

MITOCW | MITCMS_608S14_ses15

The following content is provided under a Creative Commons license. Your support will help MIT OpenCourseWare continue to offer high quality educational resources for free. To make a donation or view additional materials from hundreds of MIT courses, visit MIT OpenCourseWare at ocw.mit.edu.

PROFESSOR: All right, I'm going to start handing out assignment three. And on the back of assignment three are the changes that we've made to the syllabus, which is mostly in the order of reading, but also we've lifted some of the games that-- we've [INAUDIBLE] some of the games that that we're going to [INAUDIBLE]. Because basically we change the assignment three in the middle of the semester. Who actually read ahead to figure out what assignments are you on?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: How long ago did you read ahead?

AUDIENCE: Like two weeks ago.

PROFESSOR: Two weeks ago. OK. So whatever was online is different from what it is now.

AUDIENCE: OK.

PROFESSOR: But if you just read like the one line description--

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: It's that. But all of the text that we wrote up completely changed. So this is [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: What?

AUDIENCE: Are there any [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: It's mostly rearranged. Mostly just scheduling, rather than the actual readings. I don't think we introduced any new reading, except for maybe [? MO ?] 7, which is [INAUDIBLE]. That's been on our website for a while now though.

AUDIENCE: I did all the reading.

PROFESSOR: Yep. So I don't know if you've seen that one. [INAUDIBLE]. Simulation 101. It's like a series of webpages. It's all online on the--

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: OK. All right. So you better read it. So I'm just reading this because people are still cutting things up. So I figure I might just talk. So assignment three is going to be about applying everything that you've learned so far. Remember, assignment one was kind of just getting used to this, the discipline iterating. Of prototyping, of iterating. I feel that you've all shown like a lot of good experience and skill in doing this.

One thing while I saw those presentations it reminded me that we actually have notes about all of your individual write ups, that I should copy and paste into the grading section of the [? fellow ?] webpage.

AUDIENCE: I'll do that next.

PROFESSOR: Oh great.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

PROFESSOR: That'll be some help. Yeah, I just forgot to do that. So you'll also be getting a little bit more detailed feedback on your individual writeups. Like, in terms of the game, designing things are coming along pretty well. And if you want more feedback on the individual elements of each game that you worked on in the past we could totally get that to you. I'm just guessing a lot of you are probably more eager to just move on to the next project.

So I can talk about that. Remember, assignment one was about the skill of prototyping and iterating. Assignment two was about trying to come up with, on some part holistic aesthetic experience. And assignment three we're asking you to apply that to the end of trying to depict the perspective of somebody who lived all this in the real world. That person could be a very specific person, like I'm going to bring up some examples here. Campaign Manager 2008 specifically states that you are the campaign managers of either the McCain or the Obama campaigns, that you are-- that's one person.

Now, the powers of what you have in the game is really a whole network of campaigners, but you're the person who is calling the shots. You are trying to win the electoral college though this. We probably don't have time to play this, but anyone who wants to take a look at what's in here, all the bits, the way how each state is represented, how the United States is represented, the fact that you're basically just trying to win points among demographics by raising hot button issues. That's all this game is about, [? and it's ?] putting you in the shoes of

a very specific person who actually exists in the real life. An alternative will be something like Tulipmania 1637, which is a game about-- anyone want to hear about the Great Tulip Crash of 1637 in the Netherlands?

AUDIENCE: [LAUGHING]

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: One of the first bubble markets-- who [INAUDIBLE] bubble markets? You've got to have heard about it in the past four years-- eight years. 2008 was a real long time ago. Oh, geeze. OK.

AUDIENCE: [LAUGHING]

AUDIENCE: It's OK. Next one's coming up next year, so it's cool.

PROFESSOR: Oh, yeah, I read those articles, too. So this is about prices of tulips, flowers, being driven up by speculation to horrendous amounts and trying to be smart and exiting at the right time and often not being quite pulling it off at the right time and losing your shirt in the process. And this game puts you in the shoes of a [INAUDIBLE] speculator, someone who is trying to play this market at that time, when the market is behaving in this very, very volatile, incredible increases and yet even faster crashes.

[? It's ?] actually designed by a professor in Syracuse University, Scott Nicholson, who runs [INAUDIBLE] with Scott, and it's pretty awesome. If you like playing it, you can see the little token, little flower heads, and you get to do things like try to convince buyers to buy at a higher price than what you had originally bought it at. Things like that. [? Care to talk ?] a little bit about E3?

GUEST SPEAKER: Yeah. So I chose three games. So what we're asking you to do is choose a real world historical, political, cultural, economic situation, so you might be choosing some problematic situations like the conquest of Africa by Europeans. So it's a game about African exploration during the 19th Century. It's made in the 70s.

