College Colloquium: Tabletop Game Design
Fall 2025
Syllabus

Professor: Josh Laison
   he/him, Ford 215, jlaison@willamette.edu

Student Office Hours: These are some of the times I'll be available to talk to you about course work, advising, or other topics. You don't need an appointment to come see me at these times.
   Monday, Wednesday 10:00-11:00
   Friday 12:00-1:00

You are very welcome to talk with me at other times. If I'm in my office you can drop by without an appointment, or you can schedule an appointment via email to meet in person or over Zoom.

Colloquium Associate: George Dokken
   she/they, gdokken@willamette.edu

Campus Partner: Maddy Kaplan
   she/her, mlkaplan@willamette.edu

Class Meetings: Ford 204, 1:10-2:40, Tuesdays and Thursdays
CHASE Class Meetings: Ford 204, 11:20-12:10, Thursdays

Required course materials. A premium account at https://boardgamearena.com ($5.00/month)

Course Canvas site containing the current schedule of topics and assignments by day, pdf descriptions of all assignments, and links to the reading assignments:
   https://willamette.instructure.com/courses/8668

Graded Components of the Course

Perusall reading assignments (approximately 13)	20%
Design exercises (approximately 5, different sizes)	25%
Game design drafts (4)	50%
Active class participation	5%
Total	100%

Student Learning Outcomes: What I hope you will gain from this course. These learning outcomes are common to all College Colloquium sections.

1. You will critically examine information (written, oral, artistic, and quantitative) by identifying central ideas or arguments, making inferences, questioning underlying assumptions, and assessing evidence.

2. You will learn to contribute to a constructive classroom climate through participation in thoughtful, informed, and responsive discussion, effective speaking, active listening, and the development of an iterative group process of critical analysis and interpretation.

3. You will effectively formulate ideas, develop them through an iterative process, and express them clearly and persuasively via linguistic, artistic, and quantitative modes of communication.

Reading assignments: (Around once a week) You'll read a section of a textbook or article in preparation to discuss new ideas and implement new techniques in class. I'll ask you to think about and comment on these readings through the software Perusall. You'll also get a chance to respond to classmates' comments and start a discussion outside of class. Perusall assesses your contributions and gives you a grade. I hope this is a way for you to think about each topic before we talk about it in class, and engage with these ideas as a community.

Exercises: (Once every two or three weeks) You'll think about, write about, and/or create some aspect of a game design. Please work with and discuss these exercises with your professor, Colloquium Associate, and classmates, but your submitted written work should be your own.

Game design drafts: Your large project in this class will be designing your own game over the course of the semester. In each draft of your game, you'll add more elements to bring it closer to a professional-quality design. We'll also playtest and critique our games in class, and you'll refine them through multiple iterations to solve problems in your design. At the end of the semester, we'll share our designs with students, professors, and staff in the Willamette community.

Game design due dates:

Draft #1, Playable prototype, September 18

Draft #2, Carefully edited rules, October 9

Draft #3, Graphics, October 30

Final game design, November 13

Participation: As a community of scholars, our work gets better when we're all invested in a common effort of learning and discovery. Please support your classmates by preparing for classes, attending classes, and actively participating in class activities and discussions. Much of your learning and understanding of new ideas will come from thinking and talking about them in class.

Course Policies

Time Commitment: Willamette's Credit Hour Policy expects 2-3 hours of work outside of class for every hour of in-class time. Since this class meets three days a week you should anticipate spending 6-9 hours outside of class engaged in course-related activities.

Antiracisism Statement (Adapted from the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) I declare and affirm our commitment to anti-racist action in the coming academic year and beyond. I stand in solidarity with those who have been calling for justice and working

for so long to end institutionalized racism and white supremacy across the country and at Willamette.

Systemic racism at Willamette University is not an issue that can be addressed superficially. It will take a deep commitment from all parts of our community to make the changes that are necessary, and that is what I offer here: a commitment to gather, build, and act on a clear anti-racist agenda together.

Land Acknowledgement: (Adapted from the Dean's Office) Willamette is built on the land of the Kalapuya, who today are represented by the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians. We offer gratitude for the land, for those who have stewarded it, and for the opportunity to work on it. We acknowledge that our University's history is fundamentally tied to the first colonial developments in the Willamette Valley.

Diversity and Accessible Education Statement: (Adapted from the Accessible Education Services Office) Willamette University and I value diversity and inclusion. We are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal is to create a learning environment that is usable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming for people of any gender identity or expression, race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion or religious belief, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or ability.

If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, please notify me as soon as possible. Students with disabilities are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Services office in Smullin 155 at https://willamette.edu/offices/accessibility, 503-370-6737, or accessible-info@willamette.edu to discuss a range of options to removing barriers in the course, including accommodations.

Religious Accommodations: (Adapted from the former Office of the Chaplain) Willamette University and I recognize the value of religious practice and strive to accommodate students' commitment to their religious traditions whenever possible. If you anticipate missing class for religious reasons, please contact me to discuss your needs.

Academic Integrity: (Adapted from the Dean's Office) As members of the Willamette University community, students are expected to display honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility in their academic work. Plagiarism and cheating involve intellectual dishonesty, deception, and fraud, which inhibit the honest exchange of ideas.

This course will follow Willamette University Standards of Conduct and the Willamette Ethic, described in more detail here:
http://www.willamette.edu/cla/catalog/resources/policies/plagiarism_cheating.php
Plagiarism can take different forms, but its essence is presenting the words or work of another person or source as your own. When you are quoting from, paraphrasing, or using images created by another source in any of your work, you should acknowledge that source in a citation. This includes AI sources.

Additionally, using work created by other sources in place of your own, even if it's not your final product, might bypass the learning benefits of the assignment. Please only get assistance from others when it doesn't replace your own efforts.

Topic Schedule (subject to change)

1. **Library of game experiences**

   Readings: Zimmerman, The Rules We Break; Englestein and Shalev, Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design: An Encyclopedia of Mechanisms; Salen and Zimmerman, The Magic Circle

2. **Prototyping, iteration, and feedback**

   Readings: Koster, A Theory of Fun for Game Design; Pozzi and Zimmerman: Don't Follow These Rules, A Primer for Playtesting

3. **Player experience: strategy**

   Readings: Elias, Garfield, Gutschera, Characteristics of Games; Seymour, Hex, A Strategy Guide; Hickman-Newnham and Leiberan-Titus, Riftwalker rules and design notes

   Game draft 1. Playable prototype, due 9/18

4. **Rules and technical writing**

   Readings: Chavez, Top Six Rules for Rulebook Writing; Lim, 9 Rules for Writing Rules; Russell, Terse; Selinker, Writing Precise Rules

5. **Player experience: meaning, emotion, and narrative**

   Readings: DeKoven, The Well-Played Game; Holland, Mechanisms as Metaphors: How Board Games Create Meaning

   Game draft 2. Carefully edited rules, due 10/9

6. **User experience (UX) and graphic design**

   Readings: Norman, The Design of Everyday Things; Conrad, Paquette, Yoon, Finch, UX for Tabletop Games; Williams, The Non-Designer's Design Book; Johanson, Inkscape Quickstart; Connell et al., The Principles of Universal Design

   Game draft 3. Graphics, due 10/30

7. **Games and society**

   Readings: Narcisse, The Natural; Anthropy, Rise of the Videogame Zinesters

8. **Final game showcase.** Final draft of your game due 11/13