

## **Interactive Web Design - ART 545**

**Spring 2009 MW 9-12AM 128 Gatewood**

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**Course website: <http://digital.uncg.edu/545>**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Interactive Web Design is a course in the development and creation of interactive environments for the Web. The medium for this course is Actionscript 2.0, the programming language associated with Macromedia Flash; Students will use Actionscript to create fully interactive projects capable of public consumption on the Web. In doing so, we will also examine the conceptual issues and demands of interactivity and of the experience of built environments on the Web.

Art 545 is a course in designing interactivity, not in designing websites. The tools and concepts used in this course can be used for commercial, experimental, or artistic purposes; we will not be building commercial websites in this class.

**Prerequisites:** Design I, II, and III.

### **The classroom and course schedule**

The course is divided into two introductory projects, and three larger projects, each culminating in a final critique. Each section will begin with technical demonstrations, looking at work, and readings on the issues concerned with interactivity.

Each section of the course will involve the creation of at least one technical prototype, both to demonstrate both technical mastery, on a basic level, of the scripting introduced in that section, and to explore possible solutions to the eventual project. These technical prototypes must be presented to the class, along with a statement of intent or project narrative, explaining the final project.

This is both an advanced course and, for many students, an introduction to Actionscript or to programming in general. Although we will go through technical demonstrations in class, students must be prepared to do additional technical research on their own. The class projects are not just technical exercises, but artistic projects requiring your full technical and conceptual engagement.

Collaboration, discussion and the exchange of ideas are crucial to the process of the course.

### **The course**

#### **1. space**

The Flash movie, as the area in which Actionscript commands are enacted, is sometimes called

“programmatic space.” In this way, it differs from the usual way we think about Web “pages”, which is drawn from publishing and book design. In this project, we will start thinking about the interactive “space” created by Flash.

*Final project: **defining space.***

Using only circles, create a believable space. This means determining up and down, user’s perspective, and any ways in which the user can interact with that space. Pong, for instance, determines interactive space in a very simple but convincing way.

*This project is broken into several parts:*

**part 1:** independent motion. due January 28

**part 2:** user input. due February 4

**part 3:** defining space. critique February 18

## **2. pages vs. space; interface and interactivity**

With this project, we will look at bringing interface design into Flash. In HTML, we are used to thinking of a website as consisting of several static pages, and the user flips from one to another without any transition state. How does the introduction of time—for instance, the animation capacities of Flash—start to change how we design an interface?

In this section we will start making multiple elements manipulable in Flash, controlling movie clips with Actionscript. We will also become familiar with the building blocks of Actionscript, such as statements, event handlers, and targeting.

*Final project: **Flash interface.***

*Critique: March 18*

Take the given information (image and text) and make an interface for it in Flash. Think most about how the interface transitions from one “state” to the next.

## **3. tool**

Many new media artists and designers use interactivity not just as a medium in itself, but as a tool to create other works. This is what we do with other applications such as Photoshop, which is an interactive tool for manipulating images. In this project, we will use Flash to create a tool with which the user can create their own images.

*Final project: **drawing system.***

*Critique: April 13*

Create an interface that the user can manipulate to create “drawings” according to the system you design. How does the user affect the screen—that is, does the mouse pointer, or key strokes, leave marks? What sort of marks are left on the screen? How does the screen react to these marks? Or, in another strategy, what elements do you make available to the user, out of which to build images (think of paper dolls, or more technologically, customizable Google maps).

## **4. time**

One of the powerful aspects of Flash, as an interactive medium, is that it allows us to come up with new ways to present the same information—in this case, the presentation of a multiple amount of information over time.

*Final project: **timeline interface.***

*Critique: May 11*

You will be given a timeline, with dates, images and information to use. Create an interface that allows the user to explore all this information.

## **Software**

Adobe Flash CS3

In this class, we will be working with Actionscript 2.0. Flash CS3 also uses Actionscript 3.0, which is a significant change; for now, we will be sticking with version 2. Actionscript 2.0 was introduced in Flash MX 2004. If you have an older version of Flash on your own computer, you will have some compatibility issues with the technical knowledge we discuss in class.

