EAE 3800-001 Fall 2020 User Research

Note: This syllabus is live and online. It *can* change (because game development is hard), so check back each week.

Instructor: Ashley ML Brown, PhD

Preferred contact: I respond fastest to email or Discord. I HATE logging into Canvas mail, so if you send me a message there it will likely take me a week to respond. Unless I am sleeping, in the shower, or dead, I typically respond within minutes to email or Discord. Email= ashley@eae.utah.edu Discord= Ashley#8187

Office: In the before times EAE Building 72, Room 213. Now I live here. All the time. Hi.

Class Time: 9:40-12:40 MST, Mondays

Class Location: Twitch and Zoom! Our lectures will be from 9:40-11AM MST on Twitch. Twitch.tv/Professor_Ashley followed by a practical/homework discussion on Zoom from 11AM- 12:40AM (see the link on the bottom of the left sidebar on Canvas).

Office Hours: I'm usually around Monday mornings, but I'm more than happy to meet you whenever on whatever platform.

Class Discord: Yes! We have a Discord! This is totally optional to join, but past cohorts have found having an informal back channel to discuss homework and stuff helpful. And past cohorts still lurk there so you can say hi to some EAE alums. Here's the link: https://discord.gg/uMn28mc

TA:

TA Contact:

Course Description

This course is designed to educate students about games user research and playtesting. Students will learn how to test their games, what to test for, when to use which testing method, and how to communicate feedback to development teams. This is a hands-on, practical class which works best if you pair with a team in live development.

Note that this is a 'meets with' class. This means the undergraduate section of this course will meet with graduate students. The core difference between the classes is that graduate students have additional assignments.

Required Texts

- None! All texts are available in the weekly modules.

Required Materials

- Voice recording software. Audacity is a good choice, so is OBS/Streamlabs.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand core concepts relating to user engagement which direct playtesting and user research;
- Understand which method of generating data is most appropriate in a variety of situations;
- Gain skills in writing for both academic and industry audiences;
- Manage time as related to development cycles;
- Practice the collecting, organizing, and disseminating data.

Assessments:

A full description of class assessments are listed below. All assessments are due by 9:00am on the designated due date. This will always be before class and will always be on a Monday. Assignments must be submitted on Canvas.

No late work will be accepted… **UNLESS** you let me know beforehand. I am compassionate to the fact that we are living through a global pandemic and things might come up which effect your ability to hand in assignments. That's cool. Here's the thing though… communication is extremely important in game development- especially given current circumstances. I will happily grant you an automatic 2 day extension without question as long as you let me know **BEFORE** the 9am due date.

And yes, rules lawyers, even 8:59am counts as before the due date. But just so you know, no one likes a rules lawyer.

Evaluation

Participation 20%

PARTICIPATION IS NOT THE SAME THING AS ATTENDANCE. Sorry for shouting. I get literally hundreds of emails asking this question every year. Attendance is not graded, participation is. You cannot participate unless you attend the class, however.

Participation is active engagement in the class activities and discussions. If you cannot attend a class or feel unwell or for some other reason cannot participate one week, I expect you to make up for it the next week/when you are well and be extra talkative.

Students should expect to read all the materials and complete all homework before class.

CITI Ethics Certification (10%)

In order to conduct human subjects research at a university, you need a certificate stating you've been trained in research ethics. We will discuss research ethics in class and then you will need to complete the online training program and exam (it isn't as scary as it sounds, promise). If you have already completed the training and have a valid certificate (check the dates) cool! You don’t have to do it again.

Practicals (30%)

Focus Group

To demonstrate what has been learned in class, students are expected to conduct a focus group with other students from the programme. The focus group should last no more than 15 minutes and be centred on topics relating to general game ideas in pre-development or ideation phase. The focus group should be audio recorded and then transcribed. A half-page report of the main thematic findings of the focus group should be written. A brief reflection on what went right and wrong in the research process should also be included. The transcription and half-page analysis and reflection should be turned in together on Canvas as a Word file.

