

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) is grateful for the review and recommendations provided by the Review Committee. We appreciate the Review Committee's feedback on the Game Design Certificate (GDC) program. We especially appreciate their recognition that we are constantly working to improve the program as well as recognizing that we "take pride in the goals and the activities of the program" and that "faculty and graduate assistants appear to be in agreement about program goals and their commitment to support student learning." In response, we have prepared a point-by-point response to their thoughtful and comprehensive review. In addition, we address the questions raised by the School of Education Academic Planning Council.

1. Areas of Strength

1.1. Clear goals to focus the program mission.

We really appreciate that the committee sees how the mission has come through in our implementation of the program. Our blend of C&I with Game Design is unique in that we are focused on the intersection of game design, education, and social justice, and we have worked hard to put the mission at the forefront of our efforts.

1.2. Small classes facilitate personalized learning.

Game design classes are more similar to visual arts studio classes than they are to the traditional seminar courses that are more typical of our department. Over the course of the program, GDC students create multiple games from scratch, including designing, making the art, programming the code, and writing the game narrative. As the core of the classes involves designing and building games in teams, instructors must play through student work, teach team skills, check in repeatedly with all groups about design goals and problems, and collaboratively resolve intra-group social issues. Additionally, the diverse technical skills required for game development means that instructors must evaluate and critique thousands of lines of program code, art assets, and design documents. It is incredibly time-consuming but follows best practices for design classes as outlined by the College Art Association. Student feedback, the quality of their work, and alumni who have gone on to work in the field evince the benefits of this model. The instructors of the certificate program collectively possess extensive expertise and experience in game design and development across multiple sectors, encompassing both industry and academia. This pedagogical approach has proven to be effective in the field.

1.3. Strong student demand.

Games are an incredibly popular medium, and are played in some form – board games, video games, improv games, sports – by almost every single UW-Madison student. As of 2019, more students across the US had played games in the last week than watched TV, movies, or read a book. Many UW students want to build on their love of gameplay with a deeper understanding of how they are made through design, art, code, and project management skills. By working in

small interdisciplinary teams with intensive instructor support, students without relevant background knowledge can learn this range of skills and build a portfolio of games. They can learn from each other, and they are enthusiastic about this experience, noting how meaningful the in-depth mentorship is to their experience at UW and their growth as designers.

1.4. Strong staff commitment to the program.

For all our instructors and faculty, the program is a labor of love. Students routinely remark how invested we are and stay in contact to share the games they make and the careers they build after leaving the program. This dedication is seen every semester in course evals, as well as in the student responses recorded earlier in this report. We have designed the program to be meaningful to us while also being enjoyable to teach. In our hiring, we have specifically looked for candidates to support the mission of the program and the department; this is a major reason for the commitment and dedication.

2. Areas for Improvement

2.1. Limited program capacity.

The Review Committee (RC) notes that almost all students and faculty described the program's limited capacity to meet student demand, and that this has impacts for enrollment and certificate completion.

As discussed through our report and the committee's review, we have only two tenure-line faculty members and one teaching faculty member serving thousands of students per year, including the roughly 300 students that intend to get the game design certificate. That ratio appears to be higher than any other certificate program on campus. Despite having a small team of instructors (particularly lacking a program coordinator), we endeavor to undertake numerous behind-the-scenes tasks that go beyond instructional duties. For instance, we collaboratively handle program administration, website building and management, operation of the game lab, outreach efforts, promotion of the program at conferences, responding to frequent requests for meetings with groups across campus (given the widespread interest in integrating games into classes or research), scheduling classes across units, program development, hiring, and various other responsibilities. Our commitment to the program is made clear throughout this work, but we are at capacity. Increasing program size without additional resources would reduce our ability to support the program. It does not seem possible; the faculty, staff, students, and review committee agree that it is more likely that pushing the limit further would cause the program to fail.

2.2. Budget obstacles to increasing capacity.

The RC could see that despite several independent initiatives which have been successful in raising capacity, we are reaching a plateau that would be insurmountable without additional funding.

