

# ART & SCIENCE of INTERACTIVE GAMES



## 1 | Basics

**Instructor:** Ash Rezvani

**Course:** MART 342 Sect: 50

**Email:** ashley.rezvani@mso.umt.edu

**Semester:** Spring 2025

**Office Hours:** McGill 226, Wed 10am-12pm and Thursday 1pm-3pm

**Schedule:** Asynchronous online





## 2 | Course Description & Outcomes

This class is an introduction to the technological achievements and artistic and social impacts involved with the development of interactive games. It will cover the evolution of the gaming profile and the advanced visual, sonic and narrative properties that make interactive games the explosive growth industry that is today. Most of us play video games and it's important for us to develop a critical vocabulary that we can use to talk to others about games as an art form. Most of this class will focus on exploring the fundamental building blocks of games and how to apply them to design engaging and memorable video games.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Understand how games are designed.
2. Communicate and think critically about games.
3. Employ the fundamental concepts of game design (such as interactivity, uncertainty, or combat design) to design engaging gameplay.
4. Create game design documents.

### 3 | Course Structure & Expectations

-  This course is taught asynchronously through videos and other online learning activities. At the start of each new week (Sunday at midnight) the upcoming week's lecture videos, other materials, and assignments will be made available to you on Canvas.
-  **All assignments will be posted on Canvas.** As this is an online course, please frequently check Canvas and your student email. You can use your student email or Canvas to reach me (see the first page of this syllabus for my contact info). Please note that I am **not** available on Sundays and will not respond to any messages sent on Sundays until Monday morning.
-  While you can complete this course fully asynchronously, we will have three **optional** group Zoom discussions during Week 4, Week 8, and Week 12 (times TBD). You can attend these Zoom meetings **OR** complete a write-up for your three play journals (see next two pages for more details). I will post a When2Meet the week before each meeting for you to fill out your availability if you wish to join in on the class discussions, so the meeting times will vary from week to week. All three of these discussions will be recorded so if you are unable to attend you can still watch them if you wish.
-  I'm excited to work with you all to foster a respectful and engaging learning environment for everyone so that we can have a fantastic time learning about games this semester!

### 4 | Accommodations

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting the DSS office. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). For more information, please consult <http://www.umt.edu/disability>

## 5 | Requirements

As this is an online class, reliable internet connection and a device that you can use to complete coursework is essential. Additionally, since we will be playing and analyzing games as part of the course curriculum, having a device that you can use to play games will be essential for your learning process.

There is no required textbook for this class, but you should expect to spend \$100-\$150 purchasing required games. I have provided Steam / other storefront links, but you are welcome to play on whatever platform you wish. Here are your options:

<b>Group A</b>	<u><a href="#">Storyteller</a></u>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>2 hours</b>
<b>(Pick 3 to play)</b>	<u><a href="#">Portal</a></u>	<b>\$10</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>3 hours</b>
	<u><a href="#">Journey</a></u>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>2 hours</b>
	<u><a href="#">Pokémon Go</a></u>	<b>Free</b>	<b>Play 2-3 hours</b>	<b>Infinite (play 2-</b>
<b>Group B</b>	<u><a href="#">Inside</a></u>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>3.5 hours</b>
<b>(Pick 3 to play)</b>	<u><a href="#">Gris</a></u>	<b>\$15</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>4 hours</b>
	<u><a href="#">Florence</a></u>	<b>\$6</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>30 minutes</b>
	<u><a href="#">Olli Olli World</a></u>	<b>\$30</b>	<b>Complete Sunshine Valley, Cloverbrook, and Burntrock areas</b>	<b>Approx. 3 hours</b>
<b>Group C</b>	<u><a href="#">Hades</a></u>	<b>\$25</b>	<b>Complete Tartarus and Asphodel</b>	<b>Approx. 10 hours</b>
<b>(Pick 2 to play)</b>	<u><a href="#">Baldur's Gate 3</a></u>	<b>\$60</b>	<b>Finish main quest-line of Act 1</b>	<b>Approx. 10 hours</b>
	<u><a href="#">Halo: Combat Evolved</a></u>	<b>\$10-40 depending on storefront</b>	<b>Complete game</b>	<b>Approx. 10 hours</b>
	<u><a href="#">Marvel's Spider-Man 2</a></u>	<b>\$70</b>	<b>Play all main story missions through Hunt to Live, Live to Hunt</b>	<b>Approx. 10 hours</b>



## 6 | Course Work & Assignments

All homework has been designed with your scheduling needs in mind. That being said, I know things come up in life – if you know you will be submitting work late, please email me ahead of time and I can waive the late penalty for you. Please do not hesitate to reach out and email me if you have any questions about assignments!

If you are struggling with managing your time, please come talk to me and I will help you get back on track. The point of this class is for you to learn, and I am happy to help in any way that I can if you find yourself confused or having problems!



### Participation: 45% of course grade

Most of the time there will be activities (discussions, quizzes, etc.) for you to complete on Canvas after you have gone through the week's material. Completing these activities counts toward Participation. **Due:** See Canvas.

### Play Journals: 30% of course grade

You will turn in 3 play journals over the course of the semester, each worth 10% of your course grade. These will involve playing the assigned games and answering questions about your experience as it relates to the course material. You can either write responses to these questions and submit them on Canvas, **OR** show up to our optional Zoom discussions. If you come to the Zoom meetings and participate in the discussion, you **do not** have to submit a write-up. **Due: Weeks 4, 8, & 12** either in-class or, if written, submitted online by the end of the week.

