Course Title: Graduate Design Seminar  
Course Code/Section: AVT 611, Section 1  
Session/Year: Spring, 2018  
Meeting: Mondays, 4:30–7:10 pm, School of Art, Rm. 2002.  
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Class information: www.jandos.com/for students  
Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment

Course Description
Graduate Design Seminar is a laboratory for the exploration of contemporary design theory and practice through written work and the process of design making. Students will work together and separately to explore the boundaries between design, art, and culture and their emerging place in the world of design. This class must be repeated three times for MA students and six times for MFA students, and will have a different content every semester.

Objectives
Continuing development of professional visual sensitivity and competency in graphic communication through the creation of written and designed work. Students will become more aware of their priorities and goals as a working designer, and develop broader awareness of design’s place in the culture. Some semesters may explore the design leader’s responsibilities to the professional field and community.

Content
This class will have no technical content. Students are expected to have or to develop the professional computer and writing skills they need to complete projects outside of class. Students will produce a series of designed or written solutions to theoretical problems posed throughout the semester. Our sessions will be devoted to discussing our own design ideas and products, and the ideas of other people.

Attendance Policy
Seminars include substantial critique and discussion components. By their nature, they are dynamic educational environments—during critique periods and in the interaction of students on ongoing projects, the seminar provides resources and learning opportunities that cannot be “made up” by other means. In short, your attendance is just as important as mine. Therefore:

Students are required to attend all class meetings, to arrive on time, and to stay for the duration of the class.  
Students arriving seven minutes or more late to class will be marked tardy. Students arriving 15 minutes or more late will be marked absent. Three tardy marks equals one absence. Students who leave before the class is dismissed will be marked absent.  
Students who are having difficulty with the attendance requirement may be asked to drop the class.  
For each absence beyond three absences your final course grade will be reduced one full letter grade from the earned level of all work for the course. For example: “B” quality design work for the semester with four absences results in a final course grade of “C.”  
There are no excused absences.  
Absence, tardiness, and early departure is regarded as de facto evidence of non-participation.
Incomplete
It is not possible to earn an incomplete in this class.

Semester Emphasis
Most graphic designers spend their days crafting messages. Whether creating a logo, a magazine, a brochure, a web site or any one of 1001 other projects, the designer uses typography, imagery and symbols in an attempt to communicate concrete ideas about value, brand and meaning. All graphic design has an interactive component—books must be read, web sites must be navigated, advertisements attempt to inspire action, but for much graphic design, interaction is just a necessary by-product. Designers often labor to make interactivity as unnoticeable as possible—often with good reason. A magazine that is hard to read is abandoned and not purchased again, an ad that is confusing or nonsensical not only fails to generate a lead, but may alienate the potential customer. For these reasons, most good design works are highly crafted and curated experiences—deliberate guided tours through one or more ideas.

Many designers outside of GD (and some inside it) are doing something very different—they are creating contexts that support creative or social activities. Interior designers plan spaces intended to support work, play or relaxation, set designers create environments to facilitate scripted events, and product designer create tools that might be used to make various and unforeseen end products. Too, some graphic designers work explicitly with interaction—a designer who creates new formats for a magazine is doing the paper equivalent of set design—making a structure that will support future storytelling. A form designer creates something designed to solicit information, game designers create imaginary worlds used for, social interaction, learning and problem solving. This semester we will take on a project intended to provide an end user with a more open ended experience.

This semester, every student will create a game.
1. Your game can take any traditional form—board game, card game, tile game, video game, etc.; or can be distinctive in format.
2. Your game must have a competitive component, there must be some (fair) means to determine a winner between a minimum of two players even if it’s just a high score.
3. Your game must, in some sense, allow for creativity or problem solving.
4. Your game may have a luck component.
4. Your game may require specialized knowledge or it may be educational.
5. Your game need not be commercially viable. For example, it might be frustratingly difficult, it might be inappropriate, it might require uncommon or expensive accessories (so long as we have access to them), it might require an hour to set up and provide only a minute of play, it might be game nobody would want to play more than once, heck—it could be aimed only at twins who were separated at birth and reunited as adults.
6. Your game must be playable (in class we will play prototype and “final” versions) but it need not be market ready. For example, if you were designing something like Trivial Pursuit, you would have to create enough question cards for 30 or 60 minutes of play—but not enough to keep the game fresh for five year of monthly use.
7. Your game can be based on a real world activity or work of fiction.
8. Your game can be outlandish, a commentary on the medium of games or otherwise beyond the scope of these guidelines. Feel free to propose alternative “rules” for the assignment, subject to approval.
9. Your final will include everything necessary to play, including a written set of rules. You are not required to design packaging, but may wish to if your final presentation would benefit from an additional component.

Questions to help you start thinking about your game:
1. If you could design a game in which you would be a top player, what skills would it prioritize?
2. Is there a “world” that you have specialized knowledge of that would translate to game play? Is there an unfair
or corrupt system in the world that could be explained by a game about it? For example could a game show the difficulty of homelessness or the disfunction of congress by creating models of these systems?

