

# GAME 260 : Level Design

Room B110, Section 501, CRN 70495

Monday & Wednesday, 9:00 - 10:15

Fall 2023

**Instructor:** Ian Burch

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**Office and Hours:** B105A, in-person hours Monday & Wednesday @ 2:45 pm - 4:30 pm

Online on Zoom Tuesday @ 1:30 - 3:00 pm

**Division Chair:** Dr Stephen Takach; [set@unm.edu](mailto: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
- USB Flash Drive (4gb or more)
- Method of sharing files such as OneDrive, Dropbox, or Google Drive
  
- GameMaker Studio 2.3 or higher
- Unreal Engine 5.0 or higher
- Blender 3.0 or higher
  
- Notebook
- Assorted games to analyze

## 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 in teams.

**Tentative Schedule:**

This schedule is subject to change, but all topics listed will be covered during the semester

|             | <b>Week</b> | <b>Unit</b> | <b>Topic</b>  | <b>SLOs</b> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|---|-------------|
| <b>8/21</b> | <b>1</b>    | <b>1</b>    | Intro, Analyzing platformer levels (Super Mario Bros, Donkey Kong Country, Celeste) | 1           |
| <b>8/28</b> | <b>2</b>    | <b>1</b>    | CCST Model, Rough level layouts   | 3,4         |
| <b>9/4</b>  | <b>3</b>    | <b>1</b>    | Testing levels  | 1,3,4       |
| <b>9/11</b> | <b>4</b>    | <b>1</b>    | Finishing Platformer levels   | 3,4,5       |
| <b>9/18</b> | <b>5</b>    | <b>2</b>    | Analyzing FPS levels (CoD, Overwatch, CS:GO)  | 1           |

|       |    |   |   |       |
|-------|----|---|---|-------|
| 9/27  | 6  | 2 | Path types, real world layouts                              | 1,2   |
| 10/2  | 7  | 2 | Level terrain painting                                      | 2,4   |
| 10/9  | 8  | 2 | Level testing   | 1,2,4 |
| 10/16 | 9  | 2 | Finishing FPS levels  | 2,4,5 |
| 10/23 | 10 | 3 | Analyzing dungeon design (Legend of Zelda, Skyrim, Metroid) | 1,2   |
| 10/30 | 11 | 3 | Complex paths: loops, backtracking, gates                   | 1,2,3 |
| 11/6  | 12 | 3 | Puzzle expansion & evolution                                | 3,5   |
| 11/13 | 13 | 3 | Level layout  | 2,4   |
| 11/20 | 14 | 3 | Object scripting  | 3,5   |
| 11/27 | 15 | 3 | Level testing   | 1,2,4 |
| 12/4  | 16 | 3 | Finishing Dungeon levels                                    | All   |

### Assignments:

Assignments will be both given in person and posted 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](mailto: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. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, please do not come to class. If you do need to stay home, please email me at [ianburch@unm.edu](mailto:ianburch@unm.edu); I can work with you to provide alternatives for course participation and completion. Let me, an advisor, or another UNM staff member know that you need support so that we can connect you to the right resources. Please be aware that UNM will publish information on websites and email about any changes to our public health status and community response.

### **Accommodations & Support:**

UNM is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students with documented disabilities. As your instructor, it is my objective to facilitate an inclusive classroom setting, in which students have full access and opportunity to participate. To engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations for this class and/or program, please contact Accessibility Resource Center at [arcsrvs@unm.edu](mailto:arcsrvs@unm.edu) or by phone at 505-277-3506 or see (<https://arc.unm.edu/>) for more information. The UNM-Valencia Equal Access Services (Sarah Clawson, Coordinator), at (505) 925-8840 or by email at [sjclawson@unm.edu](mailto:sjclawson@unm.edu).

### **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 [Valencia Campus Food Pantry](#), and [jobs on campus](#). Your [advisor](#), staff at the [resource centers](#) and [Academic Affairs Office](#), and I can help you find the right opportunities for you.

### **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 who

otherwise fails to meet the expected 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, including AI generators; 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, honestly, and equitably. Submitting material as your own work that has been generated on a website, in a publication, by an artificial intelligence algorithm, by another person, or by breaking the rules of an assignment constitutes academic dishonesty. It is a student code of conduct violation that can lead to a disciplinary procedure. *Please ask me for help in finding the resources you need to be successful in this course.* I can help you use study resources responsibly and effectively.

Off-campus paper writing services, problem-checkers and services, websites, and AIs can be incorrect or misleading. Learning the course material depends on completing and submitting your own work. UNM preserves and protects the integrity of the academic community through multiple policies including 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>)

**Land Acknowledgement:**

Founded in 1889, the University of New Mexico sits on the traditional homelands of the Pueblo of Sandia. The original peoples of New Mexico Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge our committed relationship to Indigenous peoples. We gratefully recognize our history.