



“Core Loop: Finding, Amplifying, and Refining the Fun”

Time: MW 8:00-10:00 pm EST

Duration: Aug 28-Oct 9, 2023

Industry Expert: Damon Stone, Game Designer (Android: Netrunner; A Game of Thrones LCG; Call of Cthulhu LCG)

Academic Expert: Andrew D. Devenney, Associate Director of CLGS, Co-owner and Publisher of Superhero Necromancer Press

Core Loop is a six-and-a-half-week synchronous online course focused on the refining of tabletop board game designs. We'll cover a working definition of “fun” in the context of games and how to determine where your players experience the most fun. You'll then take a game idea, develop a series of mechanics, refine the idea into a full working prototype, and at each step, we'll identify what, where, and why your game is fun and bring that front and center.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will develop a tabletop game idea.
2. Students will learn how to identify and develop the core loop
3. Students will, through their own testing and observation learn to identify what parts of their game are fun
4. Students will modify their games to maximize the opportunities for players to engage in the most fun and compelling aspects of their game.

Course Schedule

Week One

Monday, Aug 28th: Concept Creation & Vision Document

- Introduction to Course & Gather Platform
- What Do YOU Need Out of the Class?
- What is a Core Loop?
- What is Fun?
- Why “fun” matters
- Creating A Concept/Writing a Vision Document
- Matching Mechanics with Theme

Assignment

Decide on a theme. “What is this game about?”

Write a vision document

- *Answer “What experience are you creating for your players?”*
- *Choose Major Mechanics and outline the proposed Core Loop*

Wednesday, Aug 30th: Core of the Core

- Review outlines
- Repetition Breeds Familiarity, Familiarity Creates Competency, Competency Spurs Innovation: How the Core Loop Impacts the UX
- Selection of minor mechanical systems

Assignment

*Finalize Core Loop, Adjusting for game flow
Create a Screen Test Prototype to present*

Week Two

Wednesday, Sep 6th: Presentations and Feedback

- BREAKOUT: Demonstrate your Screen Test Prototype
 - Talk through the Core Loop
 - Peer Feedback
- “What You Wanted” versus “What You Got”
- Moveing Forward
 - Pivot or Redo?

Assignment

Refine your prototype and write a design journal detailing how the mechanics represent the theme.

Week Three

Monday, Sep 11th: Proof of Concept

- Elegance through Simplicity
- Complexity Through Interaction
- Center and Increase the Fun
- Positive Reinforcement Through Feedback Loops: Rewarding Players for Having Fun

Assignment

Create a Proof of Concept Prototype and write expectations of where the fun is.

Wednesday, Sep 13th: Get it on the Table

- Importance of Testing
- What Testing Can/Can't Tell Us
- How to Get What You Need
- Importance of Recording Feedback

Assignment

Playtesting: at least three playtest reports.

Week Four

Monday, Sep 18th: Advanced Design Techniques to Solve Basic Problems

- Interpreting Playtest Feedback
 - It's Not Personal it's Just Data
- BREAKOUT: Review Playtest Reports from Sept 13th assignment
- Scaffolding
 - Complex vs Complicated

- How to build complexity without increasing difficulty in playing
 - How to increase complexity through game stages
- Refining Feedback Loops

Assignment

Refine Proof of Concept into a Working Prototype

Wednesday, Sep 20th: Review & Refine Prototype

- BREAKOUT: Review working prototypes
- Troubleshoot prototypes

Assignment - Refine the Prototype and track changes, reasons for making those changes, and directions considered or discarded. Get at least one playtest in with the prototype

Week Five

Monday, Sep 25th: Fun & Complexity Check

- Review reports from Sept 20th assignment
- Troubleshooting
- Where's the Fun?
- Feedback on Feedback Loops

Assignment - Evaluate the Current Prototype and Reorient or Refine

Wednesday, Sep 27th: Working Rules Doc as a Check

- What is a Working Rules Doc?
- Crafting a Language/Mean What You Say
- Golden Rules
- Intuitive Organization
- How You Can Use the Doc

Assignment - write a doc for your playtesters to learn your game

Week Six

Monday, Oct 2nd: Review, Refine, and Reinforce

- BREAKOUT: Review
 - What is your core loop?
 - Why these mechanics?
 - Where is the fun?
 - How do you reward players?
 - When does the game increase in complexity
- Refining and Redefining
- Where Can You Reinforce The...
 - Theme
 - Fun
 - Rewards

Assignment - Refine prototype and rules and more testing.

Wednesday, Oct 4th: Kicking the Tires

- Putting Your Game Through Its Paces
- The Best and Worst Kind of Testers and Why You WANT Both
- If You Love it...Break It

Assignment - Find the Flaws, Misinterpret the Rules, Play Mean, and then fix everything.

Week Seven

Monday Oct 9th: What Next

- Widening Your Audience
- Design versus Development: Fun versus Balance
- Moving on to Pitches and Funding Campaigns

Assessment

In order to certify your completion of this course, you must finish each of the six core Challenge activities listed below before the end of the course:

- Create a core loop!
- Highlight what is fun in your game!
- Reward players for having fun!
- Use Scaffolding!
- Create a Working Prototype!
- Modify Your Game!

Finishing the Challenges requires submitting a 1-2 page summary of your creative activities for each Challenge by the appropriate class period deadline. Instructors will provide feedback on your submissions, either in class or in writing or both (depending on the nature of the Challenge assignment).