Because of the pandemic, I recommend that you do NOT conduct an in-person focus group. Instead, make use of Discord, Hangouts, Zoom, etc and conduct your focus group virtually.

Deliverables:

1. Typed out transcript of the focus group (I do not need the audio file).
2. Half page summary of key findings in a Word document- bullet point lists are okay.
3. A paragraph reflection on what you could do better next time.

Observation

Students will need to observe one another playing a game for not more than 15 minutes. Students should turn in observation notes and a half-page report of the main findings of the observation. The report should include the following information: the experience level of playtester; the part of game played; any trouble players encountered (e.g. where did they get stuck? Were controls unintuitive?) as well as noting when players seemed to have fun?). The report should conclude with specific recommendations for changing the game. A reflection, similar to before should be included to highlight what went right, wrong and what can be done better next time.

Because of the pandemic, I recommend that you do not do this in person. Find someone with a webcam who can play a game and show their face and help ya out.

Deliverables:

1. Typed up observation notes. I do not need a video file or recording.
2. Half page summary of key findings in a Word document- bullet point lists are okay.
3. A paragraph reflection on what you could do better next time.

Thinkaloud

Students will need to watch and audio (or video) record another student playing a game using the thinkaloud method. The session should not exceed 15 minutes. The session should be transcribed and the transcription submitted along with a half-page report which includes the following information: the experience level of playtester; the part of game played; any trouble players encountered (e.g. where did they get stuck? Were controls unintuitive?) When did they have fun? Finally, the report should conclude with specific recommendations for changing the game.

Because of the pandemic, I recommend that you do not do this in person. Find someone with a webcam who can play a game and show their face and help ya out.

Deliverables:

1. Typed up transcript. I do not need a video file or recording.
2. Half page summary of key findings in a Word document- bullet point lists are okay.
3. A paragraph reflection on what you could do better next time.

Survey Part 1 and 2

Part 1: Students need to develop their own survey (can be pre-/post-game or during play), and include a copy of survey questions.

Because of the pandemic, I recommend that you do not do this in person. Use google forms.

Part 1 Deliverables:

1. Your survey questions (and choices/answers if multiple choice). DO NOT administer the survey yet. We are gonna workshop your survey questions in class.

Part 2: NOW you can give out the survey. Try to get 20 people to take it.

The survey and results need to be analysed and written up. A half-page report of the findings should be submitted. The half page report should end with actionable points on how to revise the game. Note that when I say actionable points on how to revise the game I do not mean that you should be telling designers, artists and engineers what to

do, what I mean is you should be removing kernels of insight and wisdom about what works and doesn't work in the game and passing those on to your dev team.

Because of the pandemic, I recommend that you do not do this in person. Use Google forms.

Deliverables:

1. The (improved) survey questions from Part 1.
2. Custom made charts/ graphs/ word clouds resulting from survey data. Do NOT just give me the Google form images.
3. A breakdown of what the results mean for the game being studied.
4. Half page reflection of what you can do better.

Playtest Portfolio (40%)

The big final! This is a polished summary of all the work you've done this term. There should be NO new data collection or fieldwork done for this assignment. You have the data, now focus on how you are presenting it. Consider branding, legibility, and style.

The portfolio should be professional-looking and designed with the idea that you'd present this in a job interview. I understand not all of you are interested in becoming a Games User Researcher, but being able to put a portfolio together is a very useful life skill you can apply to other areas of your professional development.

Remember those reflections you've done all semester? Use those to modify and polish what you have already turned in (when possible).

The portfolio must include the following components:

Title

"Playtest Plan for {game name}", team name, date, and version. You need a title for each game you playtested this term. I don't mind how you organize this information. If you ran the focus group and survey on one game, lump those together. If you ran the observation and thinkaloud on another game, lump those together if you like. Everyone's portfolio will look different as a result but that's okay.

Recruiting play-testers

For each test, tell me how playtesters were recruited. Did you reach out to your D&D group? Did you exclusively test on your roommate because no one else had a webcam and they've been sold out for months? Whatever ya did, let me know.