If you want to use other applications to create or manipulate source materials—Photoshop, Illustrator, Final Cut Pro, etc.—you may do so, but we will not be addressing those applications in class. Also, if you want to incorporate your Flash projects into an HTML webpage for final presentation, I encourage you to do so, but we will not be talking very much about HTML either.

## **Readings**

### ***Highly Recommended***

*Actionscript for Flash 8*, by Kristian Besley, Sham Bhangal, and David Powers.

This book is available from Amazon.com, and also from <http://friendsofed.com>, the publisher's website. You can also buy a downloadable digital file of the book from friendsofed.com for about half the price of the paper book. If you do this, please do not print out the entire thing on the Digital Studio's printers.

### ***Also Recommended, But Less So***

There are many other Actionscript reference books, most of which are good sourcebooks for people who already familiar with the basics of Actionscript. The best is the *Flash 8 Actionscript Bible*, by Reinhardt and Lott.

If you want a more general reference book for Flash, I recommend *Macromedia Flash 8 for Windows & Macintosh (Visual QuickStart Guide)* by Katherine Ulrich.

There are also many online resources; for links, see the course website.

### *Other readings*

I will also be distributing other readings from time to time, from a variety of sources. These readings are required.

## **Images and other materials**

All images, sounds, or other materials used in course projects must be either created by the

student, in the public domain, or used by the student with permission of the copyright holder. Public domain describes materials whose copyright have lapsed, or that have been licensed for public use. For a current description of the term of copyright, links to free-license material, and other copyright information, see below, or the course website.

[http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/training/Hirtle\\_Public\\_Domain.htm](http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/training/Hirtle_Public_Domain.htm)  
<http://creativecommons.org/>

## **Storage and Presentation**

The course will have a dedicated folder on the digital studio server, that will be public to web browsers. This folder is for *finished projects only*. Students should store working files on their own storage medium. I strongly recommend acquiring an external hard drive or other storage device, if you don't have one already. Please limit the use of Network Storage as much as possible; keep in mind that the server sometimes goes down on weekends, making working files unavailable at unfortunate times. This has been happening less this year, but students should still be prepared. Server-crash issues will not be accepted as an excuse for late work.

**UNCG now recommends the purchase of a laptop to all students.** If you are interested in buying a laptop, visit UNCG's page at <http://its.uncg.edu/Laptop>. The Digital Studio recommends the 15" MacBook Pro.

## **Technical problems**

Macromedia Flash is a very powerful application, but it will sometimes crash without warning. *Always save your work frequently* while it's in process. It's also a good idea to save multiple versions of the same project, so that there is always a recent backup. Like server-crash problems, application-crash problems are not an excuse for missing critique.

## **Grading**

Final projects: 20% each (80% total)  
Participation in class and critiques: 20%

Work that meets the absolute technical minimum gets a D; work in which the artist moves beyond the assignment and finds ways to challenge themselves, technically and conceptually, gets an A.

## **Other requirements**

This is an advanced course; students are expected to be self-motivating, to explore and do research on their own as well as in the allotted class time.

Attendance is mandatory; so is being on time, with all materials, ready to work. Two unexcused absences are permitted; more absences will result in the loss of half a grade per absence—that is, 5 points out of 100, or B- to C+. Complete participation in the work, in discussions, and in critique of each others' work is also required.

Promptness is also required. Three late marks equal one unexcused absence.

Exercises, technical prototypes, and project narratives/statements of intent are part of the process of each section of the course. Exercises and projects must be completed on time, and students must be ready to present their final project to the studio for formal critique. Projects **MUST** be uploaded and ready to display by the beginning of final critique; projects still being assembled during critique have missed the deadline. Missed deadlines result in a loss of one grade per class period period (e.g., B- to C+). Students are required to present their projects formally to the class.

No cell phones in class; no web surfing, emailing, IM-ing or otherwise multitasking while the instructor or anybody else is addressing the class.