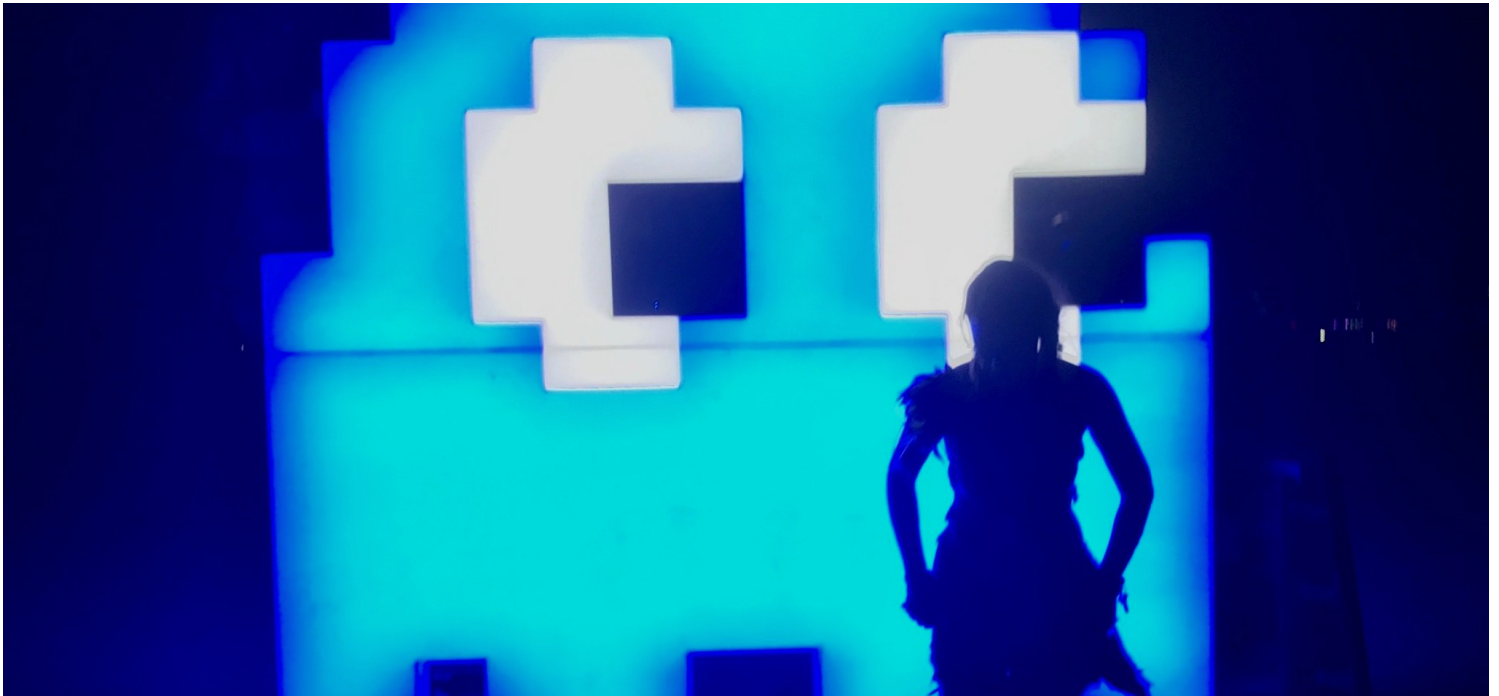# Course Syllabus

> **Note:** This syllabus may be updated periodically during the quarter.
> We will do our best to post an announcement to point out any changes that we make.

Course Details

- Course Level: Undergraduate
- Course Credits: 5
- Course Length: 5 weeks
- Course Medium: Asynchronous lecture and synchronous Zoom section meetings

Teaching Team Information (https://canvas.ucsc.edu/courses/64165/pages/teaching-team) - Details about your professor and TAs for this course, including contact info.

Catalog Description

A generally accessible course in which students explore how video games (and games broadly) shape experiences and express ideas. Students develop novel games, engage in game interpretation, and survey related topics (e.g., game history, technology, narrative, and ethics) through lectures and readings. Programming experience is not required.

About the Course

This course focuses on two questions: *How are games made?* and *What can games be about?* We cover these two questions together, because their answers are closely related.