Playtest logistics

For each test, tell me when, where and what equipment was used for the test.

Testing focus

For each test, tell me what the focus was. This is typically something you will address with the development team (if you are working on a game in live dev) or yourself if you are working on a published game. The testing focus is never as vague as “is the game fun?” Be specific. Were you doing a thinkaloud to help a team assess how user friendly a new controller layout is? Testing how well the environment contributes to storytelling?

Test script

What is the sequence of steps that will be performed during playtest sessions? This typically takes the form of a welcome, asking about gameplay experience, having the play-tester play the game (with observation/thinkaloud), then some form of post-play questionnaire or interview. This does not need to provide exact text that play-testers say (it's not a film script), but it does need to provide sufficient detail so that playtests can be performed uniformly over time, to ensure results are comparable across weeks. For the survey assignment, your test script is probably the paragraph before the survey questions begin.

Questionnaire/focus group guide

You won’t need this section for the thinkaloud or observation, but for the survey and focus group, provide a list of your questions.

Playtest report

The playtest report should be an industry-facing document which briefly covers the playtest results. In terms of format, there isn't an industry standard. These reports vary greatly by company with some even doing video reports. You’ve already written these for each of the assignments, now take them, edit them, make them pop- for example categorize your results and findings based on urgency or severity. Key here is how clear your findings are presented and how well they are described. As I grade these I will be thinking, “If I were the dev team, would I know what I need to do to fix the game based on this feedback? Am I sufficiently motivated to fix the game based off this feedback or does it seem wishy-washy?”

Week-by-week and readings.

Note, to log into the GDC vault to view some of the videos you need to go here and then click log in: https://gdcvault-com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/

Week/ Dat	Twitch lecture topic and preparatory readings	Zoom

e/ Due		Practical
W1 Aug 24	Introduction to the Class Reading: This syllabus! Optional readings: Here is a website to get you started. Read the page linked here and then have a click around. The GRUX special interest group of the International Game Developer's Association is a fantastic resource for Games User Researchers: http://grux.org/what-is-gurux/ (Links to an external site.) The special interest group also produced this video. It is quick and a fun watch: https://youtu.be/KjkvNdc9bfA	Getting to know you, what do you want to know?
W2 Aug 31 Due:	Research Ethics Readings/ homework: Your readings and homework for this week are to get CITI certified. Don't worry, the University of Utah pays for the certification. If you ever want to do human subjects research as a research assistant, you will need a CITI certificate (in fact, some of you may already have one!). If you haven't already done so, here's the link: https://about.citiprogram.org/en/homepage/ (Links to an external site.) After clicking the link, make sure you register for a new account or sign in using an old account. Ensure that you give your University of Utah affiliation so that you don't have to pay. **You'll be doing Group 2: Social Behavioural Research.** To prove that you have completed the training, upload your CERTIFICATE ONLY to Canvas. This is not the module report, but the official looking certificate.	Ethical dilemmas
W3 Sep 7	No Class- Labour Day	

W4 Sep 14 Due: CITI Certificate	Focus Groups Optional Readings: • Konito, j.; Lehtola, L. and J. Bragge. (2004)'Using the Focus Group Method (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)' • Gibbs, G. (2010). Doing A Transcription for Qualitative Research. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfdrtpQDtBk (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)	Focus group practical
W5 Sep 21 Due:	UX and Heuristics Optional readings: Heather Desurvire, M. Caplan, and J.A. Toth. (2004). Using Heuristics to Evaluate the Playability of Game (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.s. *CHI '04 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM, pp. 1509–1512 · Rigby, Scott, and Richard Ryan. "Rethinking Carrots: A New Method For Measuring What Players Find Most Rewarding and Motivating About Your Game (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.". Gamasutra, 16 Jan. 2007. Web. 09 Dec. 2014. · Federoff, M.A. (2002). Heuristics and Usability Guidelines for the Creation and Evaluation of Fun in Video Games (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.. *MS Thesis, Department of Telecommunications*, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA, 2002	Guest Lecture Jordan Lynn, iD software

