

Serious Game Design

PART ONE: THESIS

The gaming industry as it stands is infamous for its violence, its sexism, its vacuous “shoot ‘em ups” and ridiculous plots; however, there are those trying to convert the industry, and tap some of its massive potential for learning, fostering thought, and inspiring creativity.

I wish to be one of these individuals.

I wish to use your Custom Design Major Program to research, plan, design, and breath life into games, pulling from social sciences, arts, great literature, life sciences, and business classes to craft magical, immersive and meaningful experiences from start to finish. I wish to walk out of your program, head high, knowing I have the experience and the knowledge to make my way on my own, working for myself, bringing my visions to life.

PART TWO: VISION ELABORATION

Like several other forms of media, many video games center around an idea of war, and of death. Their narratives tend to glorify the hero, the battle, and the very act of killing. However, right now hundreds of soldiers and civilians’ lives are being destroyed by real war, war that is inglorious and brutal and has no heroes. My personal experiences with war were nothing more than what the press feeds us: sensational soundbites and grainy, distant images of explosions. I was shaken, shaken awake, when on reddit, I read pages upon pages of posts from traumatized war vets, who realized after being forced to brutalize children for the sake of their cover, or shoot men without questioning- maybe innocent men- realized that they “weren’t the heroes”. I was further awakened after reading a book for a literature class that was set in Afghanistan during the series of civil wars, some of the many conflicts the US sent weapons into. I saw that we, as Americans, will support war that we don’t know the first thing about, that we will never do the research to learn about. Meanwhile, day after day, the people of that faraway country will die in the hundreds, pierced by misfired bullets, shredded by mines, or buried in the rubble of their own houses. When I opened my eyes, I looked upon a world so vastly different from the exciting, heroic, triumphant battles fought in colorful pixels on my cousin’s TV screens, it sickened me.

That is not to say every game is like this. Already, companies have seen the moral morass spawned by such a presentation of war, and so they waded in to add their own, more critical, more condemning commentaries. ‘This War of Mine’ was released in 2014 by 11 Bit Studios, with the tagline “*war, not everyone is a soldier*”. You play as a refugee, a civilian who is struggling to live, and keep your band alive as snipers target you and food runs short; the goal of the game, deeper than your character’s survival, is increased awareness for the plight of

innocents caught in crossfire. Money earned from this game goes to helping children of these refugee families.

Other than encouraging donations or supporting charities, however, it is rare for a game to take a stand for those responsibilities that we, as civilians here in the United States, have in times of war. One of the largest, most far-reaching problems that the First World is crippled by is apathy. We are apathetic. We do not stand up for the people whose lives are destroyed by the actions of our leaders. So, I would propose a game that juxtaposes the experience of a war vet on the soil of a foreign country with the ignorance that he finds when he returns home. The more he talks to his girlfriend and the deeper his therapy goes, the further he sinks into his flashbacks of the brutal war (which would form the bulk of gameplay), trying to reconcile the irreconcilable worlds he is torn between. Gamers would walk away from his story feeling the need to try to reconcile those worlds for him. We should be inspired to prove him wrong and say that America is not a careless, bloody country of passive, ignorant aggression. We should be inspired to research the wars that our soldiers are fighting in, and that our drones are killing in. We should be inspired to take an active role in the politics of our foreign affairs, as well as our aid efforts.

This is simply an example game, and war is simply one example out of the many problems I can and will strive to address, out of the innumerable problems human societies face.

For a better look at some of my current work, consider the game idea I have underway for this summer, as a test drive experience for being a game designer:

While I was leafing through some National Geographic Magazines, I encountered their article "The Truth about GMO", which defended the GMO movement in the face of a larger food crisis that may be looming in the very heavily populated future. It's been a personal issue for me, ever since I, on my own, managed to convince my somewhat hippy family that GMO had benefits that needed reevaluation, not universal social condemnation. The article did an excellent job showing the very real impact that such crops can have in third world countries, where good harvests are the difference between having a future, and not. It inspired me to tell a story about GMO and other more sustainable farming practices (like smart organic farming), from the point of view of these farmers living on the edge, in poverty, who so desperately need the knowledge that we, in our superstitious fear of change and innovation, are keeping from them. Gameplay will have you making all the same decisions the farmer makes, purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and other equipment at the start of every season, then working (in the style of a time-management arcade game) to tend to your crops, build infrastructure such as canals and terraces, and keep your family afloat despite environmental and man-made setbacks. The goal would be to not only make gamers see the benefits of new farming innovations, both GMO strains and organic techniques, but to forge personal connections between characters in the third world, and players in the first, and to set these players face-to-face with the consequences of remaining ignorant and fearful of these advances in agriculture.