They tried to be less problematic. They were not entirely successful because the point of view of this game is entirely of the European explorer entering this forbidden Africa and finding things there, and basically finding Zulu tribes, which were not all throughout Africa, of course, and fighting other explorers who had died there previously, biblical things like King Solomon's mine, things like that. But mechanically, it is an interesting way to talk about exploration, not so

much about the bigger issues around what imperialism was, what that kind of conquest was.

If you're thinking about doing a live action game, we've got a couple of different versions of how to do live action games. It can be a live action playing game. It can be a party game, a conversation game. This is a book called *Heads of State: Nine Short Games About Tyrants*. We've got-- I haven't played many of these yet, but we've got, basically, the first game here it is called *Coup D'etat*.

GUEST SPEAKER: Basically, why are dictators what they are? How did they become a dictator? In this case, Gaddafi's idolization of Egyptian president Gamal Nasser, reading Nasser's philosophy of the revolution, thinking about plots against the Egyptian monarchy, but also entering into the Military Academy in Benghazi in 1963, and then having other officers in training with him organizing the group that's going to overthrow the pro-western Libyan monarchy.

Basically your dictators in school, learning how to be future leaders in one of these games. So what this book is trying to do is try to give you multiple different viewpoints of tyranny and of those kind of problematic things. There's communism in here. There's maoism in here. A game about the disappearances of people, so if you're thinking about making a game about Argentina in the '70s, good luck, but they tried it, so you can see what they did.

And then another version is Dog Eat Dog. It's a game about imperialism, in particular the assimilation of the Pacific Islands. The great thing about this game is you've got people who are acting as the new colonizers, but you've also got people who are acting as the native populace, and the different interactions that happen there. Basically, if you decide you want to do something that's coming to-- trying to do something more serious, if you try to do something with more of a problematic tone, you might want to consider having multiple different perspectives, or saying a similar perspective, but at least understanding what the other different perspectives are of the people who are inside of that system. It's just good to take account of--

PROFESSOR: I think if every player is taking on the perspective of a single person, that's OK, even if different players in the same game are taking different perspectives. I think that might complicate things a little bit because, again, you end up in the situation where you're designing basically two very different kinds of games that are interacting, but some of you have had experiences with it and made it work. So it's certainly not out of the question. What we don't want is a situation where you are simultaneously two people, right? It's like I am controlling the survivors and the

zombies simultaneously. That's a little bit weird. Yep!

AUDIENCE: Can we use a circle persona who has multiple personalities? [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: That is-- We can talk about that, but good luck.

AUDIENCE: So if it's really about the [INAUDIBLE] interesting way of pulling it out? Maybe there are multiple players playing those individual personalities? I think the biggest focus is the system, right?

PROFESSOR: It should be less about the individual person, because I get the perspective of that person, but more about the conditions in which that person lived in.

GUEST SPEAKER: Yes.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] game before where you could be the president of multiple corporations. And like, in one corporation you'd just like embezzle all their money [INAUDIBLE]

GUEST SPEAKER: That sounds like [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Yeah, and that's where ostensibly on a lot of the [INAUDIBLE] games, your actual role is one of a robber baron, of a capitalist who lived in the 1800s, who owns shares in multiple companies. You're not really the president of a single company, but you may take on that role somewhere in the middle of the game, but your role is not defined by being president. Your role is being defined as being a person with a lot of money in the 1800s, and trying to increase that wealth through railroad systems.

AUDIENCE: Can it be satirical?

GUEST SPEAKER: Yes.

PROFESSOR: Absolutely. Just because you may take your game to make a game about a serious topic doesn't necessarily mean your game needs to be dull or somber and I've got some examples of that.

So how many of you play Crunch? [INAUDIBLE] Nope? Two-person card game. You are a CEO of a bank. You are trying to get out of the bank with as large a golden parachute as you possibly can. To hell with the health of the bank itself. This game encourages you to take advantage of the government's generosity in bailing you out. It encourages you to hide cards

on your body to secret fund your own personal wealth, to be able to take money out of your own bank and put it into your own personal accounts, so that it becomes your fortune rather than the banks fortune. To make really risky loans that may never pay out. It came out in 2009, so you can understand why this game was made. This company, Terrible Games, basically makes satirical games that comment on real world situations, but this one is very, very clearly, you are a banker. Well, the satirical version vision of a banker.

They have another game called the War on Terror, which I did not bring up because it's a little bit unclear who you are in that game. You're supposedly a world power, but are you the President? Are you the government? Sort of like all of the government at once. Or are you some sort of media construction of what that country is because you can get branded as evil, for instance. [INAUDIBLE] evil in it. But then that doesn't actually change your role in the game, which is I think part of the point of game. The point is that whether you are a terrorist state or not you kind of all engage in the same sort of activities anyway. Just being branded as evil just let's you do it with a little bit more impunity. Anyway that game's not a great example of what we're looking for because who you are in the game is not quite well defined.