We will focus on the elements that make computer games compelling — from their rules and simulated worlds to their stories and social experiences. Over the quarter, students will build a series of games and practice analytical writing about games. You can see examples of the types of games that students made in 2019 here: **80K Games (https://80kgames.soe.ucsc.edu/80k-games/)**. (A much bigger archive is in **eScholarship's 80K collection.** ⊟ **(https://escholarship.org/uc/ucsc_games_cmps80k)**) Students in this course will read about games, watch videos about games, and importantly, play games with a critical eye. *No programming experience is necessary.*

After completing this course, students will:

- Be able to choose appropriate game design methods for expressing ideas and creating different player experiences
- Be able to examine the choices made by other game designers and see their strengths and weaknesses
- Develop skills in making link-based, resource-based, and graphical games
- Develop skills in areas like teamwork, giving useful feedback and critique, and understanding how to use feedback from others

Here's a high-level outline of topics and assignments:

- Week 1: We'll start talking about game design, make a small "design exercise" game, and generate ideas for our first project — a link-based game. We'll also start learning about how to do game playtesting and critique, starting by offering feedback on each others' design exercises. Later we'll dig into games and storytelling, talk more about links, and discuss agency — all of which are important for your next project stage — a draft of your link-based game (with the structure but not the content). We'll also do our first critical writing assignment, which will engage the same topics.
- Week 2: Before the holiday, you'll make the "beta" of your link-based game — and after we'll playtest it. Then we'll talk more about choices, get into Zubek's model of gameplay, and start talking about resources and why people play games. You'll create the final version of your link-based game. There will be another critical writing assignment, and they'll keep happening.
- Week 3: We'll look at some big-picture issues, like what game "mechanics" are. We'll also start learning GDevelop, the tool we'll use for the next two projects. Next we'll introduce the fundamental ways that games work ("operational logics"), how games represent domains ("playable models"), and the systems-oriented view of games. We'll make a one-week game/sketch that focuses on resources (with GDevelop).
- Week 4: We'll get deeper into how gameplay unfolds over time and how games make arguments, as well as two approaches to making games about new things (the "alternative" and "expansive" approaches). You'll submit ideas and a team document for your graphical game (using GDevelop). We'll also look at game production stages and project management, as well as taking another look at what motivates people to play games. Your team will create a vertical slice and progression storyboard for your graphical game.

- Week 5: We'll discuss level design and (in preparation for your final critical writing) ways of interpreting games using operational logics and playable models. Your team will create a beta for your graphical game. Finally, as you finish up your game, we'll talk about game "juice" (communicating interactions) and look at the "inventive" approach to opening new game possibilities. Your team will create the final version of your graphical game. Your final critical writing assignment is due, which offers the option of interpreting a game of your choice.

Expected Workload

Using the **EOP Study Formula (https://eop.ucsc.edu/resources/Study%20Formula.html)** , students who are hoping to earn an A for this class should plan on spending about 30 hours a week studying and doing assignments outside of lecture and section.

Section Attendance

Section attendance is mandatory, will be held online via Zoom, and will not be recorded. If you know ahead of time that you will miss section due to illness or other emergency, please contact your section TA as soon as possible to let them know. If you miss section unexpectedly, please contact your section TA as soon as possible. You will be working closely with the other students in your section and the TA and Tutors assigned to your section. **If you miss your section, you can not attend a different section meeting as make up.**

Section Letters, Times, TAs, and Zoom links:

A. TuTh 10:00AM-11:30AM
   - Henry
   - **https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/93768940972?pwd=aE0rZVV1YVZOdkJzc3FmWEtYRjRYZz09** ➦ **(https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/93768940972?pwd=aE0rZVV1YVZOdkJzc3FmWEtYRjRYZz09)**
B. TuTh 12:00PM-01:30PM
   - Henry
   - **https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/92090089224?pwd=Yk13UmxLWGI1bFpvcmZkcjIzbDVBUT09** ➦ **(https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/92090089224?pwd=Yk13UmxLWGI1bFpvcmZkcjIzbDVBUT09)**
C. TuTh 02:00PM-03:30PM
   - Rehaf
   - **https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/97933472284?pwd=WmhqV1NQVVlnTIQ5SDVEUHpUYVo1dz09** ➦ **(https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/97933472284?pwd=WmhqV1NQVVlnTIQ5SDVEUHpUYVo1dz09)**
D. TuTh 04:00PM-05:30PM
   - Kyle
   - **https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/99226180317?pwd=UzhFVnJGSWtpbDR2QWQ1NkRqNnhBdz09** ➦ **(https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/99226180317?pwd=UzhFVnJGSWtpbDR2QWQ1NkRqNnhBdz09)**

Final Exam

This class does not have a final exam. Instead, students will work on small teams to design and build a graphical video game (which will be due week 5) and work individually on critical writing prompts (the last of which will also be due week five).

Exams, Quizzes, and Due Dates

There are no timed exams in this course. Every assignment will be available online ahead of time.