### Game Design Document: 25% of course grade

At the end of the semester you will design a short game of your own, applying concepts from class. You will submit a detailed game design document to illustrate your idea. **Due: Friday, May 9th by 11:59pm.**

## 7 | Late Policy

For every day the assignment is late after the due date, 10% of the maximum will be deducted from the assignment score. I would rather you complete the work and learn from it than not do it at all! **No assignments will be accepted once they are more than a week late.**

⇒ In the case of a technical issue at the deadline, you **MUST** send me a screenshot of the error message AND a copy of your assessment to my email at the time of occurrence. If you leave it to the last minute and simply time out while uploading, this is **NOT** an acceptable reason for late submissions.

## 8 | Grades

100 - 94	A	76-74	C
93-90	A-	73-70	C-
89-87	B+	69-67	D+
86-84	B	66-64	D
83-80	B-	63-60	D-
79-77	C+	59-below	F

## 9 | Academic Integrity

Collaboration is great, and I encourage you all to work together and learn from one another! If you work together with someone else please make sure that you let me know and note it on your assignment. However, cheating and plagiarism **will not** be tolerated. Plagiarism is defined as, "Representing words, ideas, data, or materials of another person as one's own, the student's own previous work as if it were the student's own original work, or content derived directly from a generative artificial intelligence tool as if it were the student's own original work."

You should familiarize yourself with [UM's Student Code of Conduct](#).

## 10 | Late Drops & Incompletes

**Late Drops:** The University's policy on drops after **45** days of instruction is very specific. Please refer to the Registrar's office for more details. There are five circumstances under which a late drop might be approved: registration errors, accident or illness, family emergency, change in work schedule, no assessment of performance in class after this deadline. There must be documented justification for one of these circumstances.

**Incompletes:** Incompletes are only given at the discretion of the instructor. Guidelines for receiving an incomplete are listed in the catalog which includes having **a passing grade up to three weeks before the end of the semester** and being in attendance. "Negligence and indifference are not acceptable reasons." Also note that there may be financial aid implications.

# 11 | Weekly Schedule

Play 3 games from **Group A** during these 4 weeks

## Week 1

1/16-1/26

## Games & Our World

*Defining games & game design*

## Week 2

1/27-2/2

## Interactivity

*Affordances, representation, and simulation*

## Week 3

2/3-2/9

## The Building Blocks of Games

*Rules & mechanics*

## Week 4

2/10-2/16

## Goals & Opposition

*Win & lose conditions, uncertainty, challenges, and failure*

## Week 5

2/17-2/23

## Decision-Making and Feedback

*Reward types, decision-making, and player agency*

## Week 6

2/24-3/2

## Puzzles & Progression

*Difficulty curves and flow*

## Week 7

3/3-3/9

## Aesthetics

*Art and audio*

## Week 8

3/10-3/16

## Player Experience

*Avatars, engagement, and player types*

## Week 9

3/17-3/23

## Spring Break!

## Week 10

3/24-3/30

## Combat 1

*Pillars of a combat system, player abilities & skills*

## Week 11

3/31-4/6

## Combat 2

*Enemy archetypes, anatomy of a move*

## Week 12

4/7-4/13

## Narrative

*Narrative design & embedded vs. emergent narrative*

## Week 13

4/14-4/20

## Ideation

*Design values and how to brainstorm*

## Week 14

4/21-4/27

## Game Design Documentation

*Iterative design process, general documentation, and schematics*

## Week 15

4/28-5/4

## Wrap Up & GDD Drafts

*Submit a draft of your GDD for feedback. Final Due: **Fri, May 9th***

Work on your game design documents!

## 12 | Other Useful Information

### **Cultural Leave Policy**

Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.

### **Food & Housing Insecurity**

Any student who faces challenges securing food or housing, and believes that this could affect their performance in this course, is urged to contact any or all of the following campuses resources.

### **Food Pantry Program**

UM offers a food pantry that students can access for emergency food. The pantry is open on Tuesdays from 12 to 5 PM and Fridays from 10 AM to 5 PM. The pantry is located in UC 119 (in the former ASUM Childcare offices). Pantry staff operate several satellite food cupboards on campus (including one at Missoula College). For more information about this program, email [umpantry@mso.umn.edu](mailto:umpantry@mso.umn.edu), visit the [UM Food Pantry website](#) or contact the pantry on social media (@pantryUmn on twitter, @UMPantry on Facebook, um\_pantry on Instagram).

### **ASUM Renter Center**

The Renter Center has compiled a [list of resources](https://medium.com/griz-renter-blog) (<https://medium.com/griz-renter-blog>) for UM students at risk of homelessness or food insecurity. Students can schedule an appointment with Renter Center staff to discuss their situation and receive information, support, and referrals.

### **TRiO Student Support Services**

TRiO serves UM students who are low-income, first-generation college students or have documented disabilities. TRiO services include a textbook loan program, scholarships and financial aid help, academic advising, coaching, and tutoring. Students can [check their eligibility](http://www.umn.edu/trioss/apply.php) ([www.umn.edu/trioss/apply.php](http://www.umn.edu/trioss/apply.php)) for TRiO services online. If you are comfortable, please come see members of the teaching team. We will do our best to help connect you with additional resources.

### **The Writing and Public Speaking Center**

[The Writing and Public Speaking Center](#) provides one-on-one tutoring to students at all levels and at any time in the writing process.

### **The Math Learning Center**

[The Math Learning Center](#) has in-person, drop-in tutoring to help students with homework and test preparation needs. Check their website for drop-in hours and location.

### **UM Information Technology**

Get the technology, tools, and services you need, whether you are a student, faculty, staff, or someone partnering with the University of Minnesota. Visit the [UM IT webpage](#) for services and self-help articles, or contact the help desk directly by calling 406.243.HELP (4357) or emailing [ithelpdesk@umontana.edu](mailto:ithelpdesk@umontana.edu).