Given that we are so limited in staffing, we hire outside the department as often as we can, but, as we are the only game design program in a Dept. of C&I in the nation, it can be hard to find people to serve as part-time lecturers. Outsiders are harder to find and typically cost more money per credit. While upper-level PhD students often serve in these instructional roles across campus, the structure of the C&I Department has resulted in too few doctoral students with appropriate expertise to serve first as TAs and then as instructors for these courses. In short, we hire students and outsiders as much as possible, but there are not enough of either. For long term sustainability, we would need funded permanent positions.

2.3. Program design obstacles to growth.

The RC agrees that by prioritizing pedagogy, we may be limiting potential size.

Despite the three core faculty collectively teaching more than 1000 students per year across the Game Design curriculum, we cannot match demand. This has been a blessing and curse. While our Game Design studio courses are more similar to studio courses in other departments than typical C&I seminar or lecture courses, our classes are typically about 60% larger than other studio courses (which cap at 12). There has been consistent interest in finding ways to meet more demand, and we have increased the number of classes we offer by a significant factor – indeed, the two tenure-line faculty in the program rarely teach graduate classes anymore.

2.4. Program elective integration and availability.

The RC suggests that, though we have almost doubled the number of electives, the number remains small compared to both interest and potential.

We appreciate the suggestion by the review committee to include more classes as certificate electives. We would love to find a way to help students find alternatives when game design classes are full. That said, with only 5 required classes, we will need to make hard choices on which courses are eligible to be substituted. Over the coming year, we plan to identify new potential electives and find ways to integrate them into the program. In the last two years, we have increased the number of options by 4, and we think that adding options is a potentially fruitful way to accommodate higher demand.

2.5. Timely program staffing.

The RC noted that we are having trouble staffing classes promptly.

Funding additional sections by hiring outside UW costs the department money without generating revenue, and it typically comes late in the cycle. This is a symptom of the other issues marked above; it may be beyond our control.

3. Recommendations for Action

- 3.1. Explore solutions to expand capacity in bottleneck courses.
- 3.2. Create intentional processes to prioritize diverse student enrollment.
- 3.3. Expand the program to include more course options.

The GDC committee had several internal discussions to address possibilities for these actions.

One option might be to require students to declare the certificate before enrolling in some of the sections of C&I 277, so that we could guarantee slots will be available for GDC students who need to take C&I 277.

The course that is most responsible for limiting program size is our capstone class – Game Design II. As described above, this course is both difficult to staff because of expertise, and it requires small sections because of the pedagogical requirements of a capstone studio course. We have so far avoided finding alternatives for our capstone, as it has been the culminating portfolio class around which the certificate was constructed. That said, we have considered restructuring the certificate to allow for more “tracks” in the certificate which may focus effort on, say, game development (in Computer Science) or game studies (which might be found in English or Comm. Arts) rather than creating games. This would enable C&I faculty and staff to teach more sections of Game Design I. While we are concerned about the capstone course being taught outside the program, it is the only viable strategy we could find for meeting student demand without increasing resources to C&I. In turn, we are working as a group to find courses that might serve as alternatives in the program, and, indeed, we have already started talking to departments around UW about possible classes. Within the School of Education, the Department of Theatre & Drama has expressed interest in offering game related courses that could serve as alternatives to bottleneck courses and we are in conversations with them about how their contributions could fit into our program. Outside of SoE, Computer Sciences had offered a game development class which could, with only limited work, be connected to the Game Design Certificate. That said, with the influx of students to the Computer Science major – it is now the largest major in the state of Wisconsin, though they have fewer than 40 faculty – they are not currently offering what they have identified as “niche” courses. (This is a problem at every large university in the USA.) Discussions are ongoing. The iSchool, similarly, may be a good candidate to offer an alternative games course, and we have had preliminary discussions with faculty in that department. They do not currently offer one, but they are not opposed to exploring further options. Drawing on courses outside C&I as an alternative for the capstone course Game Design II does also mean some additional administrative work for C&I as the department homing the program. As we discuss in 4.1 below, we are also exploring options outside of UW–Madison. We are excited about the possibilities of offering a few “tracks” to

make more classes available, and we will be putting significant time into exploring this in the next year.

