

GAME 260 : Level Design

Online, Section 501, CRN 70495

Fall 2022

Instructor: Ian Burch

E-Mail: ianburch@unm.edu

Office and Hours: B110A, in-person hours M/W @ 11:00 - 12:00 am and 3:00 - 4:00 pm
Online on Zoom T @ 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Division Chair: Dr Stephen Takach; set@unm.edu

Course Goals:

This course focuses on the theory of level design and the practical development of levels. Theory will focus on pathing, flow state, and the expansion/evolution model. Development itself will focus on efficiency and iteration, explored through various game genres.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will:

- (1) Be able to analyze and critique existing levels in games
- (2) Have a strong understanding of level structure and path layout
- (3) Design levels with escalating challenges using an expansion / evolution model
- (4) Use whiteboxing, iteration, and testing to efficiently build and refine levels
- (5) Build game levels and environments that provide players a variety of gameplay options

Materials:

- Internet Access
- Way of sharing files such as OneDrive / Dropbox / Google Drive
- Access to GameMaker Studio 2.3 or higher
- Access to Unreal Engine 4.26 or higher (5.03 recommended)
- Access to Blender 3.0 or higher
- Notebook

Grade Breakdown:

Design Projects	66%
Level Analysis	24%
Participation & Attendance	10%

Grading will be primarily based on effort and completion, as collaboration and feedback is important. Letter grades will be given as follows, with + or - given for the highest and lowest 3%

in each range, respectively. Incomplete (I) grades will not be assigned without extenuating circumstances.

90% - 100%	A
80% - 89%	B
70% - 79%	C
60% - 69%	D
0% - 59%	F

Course Details:

The course will be broken into three units, each looking at the level design of a different game genre. Each unit will follow the same progression - we'll begin by discussing the theory behind the layout, progression, and design of these levels. Next, students will analyze levels within an appropriate game. Finally, students will build a level using these design principles.

The first level project will be solo design work as students build a few Mario-style levels, but will playtest each other's levels and provide feedback. The latter two projects - FPS Arena and Puzzle Dungeon - will be cooperative, with students working together to design, build, and script the level. Work will be publicly shared and discussed using the UNM Canvas discussion forums.

Tentative Schedule:

Weeks 1-4 : Platformer Design

- Analyzing the design of Super Mario World, Super Meat Boy, and Celeste
- Using the CCST expansion & evolution model to provide difficulty progression and teach mechanics
- How to design levels with sketching, whiteboxing, playtesting, and iteration
- *Project: Platformer Levels*

Weeks 5-9 : Multiplayer Arena

- Analyzing the design of Halo, Call of Duty, Overwatch, and Apex Legends
- How to encourage different playstyles through asymmetry and cover
- Designing playground levels with different play dynamics
- *Project: FPS Arena*

Weeks 10-16 : Dungeons

- Analyzing the design of Legend of Zelda, Skyrim, and Dark Souls
- Looking at non-linear layouts with critical paths, loops, and backtracking
- Incorporating light scripting into our level design work
- *Project: Puzzle Dungeon*

Assignments:

Assignments will be given on UNM Canvas (<https://canvas.unm.edu/>) Homework assignments will typically be due either in one class session or a week after being assigned. Larger assignments and projects will be broken up into smaller pieces (such as drafts or rough versions) each with their own due dates, and the whole project given at least two weeks in advance.

Late Work / Absences:

Please email me ianburch@unm.edu if you're going to be late on an assignment and I'll generally give an extension. Unexcused late work may be docked points at my discretion, especially collaborative work that puts more of a burden on fellow students. Any assignments not submitted by the end of the semester (12/17) will be graded 0.

Expectations:

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and collegial manner. This course will feature discussions, feedback, and group work. Be respectful and polite of others ideas, work, and contributions. During Zoom meetings, be professional, appropriate, and mute when not speaking. When posting on discussion boards, be polite, concise, and avoid using internet slang. If you need an extension on an assignment, please email or message me before it is due. Students missing more than 4 consecutive assignments may be dropped from the course.

COVID-19 Health and Awareness:

UNM is a mask friendly, but not a mask required, community. To be registered or employed at UNM, Students, faculty, and staff must all meet UNM's Administrative Mandate on Required COVID-19 vaccination. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, please do not come to class. If you have a positive COVID-19 test, please stay home for five days and isolate yourself from others, per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. If you do need to stay home, please communicate with me at ianburch@unm.edu. I can work with you to provide alternatives for course participation and completion. UNM faculty and staff know that these are challenging times. Please let us know that you need support so that we can connect you to the right resources and please be aware that UNM will publish information on websites and email about any changes to our public health status and community response.

Accommodations:

UNM is committed to providing courses that are inclusive and accessible for all participants. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate an accessible classroom setting, in which students have full access and opportunity. If you are experiencing physical or academic barriers, or concerns related to mental health, physical health and/or COVID-19, please consult with me

after class, via email/phone or during office/check-in hours (I am not legally permitted to inquire about the need for accommodations). We can meet your needs in collaboration with the Accessibility Resource Center (<https://arc.unm.edu/>) at arcsrvs@unm.edu or by phone (505) 277-3506.

Academic Integrity:

Each student is expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. The University reserves the right to take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty or otherwise fails to meet the standards. Any student judged to have engaged in academic dishonesty in coursework may receive a reduced or failing grade for the work in question and/or for the course.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, dishonesty in quizzes, tests, or assignments; claiming credit for work not done or done by others; hindering the academic work of other students; misrepresenting academic or professional qualifications within or without the University; and nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other University records.

Credit-hour Statement:

This is a three credit-hour course. Class meets for two 75-minute sessions of direct instruction for fifteen weeks during the Fall 2022 semester. Please plan for a minimum of four hours of out-of-class work (or homework, study, assignment completion, and class preparation) each week.

Title IX :

Our classroom and our university should always be spaces of mutual respect, kindness, and support, without fear of discrimination, harassment, or violence. Should you ever need assistance or have concerns about incidents that violate this principle, please access the resources available to you on campus. Please note that, because UNM faculty, TAs, and GAs are considered "responsible employees" by the Department of Education, any disclosure of gender discrimination (including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and sexual violence) made to a faculty member, TA, or GA must be reported by that faculty member, TA, or GA to the university's Title IX coordinator. For more information on the campus policy regarding sexual misconduct, please see: <https://policy.unm.edu/university-policies/2000/2740.html>

Citizenship and/or Immigration Status :

All students are welcome in this class regardless of citizenship, residency, or immigration status. Your professor will respect your privacy if you choose to disclose your status. As for all students

in the class, family emergency-related absences are normally excused with reasonable notice to the professor, as noted in the attendance guidelines above. UNM as an institution has made a core commitment to the success of all our students, including members of our undocumented community. The Administration's welcome is found on our website:

<http://undocumented.unm.edu/>

Respectful and Responsible Learning:

We all have shared responsibility for ensuring that learning occurs safely and equitably. UNM has important policies to preserve and protect the academic community, especially policies on student grievances (Faculty Handbook D175 and D176), academic dishonesty (FH D100), and respectful campus (FH CO9). These are in the Student Pathfinder (<https://pathfinder.unm.edu>) and the Faculty Handbook (<https://handbook.unm.edu>). Please ask for help in understanding and avoiding plagiarism or academic dishonesty, which can both have very serious consequences.

Connecting to Campus and Finding Support:

UNM has many resources and centers to help you thrive, including opportunities to get involved, mental health resources, academic support including tutoring, resource centers for people like you, free food at Lobo Food Pantry, and jobs on campus. Your advisor, staff at the resource centers and Dean of Students, and I can help you find the right opportunities for you.