You are expected to turn in assignments on time, so you can keep up with the rhythm of the class. But we know that things happen in life. So we have a one day grace period for every assignment except the final graphical game (we can't finish grading on time if those are late). No questions asked, just request the extra time from your TA.

But please don't plan to turn in everything late. This grace period is available in case you get sick, or your transportation fails, or you unexpectedly have to help a family member. If you're already planning to turn things in late, you won't have any wiggle room if an emergency comes along.

After one day, assignments have a 20% grade penalty. And no assignments can be turned in more than five days late. Late assignments are also much less likely to receive timely feedback.

Of course if an emergency happens that will consume more than a day, you can contact us. Just reach out to the TA for your section meeting.

Grades and Feedback on Assignments

Non-project assignments will be graded within 10 days of their due date.

For project assignments, Reader/Tutors and TAs will try to get grades and feedback posted in 3-4 days. The goal is to get you feedback quickly, so that you can use it to inform your continued work.

When You Have Questions

When you have questions about the course, assignments, reading, etc. always check the syllabus and weekly modules first. We will usually begin each module with reminders about due dates, section activities, etc.

If you don't find an answer there, post your question on the class Discord server in the #course-questions channel. All of the teaching team will watch that channel and you should get a response within 24 hours, but usually much sooner.

If you have a specific question about your section or an assignment grade, contact your section TA and Reader/Tutor.

Course Materials

The main readings for this course will be provided to you, or will be available online or accessible digitally through the **UCSC Library (https://library.ucsc.edu/)**. There will also occasionally be games or texts that you will be expected to purchase, but our goal is to keep student expense for this course to a minimum.

Class Conduct

Treat all others in class with respect. Discriminatory or offensive speech and actions are not tolerated. Cheating and plagiarizing are likewise unacceptable. If you have a problem or concern with class, assignments, life, or otherwise, please talk to me. Communication is key.

Working as Part of a Team

This course involves working collaboratively with others to make games. If you are having issues with a project partner, please let your TA know as soon as possible. Learning about working together as a team is an important part of this course — and learning isn't always easy. If your partner is not contributing, not communicating, or is not following the class community standards, you should let a TA know. We may be able to meet with you to intervene, and we may also be able to do differential grading (which will not be possible if we don't find out about issues until after the course is over).

Classroom Community Standards

With the lecture portion of our class being online, communication tools like Canvas, Discord, and Hypothesis are our classroom. We like a relaxed atmosphere, but please adhere to the class conduct outlined above. Please keep chat channels safe-for-work, meaning no explicit sexual content, violence, political polemics, your questionable anime avatar, etc. Likewise, we don't tolerate rudeness or harassment of your fellow students, Reader/Tutors, TAs, or faculty. That includes racial, gender, ethnic, or religious discrimination, but also just being an inconsiderate jerk. If you choose to behave that way, we'll first give you a warning, then we will ban you from Discord. We also reserve the right to remove you from teams if you demonstrate that you cannot work with others amicably and respectfully. Finally, please use your real name in Discord. It helps keep us accountable.

So be kind, be a mindful citizen, and support one another. We're all in this together.

UCSC Community Principles

The University of California, Santa Cruz expressly prohibits students from engaging in conduct constituting unlawful discrimination, harassment, or bias (see the UCSC **Principles of Community (https://www.ucsc.edu/about/principles-community.html)** and UC-wide **Principles Against Intolerance** ⤷ **(https://equity.ucla.edu/toolkits/principles-against-intolerance/)**). I am committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity and supports inclusivity. We need to work together to build this community of learning. I ask all members of this class to:

- Be open to and interested in the views of others
- Consider the possibility that your views may change over the course of the term
- Be aware that this course asks you to reconsider some "common sense" notions you may hold
- Honor the unique life experiences of your colleagues
- Appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other
- Listen to each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- Keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- Ground your comments in the materials we are studying. Refer frequently to the texts, games, and videos and make them the focus of your questions, comments, and arguments. This is the single most effective way to ensure respectful discussion and to create a space where we are all learning together.

Title IX and CARE

The **Title IX Office (https://titleix.ucsc.edu/)** is committed to fostering a campus climate in which members of our community are protected from all forms of sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual violence, and gender-based harassment and discrimination. Title IX is a neutral office committed to safety, fairness, trauma-informed practices, and due process.

Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, you can receive confidential support and advocacy at the Campus Advocacy Resources & Education (CARE) Office by calling (831) 502-2273. In addition, Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide confidential, counseling support, (831) 459-2628. You can also report gender discrimination directly to the University's Title IX Office, (831) 459-2462. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1. For emergencies call 911.

