

Explorative Game Design Project

Assignment #8 – CMS.301: Spring 2016

Summary: *The main objectives of this assignment are to explore a design space by creating game prototypes and formulate findings regarding potential play experiences.*

Learning Goals: Practice the fundamentals of explorative game design research.

Key Dates:

- Session 18: Concepts submitted and presented.
- Session 20: Prototype description and playtest results submitted and presented.
- Session 23: Second iteration prototype description and test results submitted and presented.
- Sessions 25 & 26: Final presentations.
- Session 26: Final (individual & group) reports due.

Assignment Description: This is a group assignment for groups of 3-4 students including an individual deliverable.

As a part of the “Recasting Player Two” project, The MIT Game Lab is currently studying different ways of making the gaming hobby more inclusive through exploration of new game mechanics and interaction modes. The objective of this project is to explore the design space of non-traditional player skills and abilities.

Many board and card games rely on similar player skills and abilities. The increasing popularity of “modern” board game design has led to an ever growing list of interesting game mechanics such as worker placement, deck building, variable player powers, and drafting; just to name a few. But regardless of the mechanics, the games are often some kind of math problem hidden beneath the theme of the game.

There are many games that don’t fit this description such as dexterity games, trivia games, and luck based games, but we believe that there still are other underexplored areas that could offer interesting and inclusive play experiences. What other skills and abilities can be utilized in board game design, and what qualities could game experiences based on these skills and abilities offer?

These questions can only be answered through design exploration. Your task is to explore the alternative skills and abilities design space by creating game prototypes. These prototypes are built and tested in order to find and demonstrate interesting applications, and to describe how they can provide meaningful and interesting gaming experiences.

Step 0: Playing games with an analytical eye for mechanics and experience outcomes is the root of good game design. We have scheduled a series of in-class play sessions to explore games that utilize alternative skills and abilities as inspiration for your design explorations. Students form groups (3-4) in advance of the play sessions.

Step 1: Analysis and concepts. Upload a document (max 2 pages) per group. The document should include short (1 paragraph per game) descriptions of the alternative skills and abilities utilized in the different games from the gaming sessions, how they affect the game experience and the game's potential audience.

Come up with three concepts for games utilizing alternative skills and abilities and describe the three concepts for games using alternative skills and abilities. Note that we are looking for innovative experiences, so be careful to not simply replicate those offered by the inspirational games.

Submit the document at least one hour before class on Session 18. Students will present and critique the concepts and decide which ones to move forward with.

Step 2: Build a low fidelity prototype and playtest it on confidants. (Other class members from the same section work well for this.) Upload a playtest report before Session 20. Students show and critique the prototypes and present the results of the playtest in class, including design decisions made based on the evaluation of the playtest.

Step 3: Build a second iteration prototype and playtest it on class mates from the other section (in class during Session 22). Upload a playtest report one hour before Session 23. Students show and critique the prototypes, and present the results of the playtest in class, including design decisions made based on the evaluation of the playtest.

Step 4: Students present their findings from the project including their final round of playtests and final prototypes in class during Sessions 25 & 26. Each group writes a five page report on the project describing the design process, the final prototype and the research findings. Each student also submits a one page report reflecting on the process and findings of the group project. Both reports are submitted on the last day of classes (Session 26).

Safe Learning Environment Guidelines:

Since it is absolutely crucial to us that all students feel safe and included in all learning activities, we have the following guidelines for all class related play sessions:

- 1) Any student or playtester may at any time opt out of a playing activity without having to give a reason or explanation.
- 2) We are dedicated to provide a harassment-free environment. See our anti-harassment policy for details: <http://gamelab.mit.edu/harassment-policy/>

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