PART THREE: CUSTOM DESIGNED PLAN

Art is the core of my vision; the nuts and bolts that drive the machine of my crusade. I've often been told by various mentors and role models that 'art and craft are joined together; the appearance, tone, mechanics, syntax, shape, color of a thing must match its message and its goal.' Through the skills that I will learn in my Animation and Game Development classes -- rendering, rigging, animating-- I will be capable of taking an extraordinarily hands on approach to the design of all of my games, by having a fluency in all the visual tools and tricks that games may use.

Likewise, I will be taking a smaller number of computer science classes, to give me a concrete vocabulary with which to talk to my programmers. As much as the art is what the gamer bonds with emotionally and instinctually, the mechanics, the hard number crunching behind the scenes is what challenges them cerebrally. I need a strong command on both the art and the code then, if I am really to create games that change minds, and change lives. .

As far as the design of my games, I will first focus each on a core message: to reevaluate consumerism, or to feel the damage of stereotypes such as racism or sexism, or give a narrative on poverty. My studies in psychology and sociology will be the foundation of this message. Through classes such as "The Problems of Modern Youth", I will grow to understand portions of my audience, to cater games to them that don't just entertain them, but give them confidence, an avenue of stress relief and a place for creative healing. I will not only gain insight into problems to tackle, but also into ways by which to tackle them: before anyone can plant ideas or relieve anxiety, or offer any of the hundreds upon thousand of other benefits that gaming could have, they must understand how the mind works, and this I will learn in classes such as "Cognitive Psychology" and "The Psychology of Learning".

Then, through the exposure to fiction given to me in English and in Writing courses, I will take this message and rework it, transposing it into a different context: familiar enough for the moral to still be identifiable, and foreign enough to retain the raw power of a new experience. These classes will give me a vocabulary of archetypes, tropes, and genres to both draw upon and recreate. This seems unrelated and unnecessary to a field like Game Design, but jumping into my games without a knowledge of the great rhetoricians that came before me is akin to majoring in art without taking Art History, or try to genetically modify a plant without knowing its ancestry. Just like a need a vocabulary of coding to speak to my programmers, I need this vocabulary of literary history to spin a story that captures its listeners, entertains, makes them laugh, makes them cry, makes them think. There is no better example to look to than a book.

Finally, perhaps the most important step is to release my creations to the world. Management and Entrepreneurship are my gateway to this. Management will teach me how to lead within an organization, how to build a team who will stand behind me and my crazy vision. Entrepreneurship then broadcasts the final product to the world, by learning how to reach out

beyond my team to investors, and at last, the consumer. My dream position would be to use this knowledge to head my own team of indie game specialists, a team that already includes myself and my boyfriend, who is just as passionate about spreading positive messages through gaming. I could take on the dual role of artist and art director, if it were necessary to bring additional artists into the production. Through the experience I would gain from the Management portion of my major, however, I would be just as capable of fitting into a larger company as an artist, a lead artist, and even a creative director.

PART FOUR: CUSTOM DESIGNED DEFENSE

The custom design major is the most vital component of this plan. There is no combination of programs- minors, double majors, double minors, concentrations - nothing that would give me a solid foundation in four very different areas: Game Design, Psychology/Sociology, English/Writing, and Entrepreneurship/Management. However, these foundations are the core of my games, and the heart of my design process. To remove one of them would be amputating a vital limb from my desired *corpus* of work.

Not only this, but there are another set of classes existing outside my foundation programs: my inspiration classes. For example, if I became inspired to tackle the sensitive subject of evolving gender within my games, I would want to take a course or two within women's studies or sexuality. Alternatively, if I found myself called by environmental issues instead, such as in my game about farming with GMO and other new techniques, ecology and sustainability classes would be a necessity, in order to fully understand the problem that would be the basis of my game. In a normal major/minor setting, my electives would probably be tied up already in simply trying to cover all my 'foundation' classes.

The custom design major gives me both the space, and the flexibility to choose, and change around, this smaller group of 'inspiration' classes. Without the custom-design major, my schooling would be a stressful, frustrating struggle against time, as I tried repeatedly to dredge up the time to take credits I want outside my program of study, while overloaded with work and requirements from within my program of study.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSION

I know that my Custom-Design major will not be a walk in the park either, but my messages are messages that need to be spread. There is a huge industry right now, with millions of consumers, an industry that only grows as you read, but the content lags behind its capabilities. I have simply one question for the world: why not have both diverting content and inspirational capabilities?

