. We will discuss this in class.

The format of this report is expected to vary somewhat among groups as the content, methods, demographics, etc will be different.

Class Schedule- See modules

Other Relevant Information

ADA Statement

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 the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, (810) 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Faculty and Student Responsibilities

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

Non-Contract Note

Note: The syllabus is not a binding legal contract. The instructor may modify it when the student is given reasonable notice of the modification.

Plagiarism Software Policy

Your professor may elect to use a plagiarism detection service in this course, in which case you will be required to submit your paper to such a service as part of your assignment.

Copyright Notice

By participating in this course, students allow the instructor and the university to use materials submitted to the class for educational use, including but not limited to presentations and research conducted by the instructor.

Accommodation Policy

The instructor shall offer no accommodation based on class content. Students must learn to negotiate personal beliefs with objectionable content in a professional manner. Should students require assistance in this they may solicit informal advice from the instructor, however no formal exceptions nor accommodations shall be provided for content.

Acknowledgements

This syllabus is based on prior syllabi developed by Dr. Kelly Boudreau at Brunel University London. The format (and participation and reading assessments) are shamelessly stolen from Dr. José Zagal.

College of Engineering Addendum:

http://www.coe.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/faculty/semester_guidelines.pdf (Links to an external site.)