COURSE DESCRIPTION:
Explores the genre of alternate reality or pervasive gaming, in which the computer gameplay extends beyond typical screen spaces to any area of the player's life, often employing dispersed unconventional "real world" media, such as websites, emails, instant messaging, text messages, phone calls, online videos, and even direct human interactions. Examines how blurring common distinctions between game and life opens new critical possibilities for artists. Engages students by designing and staging their own alternate reality game as a transformative social action. Open to undergraduates and graduate students. No prerequisites, though prior programming experience is helpful. (ALP, STS)

PRIMARY COURSE TEXT:

SUPPLEMENTARY COURSE TEXTS:

OFFICE HOURS:
Thursdays from 2:00-4:00p in Smith Warehouse, Bay 12, Room 241. Email in advance for appointment.

COURSE FORMAT:
The course is designed to be a group project course in which the students collaborate to build and stage a new pervasive game. Weekly studio sessions are designed to prepare the students for accomplishing this goal and to provide critique and guidance throughout the process. The instructor will guide this process, provide critical feedback, and help the students solve difficult design problems; however, the students will be responsible for the majority of project work.

EVALUATION OF WORK:
Evaluation of student work will be primarily qualitative but numeric grades will also be awarded. Grading will adhere to the following framework:

» **Student performance and participation [40%]**
  Given the predominantly group project format of the coursework, student participation will constitute a large portion of the total course grade. In order to better capture the level of individual student participation throughout the entire course of the project, participation grades will be a composite of the following sources:
  • final instructor-assigned participation grade [20%]
  • two peer-assigned participation grades [20%]
» **Individual research presentations [10%]**
» **Shared evaluation of final game project [50%]**
The shared project grade will be distributed equally for all students and is derived from the following sources:
  • final instructor assessment of project success [30%]
  • final critique jury assessment of project success [10%]
  • game players’ assessment of project success [10%]
ATTENDANCE:
Given the course's group project format, attendance at weekly class sessions is mandatory. More than one unexcused class session absence will lower the final grade by one complete unit (i.e., an A will become an B, an A- will become a B-). With each additional unexcused absence, the grade will drop an additional unit.

CRITIQUES:
As a means for injecting outside feedback and expertise at various stages of the design process, the course includes several critiques in front of invited juries of external reviewers. External reviewers will be local game and new media experts as well as external pervasive and alternate reality game experts who will join the class via videoconferencing. Critique reviewers will be announced as they are confirmed.

COURSE PROJECT:
Students will work with the course instructor to determine the exact subject, implementation, and player audience for the final pervasive game project within the following assignment guidelines:

- the game must be a pervasive or alternate reality game as established by course readings and discussions on the genre;
- the game must be fully designed and implemented as a class group;
- the game must have a narrative element;
- the game must be playable by at least 25 players at once;
- the game must feature both conventional and unconventional communications technologies;
- the game must challenge the players’ accepted perceptions and attitudes towards commonly accepted social dynamics and communications technologies; and
- the game must be fun.

SCHEDULE:
WEEK 01: INTRODUCTION

WEDNESDAY (08/26):
- Course description and expectations.
- Discussion: What are pervasive games?

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT CLASS:
- Read Wikipedia entry on alternate reality gaming.
- Read The Economist, “Serious Fun” (05 March 2009).

THURSDAY (08/27):
- Discuss readings and pervasive gaming principles.
- Assign research presentation topics.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT CLASS:
- Read Guy Debord, “Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play,” Internationale Situationniste #1 [June 1958].
- Read Wikipedia article on Situationist International.

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WEEK 02: GAMES AS POLITICS, GAMES AS ART

WEDNESDAY (09/02):
- “Games as politics, games as art” lecture and readings discussion: McLuhan, Debord / Situationist International.

THURSDAY (09/03):
- “Pervasive gaming as art” lecture and readings discussion: McGonigal.
- Game research presentation desk critiques and work session.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Game research presentations.

WEEK 03: INITIAL GAME RESEARCH

WEDNESDAY (09/09):
- Game research presentations.

THURSDAY (09/10):
- Brainstorm game concepts.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Initial game proposal presentation.

WEEK 04: INITIAL GAME PROPOSAL

WEDNESDAY (09/16):
- Finalize initial game proposal.

THURSDAY (09/17):
- Initial game proposal presentation and critique to local review jury.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Final project proposal presentation.

WEEK 05: FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

WEDNESDAY (09/23):
- Final project proposal presentation and critique by external review jury.

THURSDAY (09/24):
- Begin developing full game script and action map.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Finish game script and action map.

WEEK 06: GAME SCRIPT & ACTION MAP

WEDNESDAY (09/30):
- Evaluate game script and action map.

THURSDAY (10/01):
- Discuss tech assessment guidelines.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Finish technology assessment [proof-of-concept].

WEEK 07: TECH ASSESSMENT & GAME DEVELOPMENT

WEDNESDAY (10/07):
- Discuss tech assessment and implications.

THURSDAY (10/08):
- Continue game development.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Continue game development.
WEEK 08: GAME DEVELOPMENT

WEDNESDAY [10/14]:
- Game development.

THURSDAY [10/15]:
- Game development.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Continue game development and prepare 1-month progress evaluation.

WEEK 09: ONE-MONTH PROGRESS EVALUATION

WEDNESDAY [10/21]:
- 1-month progress evaluation presentation and critique by external critique jury.
- Assess evaluation feedback and continue development.

THURSDAY [10/22]:
- Game development.
- Mid-semester peer participation grading.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Continue game development.

WEEK 10: GAME DEVELOPMENT

WEDNESDAY [10/28]:
- Game development.

THURSDAY [10/29]:
- Game development.
- Begin beta tester recruitment.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Continue game development
- Begin recruiting beta testers.

WEEK 11: GAME DEVELOPMENT

WEDNESDAY [11/04]:
- Finalize functional game prototype.
- Discuss player recruitment and PR.

THURSDAY [11/05]:
- Finalize functional game prototype. (NO CLASS MEETING: instructor out of town)
- Begin game player recruitment and PR.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Finalize functional game prototype and prepare for beta testing.
- Game player recruitment and PR.

WEEK 12: FINAL GAME PROTOTYPE DUE / BEGIN BETA TESTING

WEDNESDAY [11/11]:
- Evaluate final game prototype and begin beta testing.

THURSDAY [11/12]:
- Continue beta testing and project development.

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK:
- Finish final game.
WEEK 13: GAME LAUNCH

WEDNESDAY [11/18]:
- Evaluate beta testing.
- Finalize game development.

THURSDAY [11/19]:
- Prepare for game launch and coordinate documentation strategies.

WEEKEND [11/20-11/22]:
- LAUNCH GAME!

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT SESSION:
- Prepare for game launch and documentation.

WEEK 14: THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEDNESDAY [11/25]:
- THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS

THURSDAY [11/26]:
- THANKSGIVING BREAK: NO CLASS

WEEK 15: POSTMORTEM & DOCUMENTATION

WEDNESDAY [12/02]:
- Game postmortem and documentation.

THURSDAY [12/03]:
- Final peer participation grading and project evaluation.