Student Support

The **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) (https://caps.ucsc.edu/)** office provides a variety of counseling services to undergraduate and graduate students including individual counseling, groups and workshops, couple counseling, crisis services, on-campus psychiatry, the Let's Talk program, ADHD assessment, referrals to off-campus therapy, on-line self-help tools such as WellTrack, as well as a wide range of links to self-help resources on topics ranging from academic success, to depression, to general life issues.

UCSC Writing Center

You can get help with your writing from the **Writing Center (https://lss.ucsc.edu/programs/writing-reading-support1/index.html)**. If you are not very confident with your writing, or if English is your second language, you are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this and other writing resources.

Questions & Contact

Questions about course issues and assignments should start on the class Discord server. Do not post phone numbers or other personal information to Discord or Canvas. First, check to see if a question like yours has already been answered. If it has not, and your question does not raise privacy concerns, post it. If you have a question that requires privacy, or if you are not able to get a satisfactory answer through the forums, ask the TA for your section directly either through a Discord DM or via email. If your TA is unable to answer a question, they will bring it up with me and one of us will follow up with you.

Academic Integrity

This class operates on mutual trust, and with mutual responsibility. As the student, you have the responsibility to perform course work in a timely manner, to the best of your abilities. You will seek help as needed to complete course assignments. As the instructor, I have the responsibility to provide you with learning materials (lectures, readings, etc.), feedback (quizzes, grading), and access to help (sections, office hours) so that you can be successful in this course.

Mutual trust implies that we each assume the other is acting with integrity. Since "acting with integrity" can seem a bit abstract, more detail is provided below.

Except for team-based assignments, you are expected to perform your own work in this class. For this course specifically, this takes several forms:

- You are expected to perform all assigned readings, viewings, and game play assignments. The readings, in particular, are very important in this class.
- You are expected to do your own writing. Talking with other students about ideas is encouraged, but you should structure and write your own assignments. Using AI-generated text is not acceptable. You may use tools such as Grammarly to help you find errors, but do not use it to replace whole sentences (or more) in your text. (You will also find that LLMs such as ChatGPT do not understand the class concepts and will likely confuse you if you employ them.) You may include ideas and text from other writers, but only if properly cited.
- You are expected to learn the game making technologies in the class yourself, and you are expected to understand how your (or your team's) game works. However, you are very welcome to seek help from other students, TAs, Reader/Tutors, or websites on how to use these technologies. If it is helpful, you can reuse snippets of code from other sources, *with attribution.* You can share your code with other students in the class. Note that if you find that your game is approaching the point where over 33% of its non-library code comes from other sources, please contact your section TA to discuss.

If you find yourself in a situation where you do not feel you can complete course assignments without resorting to academic dishonesty, please contact your section TA or the instructors to discuss a deadline accommodation or ways of getting you additional assistance.

For the official university policy on cheating, plagiarism, and other misconduct, please see the **Academic Misconduct Policy for Undergraduates. (https://ue.ucsc.edu/academic-misconduct.html)**

Intellectual Property

The materials in this course are the intellectual property of their creators. As a student, you have access to many of the materials in the course for the purpose of learning, engaging with your peers in the course, completing assignments, and so on. You have a moral and legal obligation to respect the rights of others by only using course materials for purposes associated with the course. For instance, you are not permitted to share, upload, stream, sell, republish, share the login information for, or otherwise disseminate any of the course materials, such as: video and audio files, assignment prompts, slides, notes, syllabus, simulations, datasets, discussion threads. Conversely, any materials created solely by you (for example, your videos, essays, images, audio files, annotations, notes) are your intellectual property and you may use them as you wish.

Illness or Emergency

The UCSC health center does not provide medical excuses. In recognition of this, you should simply email your TA before any section meeting that you are too ill to attend. During group project assignments, be sure to communicate with your team before you miss a section or team meeting. This course has a generous late assignment policy. If an individual assignment will be unavoidably late by more than two days due to illness, please contact your TA. The same policies apply for family emergencies, internet failures, power outage, and so on.

Accommodations

UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. As much as possible, we try to practice "universal accommodation" in this course, with strategies such as moving away from timed testing.

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please make sure you have an Accommodation Authorization Letter from the **Disability Resource Center (DRC), (https://drc.ucsc.edu/)** preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. If there are specific accommodations you'd like to discuss in real time, you can request a meeting with us.

We encourage all students who may benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089, or by email at drc@ucsc.edu. If you feel comfortable, please also reach out to your TA if you need accommodations in section, or even have less-formal accessibility requests relating to section, TA/tutor instruction, or assignments.