Custom-Designed Major Application
Plan of Study – Spring/Summer 4COP

Class Status: Freshman

Term: FALL 2015

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
The Drexel Experience	UNIV 101		1
Intro to Multi-Discipline Methods	CSDN 101		1
Principles of Communication	COM 111		3
Digital Design Tools	DIGM 100		3
General Psychology I	PSY 101		3
Design I for Media	VSST 108		3
Intro to Honors Program	HNRS 200		1
			TOTAL: 15

Class Status: Freshman

Term: WINTER 2016

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Civic Engagement	CIVC 101		1
Knowledge by Design Seminar	CSDN 102	CSND 101	1
Expos Writing & Reading	ENGL 101		3
CPU Graphics Imaging	ANIM 140	DIGM 100	3
Design 11 for Media	VSST 109	VSST 108	3
Phys Psych	PSY 212		3
Theory & Models of Com	COM 210		3
			TOTAL: 17

Class Status: Freshman

Term: SPRING 2016

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Persuasive Writing & Reading	ENGL 102	ENGL 101	3
Overview Ent/Arts Mgmt	EAM 130		3
Narrative Psych	PSY 345	PSY 101/112	3
Sense & Perception	PSY 213		3
CPU Graphics Imaging 11	ANIM 141	ANIM 140	3
Career Mgmt/ Profess Dev	COOP 101		
			TOTAL: 15

Class Status: Freshman

Term: SUMMER 2015

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
NO CLASS			

Custom-Designed Major Application
Plan of Study – Spring/Summer 4COP

Class Status: Sophomore

Term: FALL 2016

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Anatomy and Physiology	ANAT 101		5
Arts, Culture, Society	EAM 350		3
Intro to Soc Psych	PSY 150		3
Animation 1	ANIM 211	ANIM 141	3
Creative Concept Design	DIGM 223		3
			TOTAL: 17

Class Status: Sophomore

Term: WINTER 2017

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Cust-Des Major Seminar	CSDN 203	CSDN 102	1
Animation 11	ANIM 212	ANIM 211	3
Adv Soc Psych	PSY 350	PSY 150	3
Science Fiction	ENGL 303	ENGL 103	3
Leading Start-Ups	ENTP 210		3
Applied Bio Diversity	BIO 101		3
			TOTAL: 16

Class Status: Sophomore

Term: SPRING 2017

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Organic Modeling	ANIM 247	ANIM 141	3
Sociology and Future	SOC 110		3
Mythology	ENGL 335	ENGL 103	3
New Tech in Comm	COM 240		3
Computer Prgming 1	CS 171		3
Entrepren & New Tech	ENTP 329		3
			TOTAL: 18

Class Status: Sophomore

Term: SUMMER 2017

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Digital Storytelling	DIGM 350		3
Social Problems	SOC 115		3
Writing Fiction	WRIT 302	ENGL 103	3
Media Effects	COM 385		3
Computer Prgming 2	CS 172	CS 171	3
Overview of CPU Games	GMAP 260		3
			TOTAL: 18

Custom-Designed Major Application
Plan of Study – Spring/Summer 4COP

Class Status: Junior

Term: FALL 2017

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Character Animation 1	ANIM 314	ANIM 212	3
Psych Problem Modern Y	PSY 222		3
Young Adult Fiction	ENGL 304	ENGL 103	3
Media and Identity	COM 246		3
Global Entrepreneurship	ENTP 370		3
			TOTAL: 15

Class Status: Junior

Term: WINTER 2018

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Character Animation 11	ANIM 315	ANIM 314	3
Positive Psych	PSY 445	PSY 101	3
Dynam of Intrprsnl Comm	COM 311	COM 210	3
Industrial Psych	PSY 250		3
Social Entrepreneurship	ENTP 270		3
			TOTAL: 15

Class Status: Junior

Term: SPRING 2018

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Co-op	COOP 201		
Psych of Lang	PSY 336		
			TOTAL: 3

Class Status: Junior

Term: SUMMER 2018

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Co-op	COOP 201		
Game Dev Foundation	GMAP 345	GMAP 260	3
			TOTAL: 3

Custom-Designed Major Application
Plan of Study – Spring/Summer 4COP

Class Status: Senior

Term: FALL 2018

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Senior Capstone	CSDN 304	N/A	3.0
Game Dev Workshop 1	GMAP 377	GMAP 345	3
Cogn Psych	PSY 330	PSY 101/112	3
User Experience	WBDV 280	DIGM 100	3
Writing in Cyberspace	WRIT 400		4
			TOTAL: 16

Class Status: Senior

Term: WINTER 2019

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Senior Capstone	CSDN 305	N/A	3.0
Game Dev Workshop 11	GMAP 378	GMAP 377	3
Experimental Games	GMAP 348	GMAP 377	3
Psych of Learning	PSY 325	PSY 101/112	3
Launch It! Early Stages	ENTP 440		3
Adv. Prgming Tools & Tech	CS 265	CS 172	3
			TOTAL: 18

Class Status: Senior

Term: SPRING 2019

Name	Course ID	Pre-Requisites	Credits
Senior Capstone	CSDN 306	N/A	3.0
Serious Games	GMAP 347	GMAP 378	3
Hmn Factors & Cogn Eng	PSY 332	PSY 101/112	3
Message Design & Eval	COM 350		3
Topics in Gaming	CS 445	GMAP 345	3
Thought Leadership	ENTP 410		3
			TOTAL: 18