W6 Sep 28 Due: Focus groups	Observation Optional Readings: • Baker, L.2006. Observation: A Complex Research Method: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/202353/summary(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.) • Bolt, N. and Tulathimutte, T. 2009 'Researching Video Games the UX Way' http://boxesandarrows.com/researching-video-games-the-ux-way/ (Links to an external site.)	Observation practical
W7 Oct 5 Due:	What is Fun? Optional Readings: Rogerson, D. 2019. Did You Have Fun? Analytics in Call of Duty. https://gdcvault-com.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/play/1025985/Did-You-Have-Fun-Analytics Davis, S. B., & Carini, C. (2005). Constructing a player-centred definition of fun for video games design. In People and Computers XVIII—Design for Life (pp. 117-132). Springer London. http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen_Davis/publication/221437158_Constructing_a_Player-_Centred_Definition_of_Fun_for_Video_Games_Design/links/0046351a3ae33267e8000000.pdf (Links to an external site.)	Hobbies Discussion
W8 Oct 12 Due: Observation	Thinkalouds Optional Readings: • Hughes, M. 2012. 'Talking Out Loud is not the Same as Thinking Aloud (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)" • Chek Tien Tan, Tuck Wah Leong, and Songjia Shen. 2014. Combining think-aloud and physiological data to understand video game experiences. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*(CHI '14). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 381-390. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557326 (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.) (Links to an	Thinkaloud Workshop

	external site.) http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2557326 (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.) This should be open access... if it isn't, let me know...	
W9 Oct 19 Due:	Playtesting and the Development Cycle Optional Readings: • Redavid, Claudio, and F. Adil. "An Overview of Game Testing Techniques (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)."Västerås: sn (2011). • Fullerton, Tracy. Chapter 9: Playtesting (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.). Game design workshop: a playcentric approach to creating innovative games. CRC press, 2014.	Guest Lecture James Berg, EA.
W10 Oct 26 Due: Thinkaloud	Surveys This is basically the best resource you will ever come across on survey design:Zelle, E. 2019. "Survey Design in the Wild". Talk given to the Games User Research Summit. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E41ATQqucmI Optional Readings: • Cummings, S. R., Kohn, M. A., & Hulley, S. B. (2013). Designing Questionnaires (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.), Interviews, and Online Surveys. Designing Clinical Research,4. • Davis, J.; Steury, K. and Pagulayan, R. 2005. Á Survey Method for Assessing Perceptions of a Game' http://www.gamestudies.org/0501/davis_steury_pagulayan/ (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)	Writing good survey questions
W11 Nov 2	Analysis and Feedingback Optional Readings:	Let's look at prett

Due:	Hopson, J. 2019. 'The Time I tried to Ruin Halo 2' Polygon: https://www.polygon.com/features/2019/7/2/18651880/the-time-i-tried-to-ruin-halo-2-user-research (Links to an external site.) GUR SIG (2016). How to Easily and Effectively Communicate with Dev Teams.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98T7Gl9ePKU&list=PLsl1h_zG-cXNYP__BcZ_HZjzE_NnFgGrN&index=10 (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.)	y charts and then talk about them
W12 Nov 9 Due: Surveys	Stats Optional Readings: *Rugg, Gordon. Using Statistics : A Gentle Introduction, McGraw-Hill Education, 2007. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utah/detail.action?docID=332691 (Links to an external site.)*	Fun with predictive statistics
W13 Nov 16 Due:	Biometrics and Analytics Optional Readings: Drachen, A., El-Nasr, M. S., & Canossa, A. (2013). Game analytics–the basics (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.(Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.). In Game Analytics (pp. 13-40). Springer London. Mirza-Babaei, P., Long, S., Foley, E., & McAllister, G. (2011, September). Understanding the contribution of biometrics to games user (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site. (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)research. In Proc. DiGRA (pp. 329-	Normally we would go to the lab and monkey around with eyetrackers but consideri

		ng… ???
W14 Nov 23 Due: Suveys written up	Jobs? Optional Readings: Games User Research Salary Survey. https://grux.org/career/salary-survey/#:~:text=The%20Salary%20survey%20is%20an,Research%20and%20User%20Experience%20SIG.&text=New%20for%202020%20is%20an,%2C%20using%20community%2Dsourced%20data!	CV workshop ft. Adam Hunter
W15 Nov 30 Due: Portfolio (next week)	Final Portfolio	Portfolio workshop

Other Relevant Information

ADA Statement

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Union Building, (810) 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations.