3.4. Revive the graduate-level GDC Masters (MS) proposal.

We plan to revise our MS proposal this summer and resubmit it in Fall 2024. It would generate revenue and share instructional staff such that it could increase capacity of the undergraduate certificate program.

4. SoE APC Questions

- 4.1. The committee recognized tensions between a desire for small classes and a need to accommodate student demand (which in this case is substantial), given limited resources, and acknowledged that larger classes should be possible in this program. The members of the SoE Academic Planning Council are requesting more information about how to increase class size without additional resources.
- 4.2. What strategies might the program consider to address high demand and difficulty students have enrolling in courses required for the certificate? Would limiting initial enrollment in the certificate through expanded or revised prerequisites be desirable or undesirable?

As outlined in the report and the review, simply increasing the class size of Game Design I and Game Design II would significantly compromise the quality of instruction and the core reasons that this program is in high demand. Thus, as stated in the report, expanding the program to meet the demand requires additional resources to staff additional courses. Nevertheless, we are dedicated to exploring possibilities over the next year for offering new classes, providing new choices, and alternatives. These may include: new classes sourced from elsewhere at UW (as detailed in 3.1 above); other new, larger seminars that we teach as substitutes in C&I; or classes that could be substituted from UW-Platteville, UW-Stout, UW-Whitewater, UW-Milwaukee, Edgewood College, Milwaukee Area Technical College, and Madison College. We maintain communication with faculty at these institutions, and we can encourage students to enroll in classes there. This approach will help alleviate demand, strengthen connections with our colleague institutions, and foster closer ties across the region. Drawing on courses at other institutions could grow the program without additional teaching resources, but we acknowledge it would produce an administrative burden for tracking the additional students and transferring institutional credits. While this is a significant endeavor, we are eager to start. Furthermore, we believe that UW–Madison could serve as a "hub" for regional games classes, which, in turn, should positively impact graduate options for both students coming from UW and those applying to regional universities.

5. Suggestions for Additional Funding

Many of the issues identified in this report and the subsequent responses could be remedied with added funding:

- One or more additional tenure-line faculty members could raise the profile of the program such that we become internationally ranked; having only 2 full-time tenure-line faculty is deemed too few by rankings such as Princeton Review. In addition, this would enable us to increase the program size by approximately 50%, as well as find additional research funding to support the (potential) Master's and doctoral programs.
- Additional Teaching Professors or Teaching Faculty could create permanent, professional instructional staff who could focus on expanding course offerings.
- A full-time program coordinator could handle the many hours a week that the faculty and staff spend on scheduling, marketing, organizing, managing, and administering the Game Design Certificate and graduate programs. A dedicated, updated website would further enable us to recruit and to become a nationally ranked program. At the moment, the faculty – with the occasional help of undergraduate volunteers – can only sporadically update a simple website.
- A full-time games librarian would be an inexpensive addition, allowing the game lab to be open during normal business hours and multiplying the ability of the instructors to teach effectively (indeed, this could be an undergraduate).
- Dedicated doctoral assistantships could address the doctoral student, TA, and instructor crunch such that we could admit students who are, effectively, “assigned” to game design.
- The least expensive additional funding would be a larger dedicated materials and expenses budget. The Game Lab is outdated and requires instructors to spend out of pocket to keep it stocked. Our current part-time librarian position comes out of a small (\$5K) existing funding stream, leaving little money for lab updates and materials. Students cannot design and create games without materials, tools, and dedicated space. The lab was last updated in 2017, meaning that modern video games do not work on most of the computers and or any of the consoles in the lab.

6. Conclusions

We deeply appreciate the interest, attention, and thoughtful consideration that the committee and APC put into their reviews and responses. It is gratifying that the department, the review committee, and the School of Education see the value in the work that program does. We are excited to grow and adapt the program over the coming years, and we believe that we have the potential to become a model for other programs in the US and internationally.