AUDIENCE: Are these games usually a set number of players or do they have [INAUDIBLE] range like 2 to 4, or is it [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: This is a two-player game. Specifically, Campaign Manager 2008, again a two-player game. Tulipmania has a range. It really depends on your ability as a game designer to design for different people, but for this assignment in particular we're asking for two to four people, but a specific number. So you can design a two-player game, a three-player game, or a four-player game, but you don't need to make the game playable by a range, and that means you can tune it very specifically for a fixed number of players.

The gentlemen of the South Sandwich Islands is an absurd game of logic discovered in 1821, which is not true at all. It was really kick-started as a project about three years ago. Four years ago, maybe? Yeah. This is interesting because this is probably right at the edge of what I would consider acceptable for classical. This is a game about sort of fantastical courtship where you are trying-- where you are two gentlemen trying to win the affection of ladies who are walking around this island, but and also there are-- there-- what's the word? the handlers

AUDIENCE: What do you call it? [INAUDIBLE] chaperone.

PROFESSOR: Chaperone. Yes. But the chaperones are also following them around here trying to get them

alone, so that they can have a quiet talk with them. Kind of the game of Jane Austen. Now Jane Austen, of course, was writing about some of the social situations, but every single character that she wrote about was fictional. But, the world that she was writing about is at least plausible. And it's based on [INAUDIBLE].

You want to look at something and make the game set in Dickens' Oliver Twist or something like that, you can. You could be individual people in that setting. Do pay some mind onto how grounded in reality those things were. The more grounded they are in reality, the more different sources you can pull out for inspiration. If it's just like, well this was just the fantastical invention of one person in this game or something like that, then you'll only have Scott Card's writing as a reference. Whereas with Jane Austen, you can actually look at real historical stuff to be able to get more ideas about how that social system works and actually Jane Austen's books are actually these social systems. And they're incredibly complicated.

But this game is really just about walking across bridges and being on a very small island, so this is a sort of a holiday island or just trying to get quiet talks with ladies. Yes?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Yes, I don't want a game that takes more than four people to play definitely.

GUEST SPEAKER: For us to grade, it's hard to get more than four people.

PROFESSOR: Yeah, you will be getting your grade in August if you give me a game that requires six people. I can't get that many people in a room.

GUEST SPEAKER: You want your team to be no bigger than four or five still.

PROFESSOR: It's easier to test [INAUDIBLE] at least [INAUDIBLE] the game. Something to think about is agency. Not just how does the world look like to that person. Like for instance in Source of Denial you are colonial European power for the most part right? And you're seeing the continent of Africa as this resource rich land to grab stuff out of. That's the perspective.

But then what are the verbs? What are the things you can do in that context? In [INAUDIBLE], you are in communist Poland in the 1980s. Poland? Poland, right? Yeah. And the only thing that you can do is stand in line for rationed goods, but what you can do is you can affect your place in line by let's see carrying around a cute baby is one of them that are on here. I believe you can knock somebody's hat off or you can change which line you're standing on so maybe

instead of waiting for dry goods you are waiting for furniture. That's our thing. It's kind of neat because all the goods that we actually have in here are actually pictures of the actual rationed goods that were available in Poland in 1980s. In fact this was a project that was funded by some Polish historical institute.

But the only agency you have in this game is, which line are you standing in and where in line are you standing because that's the perspective that they want to get across to you. And so your whole game is all about jockeying for position. And it's actually a pretty well-designed game. We played it a few times. That has both the perspective of this is what the world looks like. The world looks like a bunch of lines for rationed goods to me as someone who lives in that world. It's a kind of satirical lighthearted tone, but it's grounded in reality as it's the only thing I can do. What can I do about this world that's going to give me some interesting decisions to make, right? And it's going to be which line do I want to wait for? [INAUDIBLE] again, historical-- I can't remember which decade this is in, though.

AUDIENCE: 1890s is it?

PROFESSOR: I think that sounds right. Somewhere in the rules they mentioned it and it's about Manhattan. It's about ruling New York where it says it's a game of backstabbing, corruption, temporary alliances and you're basically just running for mayor. And if you can't get mayor, you're running for other city offices. Turns out that actually as soon as you become mayor, you have a giant target painted on your back and everybody else who is in other positions, but you can become chief of police, precinct chairman. You then abuse those powers to sort of place new immigrants in different worlds and change the demographic makeup of different worlds of different boroughs in New York to be able to change the way how they vote.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: The object of the game is victory points for the most part. But the victory points you can get it by becoming mayor, but then you're not staying there for long.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] machine and trying to control it? And the agency that you have is really just you were able to coerce people to come to various locations and you're trying to get the vote out. So [INAUDIBLE] were 14 people [INAUDIBLE] or doing things like having free food [INAUDIBLE] things like that.