Faculty and Student Responsibilities

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also

specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

Non-Contract Note

Note: The syllabus is not a binding legal contract. The instructor may modify it when the student is given reasonable notice of the modification.

Plagiarism Software Policy

Your professor may elect to use a plagiarism detection service in this course, in which case you will be required to submit your paper to such a service as part of your assignment.

Copyright Notice

By participating in this course, students allow the instructor and the university to use materials submitted to the class for educational use, including but not limited to presentations and research conducted by the instructor.

Accommodation Policy

The instructor shall offer no accommodation based on class content. Students must learn to negotiate personal beliefs with objectionable content in a professional manner. Should students require assistance in this they may solicit informal advice from the instructor, however no formal exceptions nor accommodations shall be provided for content.

Acknowledgements

This syllabus is based on prior syllabi developed by Roger Altizer.

The University of Utah values the safety of all campus community members. To report suspicious activity or to request a courtesy escort, call campus police at 801-585-COPS (801-585-2677). You will receive important emergency alerts and safety messages regarding campus safety via text message. For more information regarding safety and to view available training resources, including helpful videos, visit safeu.utah.edu (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.).

Undocumented Student Support:
Immigration is a complex phenomenon with broad impact—those who are directly affected by it, as well as those who are indirectly affected by their relationships with family members, friends, and loved ones. If your immigration status presents obstacles to engaging in specific activities or fulfilling specific course criteria, confidential arrangements may be requested from the Dream Center. Arrangements with the Dream

Center will not jeopardize your student status, your financial aid, or any other part of your residence. The Dream Center offers a wide range of resources to support undocumented students (with and without DACA) as well as students from mixed-status families. To learn more, please contact the Dream Center at 801.213.3697 or visit dream.utah.edu (Links to an external site.). (edited)

Preferred Name and Pronoun:
Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, our instructors respect our students right to be called whatever name and pronoun that feels best for you in class, on papers, exams, group projects, etc. Please advise your instructor of any name or pronoun changes (and update CIS) so they can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun will be respected. If you need assistance getting your preferred name on your uIDcard, please visit the LGBT Resource Center Room 409 in the Olpin Union Building, or email bpeacock@sa.utah.edu to schedule a time to drop by. The LGBT Resource Center hours are M-F 8am-5pm, and 8am-6pm on Tuesdays.

Addressing Sexual Misconduct:
Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which Includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a civil rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran's status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677(COPS).

Wellness Statement:
Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student's ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness; www.wellness.utah.edu (Links to an external site.); 801-581-7776.

University of Utah Student Code:
The Student Code is spelled out in the University of Utah's Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the code. The code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating, tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully to become aware of these issues. Students will receive sanctions for violating one or more of these proscriptions.The faculty will enforce the code. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.Additionally, the College of

Engineering has semester guidelines all students taking courses from CoE departments and programs should be aware of. You can find those here: https://www.coe.utah.edu/students/academic-affairs/academics/semester-guidelines/ (Links to an external site.)

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Students who are found to have participated in academic misconduct in a class will be sanctioned with a failing grade for the course. Students who are sanctioned a second time will not be allowed to take further EAE courses at the University of Utah. Further, students who are in the degree program will removed from the program.

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College of Engineering Addendum:

Be aware that the University of Utah has a safety protocol in place which you can find more info about here:

https://safeu.utah.edu (Links to an external site.)

Please see College of Engineering Guidelines here:

https://www.coe.utah.edu/semester-guidelines