

## Implementing a Game Design & Development Minor in Dubrovnik, Croatia

### *Background*

In the spring of 2013, I had the opportunity to teach two classes at the American College of Management and Technology (ACMT) in Dubrovnik, Croatia. This was my first experience teaching overseas, and my first visit to Croatia—and the experience was profoundly transformative for me. The courses I taught at ACMT were part of the college’s Information Technology (IT) degree, rather than courses from my current academic discipline of Interactive Games and Media. However, early on in my time in Dubrovnik, I began to feel that the architecture and history of the city made it an extraordinarily valuable context for students studying game design and development.

During my first few weeks in Dubrovnik, I walked the centuries-old walls of the old city with several students. Halfway through the walk, one of the students looked out over the terracotta rooftops and exclaimed “I’m living in *Assassins’ Creed!*”<sup>\*</sup> That casual comment, though meant as a joke, actually had a significant impact on my thinking about Dubrovnik as a situated space for the study of game design and development. The more time I spent in the city, the more I realized how rich the environment was for this field of study. Even my daily “commute” to campus, which involved navigating narrow walkways and old stone staircases, led me to think about the way the non-linear, richly textured space of Dubrovnik would lend itself to new ways of thinking about game design. Creating a sense of depth in games—both graphically and in narrative—is often a challenge for game designers. Immersion in an environment that is so rich in both tangible and narrative texture would be a wonderful thing for game design students.

Based on those experiences, I began to investigate the potential for bringing a minor in game design to ACMT. At first, I saw this primarily as an opportunity to encourage students from my university’s Game Design & Development (GDD) program to pursue study abroad opportunities in Croatia. However, discussions with students, faculty, and administrators in Dubrovnik led me to consider the possibility of bringing some of our highly-regarded game design and development curriculum to the ACMT campus—not just for study abroad students, but also for students in both the IT and hospitality degree programs in Dubrovnik.

### *Implementation Specifics*

I am proposing to spend the spring semester of the 2014-15 academic year developing a new minor in Game Design & Development to be offered at the ACMT Dubrovnik campus, and teaching two game design classes to students while I am there. The minor would be based on coursework already being offered in the successful Game Design & Development degree program at the Rochester Institute of Technology, but would be tailored to the academic and cultural context of the ACMT campus. I would work with the ACMT faculty and game industry professionals in Croatia to identify a set of courses that combined the strength of the RIT game design curriculum with the unique aspects of the Croatian context. This would also involve determining the best way to offer the courses on an

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\* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin's\\_Creed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassin's_Creed)

ongoing basis, using a combination of visiting faculty, online learning, additional training for existing ACMT faculty, and use of industry professionals as adjunct instructors.

During my semester in Dubrovnik, I would plan to teach two classes—the current “Game Design & Development I” course, which is part of the core curriculum in the current RIT GD&D program, and a new course intended to introduce non-technical students in the Hospitality & Tourism program to basic programming and prototyping concepts. Both classes could serve the needs of study abroad students as well as Croatian students. At the same time, I would be working on the design of several additional courses on topics including both level design and games for tourism, which could be offered in subsequent semesters. These would be new courses, tailored for the unique environment that Dubrovnik provides.

### *Anticipated Benefits*

The proposed minor would have benefits for US students seeking opportunities to study abroad, for Croatian and other EU students interested in working in the growing games industry sector, and for the country of Croatia itself.

In my initial discussions with ACMT colleagues, I have found that they are very enthusiastic about the potential for such a minor—not just to attract more study abroad students, but also to enhance the existing degree programs at ACMT, and to draw more students from across the European Union to the university as full-time students.

Currently, ACMT in Dubrovnik offers two degree programs—one in Information Technology, and one in Tourism, Hospitality, and Service Management. The proposed minor would be designed with two tracks—one for students coming from a technical degree program, and one for students in non-technical fields.