3. How long should game play last?

4. What age range is your game for? Would it appeal equally to males and females? How would you like the winner to feel after the game? What about the loser(s)?

5. What would you hope users get out of the experience of playing the game?

6. How would the game be paced—how much and when would players have to pay attention? Would every player be involved in every turn or move? Would it have a set quantity of turns or time; or a final goal? Or could players choose how many rounds to play?

**TEXT AND REFERENCES**

There is no required text for this class. However students are expected to do any necessary research to bring their game to successful completion.

Additionally: All graduate students are expected to keep up to date with the design press and blogs. Suggested publications include Print, Communication Arts, Eye and Baseline. These are all available in Fenwick. Suggested websites include Print, Eye, Design Observer and AIGA Voice.

**Materials & Supplies:**

There is no set list of supplies. However, access to analog drawing supplies will likely be useful, as well as traditional graphic design equipment: a computer with the Adobe Creative Suite, and a color printer. Students should assume a total supply/printing cost of up to 200.00 for this class.

**Student Evaluation/Methods of Assessment:**

Participation, defined as attendance, meeting deadlines, participating in class discussions, effectively meeting class leadership requirement: 1/2

Final Project: 1/2

**Class, Department and University Policies:**

All projects are due at the beginning of class on the date assigned. Late projects will be reduced one letter grade for each week late or portion thereof. After two weeks, projects will not be accepted. The final project is due on the last day of class. No extensions will be given.

This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran’s status, or physical ability.

As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by the instructor.) Violations must be
reported to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously. Using someone else’s words or ideas without attribution is plagiarism, a very serious Honor Code offense. Plagiarism will also result in a failing grade.

Students must be completely prepared for class to be considered present, i.e. they must have all necessary supplies and computer files and all ongoing (ungraded) projects with them.

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Students are responsible for the content of university and class communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly. Students are responsible for the content of messages that bounce due to “over limit” errors.

Cell phones and pagers must be turned off during class. The use of headphones is permitted during work periods.

The instructor evaluates your work in line with the course syllabus, university catalog and guidelines, and documented prepared course participation and performance throughout the course. The course grade is determined by a careful assessment of your overall performance in the course that includes attendance, prepared participation, project evaluations, project revisions, and final project(s) presentation all of which is described in detail in the course syllabus, handouts, and lecture presentations.

All work created in this class must be specifically for this class and this class only. It is not permitted to use class projects as a platform for producing professional work or projects intended to be submitted to other teachers.

**Useful Information:**

Open Studio Hours SoA teaching studios and the computer lab are open to students for extended periods of time mornings, evenings and weekends whenever classes are not in progress. Policies, procedures and schedules for studio use are established by the SoA studio faculty and are posted in the studios.

ArtsBus Students enrolled in the graduate graphic design program do not require ArtsBus credit, but may enjoy and benefit from the experience of visiting New York galleries with Mason students and faculty at a reasonable cost. Extra bus tickets are available to SoA students and the Mason community on a first come/first serve basis. See the ArtsBus web site for scheduling information. There are three ArtsBus trips every semester.

**Course Outline (Subject to change)**

**Class Presentations:** In addition to producing design and participating in critiques, each student will make three presentations and lead one discussion. One presentation will be of an effective game or unusual game, one presentation will be of your own work, and one presentation will be about a contemporary designer or firm (currently active—not affiliated with you). Choose someone you are finding interesting or influential. The presentation must include visuals, either printed or in digital form for overhead display. The discussion will be on the topic of a design article(s) or provocative blog post(s) distributed by the student one week ahead of time, either via printouts/photocopies or links. (All students are expected to have read the distributed article by the presentation date.) All articles and posts must be published within the last 6 months. The discussion may include visuals. Expect to lead the class for a minimum of 15 minutes, discussions may go longer if the extra time is warranted. Students will sign up for their dates on the first day of class.

01/22 Monday: introduction to class and major project, sign up for presentations and
discussion dates.

01/29
Game presentations (may include play).

02/7
Game presentations, game pitches. Students will have ideas for at least three possible games, which the class will discuss as a group.

02/14
Rough sketches for game components due. Personal design work presentations.

02/21
Second sketches for game components due. Presentations/discussions.

02/28
Draft rules due. Presentations/discussions.

03/5
Draft prototype (playable game) due. Presentations/discussions.

03/12
Spring Break—no class.

03/19
Game branding components due—logo, typography, colors, sample final element(s). Presentations/discussions.

03/26
Progress Critique. Presentations/discussions.

04/2
Progress Critique. Presentations/discussions.

04/9
Progress Critique. Presentations/discussions.

04/16
Progress Critique. Presentations/discussions.

04/23
Progress Critique. Presentations/discussions. Presentations/discussions.

05/2
Final critique. Have a great summer!