Game Design Studio

Week 2, Class 1
Plan for Today

• Announcement: Thu class may be in a different room
• Jim Whitehead on project opportunity
• Jane Pinckard on game industry and finding potential jobs
• Introduction to interviews, resumes, portfolios
• A little on game innovation, if time permits
• One more thing, if there’s more time
Jim!
Jane!
Jobs
The Games Landscape is Changing

• Console down, Social up
• More non-game companies interested in games
• “Gamification” trend creates game niches in media and entertainment companies
• New modes of distribution make it easier to create indie games/start your own studio.
What Types of Jobs Are There?

• Traditional: programmer, graphics programmer, engine programmer, gameplay engineer, technical artist, etc.

• Social: some of the above, plus analytics engineer, games analyst, data analyst.

• Outside the games industry: game guru/business/design/production (advertising, marketing firms, platform holders, etc.)
Resources

- http://www.insidesocialgames.com/category/jobs/
- http://www.gamasutra.com/jobs/
- http://www.gamejobhunter.com/
- http://www.gamejobs.com/
- http://www.creativeheads.net/
- http://www.gamecareerguide.com/
Other Resources

- http://shpe.soe.ucsc.edu/
- http://nsbe.soe.ucsc.edu/
- http://sweslugs.soe.ucsc.edu/
- http://marcmbrs.ucsc.edu/SACNAS.html
- http://anitaborg.org/initiatives/systers/
- IGDA SIG mailing lists
What Do Companies Look For?

- PASSION
- Discipline
- Talent
- Mix of team player and leadership potential
- Communicator
- Experience on a team shipping a playable project
What Should You Look For?

- Ask questions.
- Company culture
- Company organization
- The way responsibilities are divided
- A career path
Interview Basics

• Play their games (but don’t pretend to more knowledge than you have)
• Ask the recruiter/HR person for details on interview process, whether there is a test and what it will cover, etc.
• Prepare questions.
• Arrive 5 minutes early.
• Dress one level up from the company’s normal dress code. East coast is slightly more formal than west coast.
In the Interview

• Be calm.
• Be honest.
• Be enthusiastic.
• Highlight your strengths but don’t hide your weaknesses.
• Speak clearly and make eye contact.
Sample Question

• Tell me about yourself.
• Why do you want to work here?
• What games are you playing?
• How would you make X game better?
• What strengths do you contribute to the team?
• What are your achievements?
• What weaknesses do you have?
• What’s a difficult situation you encountered, and how did you resolve it?
• How do you handle stressful situations?
• Talk through a potential problem/scenario.
• What’s your five-year plan?
• What’s your dream game?
• Design test/programming test. Sometimes verbal.
• Ask you to explain something technical in layman’s terms.
Noah

In preparation for EA coming Thu
Interviews

• Most companies go through several rounds of interviews
• Start with the general HR filter, then into ones more specific to your position
• People will ask about non-programming things (e.g., the math covered in CMPS 164)
• People will ask in natural-language ways, and also by requesting you write (psuedo)code
Questions from game company interviews

- Take a game you’ve played in the last month, how would you make that game better?

- You are working on a game with at least 1000 objects running around freely. How would you optimize the collision detection between these objects?

- You are given an array with ints between 1 and 1,000,000. One is in the array twice. How can you efficiently determine which one?

- There are n gas stations along a circular road, each with a limited supply of gas. You can only drive clockwise and you start with 0 gas. Knowing how much gas you need to get from each station to the next and how much you can get at each station, design an algorithm to find the gas station you need to start at to get all the way around the circle.
Resumes

• Try to have a draft resume by Thu EA visit (not officially due until week 4)
• Keep to one page
• Name and contact information at top
• Characterization/objective at top (customize for position?) and portfolio address
• Focus on game-related topics and/or topics connected to interview
Resumes

• Education
• Employment
• Games
• Skills
• Other possibilities: awards, extracurricular
• Leave off things from high school unless strongly related to games or your pitch for yourself (to that company)
Portfolios

• Focus on 3-4 best projects, showing who you represent yourself to be on resume/letter

• You’re an engineer — show behavior over time (videos, downloadable things to play, both with contact info embedded)

• Use text to describe: what’s interesting, your contributions, other important info for audience
Portfolios

- Use server space that you will still have access to after graduation
- Really easy to navigate, clear contact info at top (more important than pretty)
- Try to bring a wireframe for Thu (just stills)
Game Innovation
Game Innovation

• Bring in a passion from the outside — crochet!
• New mechanics/themes
• Take advantage of new technologies:
  – Motion control
  – Mobile
  – Touch
  – Social
  – WebGL/HTML5
Game innovation

• Familiar mechanics in a new situation. *American McGee's Alice* uses standard action mechanics in dark Wonderland

• A new mechanic supported by new element. *Timebot* combines simple door/trigger puzzles & “collaborate with yourself”
Game innovation

- A new mechanic for something familiar (wheel navigation of *Mass Effect* dialogue)
- A new mechanic for the unfamiliar (*Portal*’s portals are a new gameplay element, even if already in engines)
So what are mechanics?

- Two common meanings
  - 1: Things the player can do (jump) as opposed to rules (gravity)
  - 2: The deep rules by which gameworld and game operate (Adams)

- In either case, with your skills, you should be able to innovate on mechanics level!
Game ideas

• Gameplay: a puzzle game, a party game, a game like *The Sims*, a game like *Super Mario*

• Technology: a 3D game, an asynchronous multiplayer game, a specific tool trick

• World, theme, story: HP Lovecraft, environmental education, espionage
Game ideas

• Brainstorm multiple ideas connected to your strengths/interests
• “A 2D Sims-style game set in an HP Lovecraft world”
• “A mosaic-assembling puzzle game with mechanics inspired by art history”
• “A Diplomacy-style game of conflict and allegiance set in a suburban mall”
The big challenge

• Thinking of things that haven’t been done before isn’t that hard

• It’s more challenging to think of new things where the *gameplay* and *gameworld* work together — what we do and what we see

• Rather than always thinking of new worlds for same mechanics, varying both can open new creative spaces (even new genres)