

English 3364
Introduction to Interactive Narrative Design
Spring 2026

Instructor: Dr. Matthew Kelly

Class Meetings: Tues/Thurs, 9:30-10:50am

Class Location: Soules College of Business (COB) 00227

Instructor's Office: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) 236

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Course Description

This course prepares students to develop interactive literary narratives using industry-standard software platforms and technical documentation practices. Completion of a working prototype for an interactive narrative is required.

Course Overview

In contemporary literary studies, the term "narrative" is often used to describe the abstract, theoretical, and philosophical underpinnings of a given text. For example, the narrative of James Joyce's *Ulysses* not only encompasses the specific chain of events that constitute the book's plot, "narrative" also represents the larger symbolic significance of the concepts expressed by Joyce's imagery or character dialogue. Hence, narrative denotes the ways in which an author constructs a fictional universe via storytelling devices (such as character or setting) and, furthermore, how we derive some form of symbolic significance from said textual universe via our own personal interpretations. While this two-fold deployment of "narrative" has provided the foundation for contemporary literary analysis, this seminar seeks to explore another dimension that influences how texts are composed and analyzed; namely, we will be looking at how the material and technological features of a text fundamentally shapes its narrative structure and the interpretive methodologies afforded to readers. In other words, this seminar will not focus on literary depictions of technology. Instead, we will look at how technological advances fundamentally shape the ways in which we tell stories and construct narrative significance, which, in turn, can offer us new ways of envisioning the world and our position therein.

Some guiding questions for this course include: how does a narrative's material form contribute to its meaning, and vice-versa? How can we use the relationship between narrative and technology to better understand the historical circumstances and socio-cultural significance of interactive texts? How might we, as scholars and critics, begin to use digital media technologies to undertake new forms of literary analysis? To explore these questions, we will read historical accounts that trace the inception and evolution of contemporary technologies, scholarly investigations that explore the philosophical impact of new media platforms, and digital texts that will provide you an opportunity to read, reflect, and play around in virtual environments.

Course Goals

By the end of the semester, you will be expected to be capable of satisfying the following course goals:

1. Analyze effective design principles that are used to structure interactive experiences and virtual environments.
2. Examine real-world video games with a critical emphasis on environmental design and narrative structure. In other words, you will learn how to analyze games as if you are analyzing a work of art (as opposed to simply analyzing games as if you are composing a consumer review).
3. Practice foundational game design strategies while building a prototype for your own interactive narrative.

Course Materials

All course readings (which include essays, online articles, and videos) will be posted to Canvas; there is no required textbook for this class. Given the emphasis on interactive fiction throughout the semester, there are several video games that you will need to purchase and install. You are free to use any online marketplace to purchase these games but I recommend using the following due to ease-of-access:

Steam: <http://store.steampowered.com/>

GoG (Good Old Games): <https://www.gog.com/>

Humble Bundle: <https://www.humblebundle.com/>

Grading

Each major project is designed to help you move towards the three course goals outlined above but every assignment prompt will also include a handful of specific criteria that will be used to evaluate your success on a given project. If you ever have any questions about how I will evaluate a project, feel free to ask.

Your final grade will be calculated based on the following breakdown:

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| Mid-term Presentation | 30% |
| Final Project | 30% |
| Short Written Assignments (updated every three weeks) | 25% |
| Participation (includes attendance) | 15% |

Participation Policy

I understand that everyone has their own processes for (and even hesitations about) participating in social scenarios; some need a lot of time to work through ideas before speaking, others like bouncing ideas off peers in order to suss out their own arguments, others enjoy listening and

synthesizing different ideas discussed in class into his/her own writing. For these reasons, I will offer a variety of outlets for participation, including short in-class writing assignments, longer take-home assignments, class conversations, and opportunities to provide feedback on your peer's writing.

It is perfectly normal to be more comfortable sharing your ideas in one type of social scenario versus another, but it is imperative that you are able to discuss complex ideas across a multitude of different contexts in order to be successful in the professional world. Therefore, I will evaluate your participation across all of the outlets I mention above.

Attendance Policy

Because of the rapid pace of this course and the emphasis on in-class activities/discussions, consistent attendance is very important. Every student is allowed FOUR absences. Each additional absence will result in lowering your final grade by one full letter (i.e., a B+ will be lowered to a C+). **Coming to class without the assigned readings or materials will result in being absent for the day.** Being late twice equals one absence.

Email Policy

Email is the easiest way to contact me. However, courtesy in correspondence is important; that is, be rhetorical and think about your audience. Because email is quick and easy, people often do not take the time to formulate emails that will effectively communicate what is desired. When emailing me, please include a subject header with helpful information, an opening address, and a closing signature. This will help me know who has written me and what it is about.

This class will be dynamic in the sense that class readings, exercises, and discussions will revolve around the ideas you are actively working through. Consequently, I will regularly email out readings, worksheets, and questions to consider for class discussion based on the evolution of our class conversations and your individual assignments. Seeing as it is impossible to foresee these ideas in advance, it is important that you keep up-to-date with your email in order to properly prepare yourself for class activities. **Hence, everyone needs to check their official UT Tyler email account once every 24 hours.**

Policy on AI and AI-Generated Work

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the

guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI is permitted only for specific assignments or situations, and appropriate acknowledgment is required. During some class assignments, we may leverage AI tools to support your learning, allow you to explore how AI tools can be used, and/or better understand their benefits and limitations. Learning how to use AI is an emerging skill, and we will work through the limitations of these evolving systems together. However, AI will be limited to assignments where AI is a critical component of the learning activity. I will always indicate when and where the use of AI tools for this course is appropriate.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

The semester will be divided into three general sections, each with their own unique focus, readings, and assignments. The following schedule offers an outline of these sections. However, please ensure you check your Canvas calendar on a regular basis in order to stay up-to-date with assignment due dates. Whenever I create a new assignment, I will post a submission dropbox on Canvas with a deadline; this deadline will appear in your own Canvas calendar.

Weeks 1-5: Introduction to game design and narrative theory

- "Ergodic Literature" by Espen Aarseth
- "Rules of Play" by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman
- "The Ethics of Computer Games" by Miguel Sicart
- "The Rhetoric of Computer Games" by Ian Bogost

Weeks 6-10: Analyzing environmental design in video games

- "NORCO" by Geography of Robots
- "What Remains of Edith Finch" by Giant Sparrow

Weeks 10-15: Using Minecraft to build an interactive narrative

- Real-world design documents (posted to Canvas)