PROFESSOR: You could possibly evict people from boroughs and move them into other boroughs to create

not ghettos, what am I thinking?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: [INAUDIBLE] the districts, right?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Yeah, instead of changing the minds, they're actually moving people. Yeah because you know if you're chief of police, you can just grab people and put them somewhere else. You can throw them off New York. So that's their view. Yeah that's a perspective they are trying to place, this abuse-- they're asking-- they're saying that in this era if you're one of these people you are actively engaging in the abuse of power to sort of play with the lives of immigrants.

So, yeah, it turns out that it's just more of a game of territory. When you actually play the game you are looking at Manhattan as a bunch of resources that get moving around, but it's a very specific perspective and I think the game is played over a period of 16 years, which is [INAUDIBLE] or something that. So check it out when you get a chance.

Any questions about assignment three? Now one little wrinkle is on April 16th, which is just two weeks from now we want you to come in here and give us a pitch presentation on what you've decided to do with your project and we want to see a concise description of how you expect it to be played at least two weeks into the project at what you decided so far. Because [INAUDIBLE] you want to create so you want to tell us what kind of feel you want to get out, whose perspective this is. What type of agency that you're likely to have in the game.

Very important to tell us where you are drawing your historical references from if it's a history game, where you're drawing information from. If it's a contemporary game what are you using to inform this thing, your experience. Now you could theoretically all make a game about being an MIT student at MIT in 2014. I'm going to encourage you to think a little bit broader than that because you don't need any additional information. And that's why it's kind of boring to get that degree.

You can draw inspiration from other games but also books, websites news articles, not just Wikipedia but Wikipedia can be a useful resource to find other stuff but we want you to give that presentation as if you were seeking green light as if you were going to a publisher saying, please give me money to be able to continue work on this game. We're not going to fund you down we're not going to cancel your project but we are going to give you feedback both on

how you can improve the project on what we've heard, also on your presentation skills.

That's going to be one of the few time in this class where we're talking specifically about how you deliver the presentation because you might have to do that one day and there are other classes especially [? CMS 610, ?] where you will get a lot of practice doing pitching so this is a little taste of that if you want to be able to get more practice I encourage you to look at that class. everything else at the end of the semester you're going to do the same sort of a presentation you gave today.

We expect change logs. We expect a one page write up. The one big difference is that everything needs to be handed in at the same time. Previously you could hand in your write up the following week, I believe that's the case for this assignment. We can't do that for the final assignment in a MIT [INAUDIBLE] because of MIT course rules. You can't hand in anything late and only the class can ask you to hand in anything later than that. So everything is due on the 14th.

Finally, we have a bunch of guest lecturers that will be coming in. This is starting to segue into what you do with the information that you're getting in this class after this class is over. April 9th, exactly a week from now, will be the Game Makers Skill people who actually are a collection of people here in Cambridge who make board games and card games for retail, but have been funded through a range of different sources all the way from traditional publishing model to Kickstarter, and they all talk about their experiences and what it took to be able to take these ideas into something that people could buy off the shelf.

We also have another guest lecturer from The Geneva University of Art and Design. These are mostly masters students and people who recently graduated from masters programs and are going to a design school that are thinking about game playing. They're mostly tech designs, so they're digital games for the most part but because it's an art school they're actually pretty broad minded in what happens in the computer and what happens outside of the computer. So that should be fairly interesting. They're gonna talk a little bit about their work.

[INAUDIBLE] will be coming in May 7th. He is a theorist. He actually currently teaches at a number of places, including New York University. He used to teach here at MIT. He is probably best known among game scholars for writing his books on the *Art of Failure*, *A Casual Revolution*, [INAUDIBLE]. These are the three books that are about games and how-- not so

much how designers think about games, but how to analyze games from sort of abstract perspective. [INAUDIBLE] If you're interested in those books, please feel free to check out our library and game lab. I'll be happy to let you have a look. They're really, really easy reads because he believes in padding out his books with images. He has told us this very specifically. He was like, "Well, I could write about half as much and then just have larger images and then the book becomes bigger. " He also makes games and he'll be here to not only talk about his current work and what he's working on right now, but also play test games on me, so I can give you some feedback, because he's taught here before, he's been part of this class a couple of years ago.

So please don't miss any of the guest lecturers. They're great folks and give you an idea of what you could do if you want to go to design school, if you want to go to academia, if you wanted to make your own games and publish them, and make commercial product. Just give you some perspective on what you can do.

All right who's games are actually ready at this point in time? Everyone's ready? Awesome. Let's play those games.