Information Technology students already have many of the technical skills necessary for the game industry, but are lacking in an understanding of basic game design and production concepts. They, along with study abroad students from computing fields, would not need basic programming and web concepts in order to develop game prototypes and systems as part of their coursework.

While it would be tempting to offer the minor only to students with a strong technical background, the use of game design and game mechanics in non-game contexts (sometimes referred to as “gamification”) has become increasingly important in the fields of tourism and hospitality. In some ways, these industries could be considered the first to have experimented with gamification, through mechanics such as frequent flyer points and “coffee card” programs. A minor in Game Design & Development that met the needs of non-technical students could provide students in a variety of academic fields with a strong set of skills to enhance the value of their degree. It would also provide an opportunity for students across degree programs—and nationalities—to take courses together and learn from each other’s fields. In addition, it has the potential to make the ACMT degree programs more attractive to a wider range of students in Croatia and across the EU.

For US-based game design and development students who choose to study abroad in Dubrovnik, the richness of dimensionality and texture in the architecture and landscape of Dubrovnik would lend themselves beautifully to concepts of level design, 3D modeling, and texture creation, while the rich history of the area would be useful in narrative design classes. In addition, US students would benefit from exposure to a culture different from what they typically encounter during their college careers. Internationalization is a major priority in game design and development (as it is for most computing fields), but it is often difficult for students who have not experienced other cultures firsthand to understand that creating international versions of games or software involves more than simple language translation.

#### *Why Dubrovnik?*

Croatia is home to a growing number of game development companies (including Croteam, Ocean Media, Dreamatrix, Pandora Studio, Lemonade3d, 2x2 Games, and others), and these companies would benefit greatly from a deeper pool of college graduates with a strong understanding of game design and the games industry. During my stay in Dubrovnik, I had conversations with executives at several of these companies, all of whom expressed a strong interest in graduates from a degree program that included game design and development courses. With the recent entrance of Croatia into the European Union, there is greatly increased potential for Croatia to become a key location in the European games industry, and a strong educational program in this field would be of benefit to both Croatia and the larger EU community.

While there are several universities in Europe with programs in game design and/or game studies, there is still a rather striking difference in the approaches currently used in these European and Scandinavian programs and the American approach involving a stronger mix of development with design. I believe that Croatia is an ideal location for a program that begins to merge these two approaches. Croatia's central location will allow me to access existing networks of professional expertise and academic knowledge in Russia, Eastern and Central Europe and Scandinavia, while also building a fresh approach leavened by access to American paradigms as exemplified by RIT's highly-regarded curriculum.

I have developed strong ties with academic and industry colleagues internationally, and have given invited presentations at both academic and industry events outside of the United States. This has given me valuable insight into how these courses and projects could be adapted to international contexts, as well as a network of EU contacts with whom I could collaborate to ensure that curriculum designed and offered in Croatia would be useful to both potential students and potential employers for the program's graduates.

#### *Why Me?*

I have extensive experience in developing and teaching courses in both the Information Technology and Interactive Games & Media departments at RIT, where I have developed and taught courses including "Introduction to Interactive Media," "Game Design and Development I & II," "Online Identity, Community, and Group Behavior," "Introduction to Web Design and Development," and "Web-Database Integration," as well as a number of

seminars focused on the development of specific games. My teaching and course development experience, along with many years of service on departmental and college curriculum committees, has prepared me well for the tasks associated with developing new courses and programs, and teaching those courses.

I have included syllabi from two classes that I developed and have taught frequently. The first is from an introductory class in game design, which is currently taken by all GDD majors during their sophomore year. This is one of the classes that I would plan to teach while in Dubrovnik. The second is from a graduate class on online identity, community, and online behavior, which I typically teach to graduate students from a range of programs at RIT. Because of its relevance to the development of social games, portions of the content from that class would be incorporated into one of the new courses to be offered in Croatia.

In addition to my teaching experience, I also served as the lead designer and producer for a community game called *Picture the Impossible* (<http://picturetheimpossible.com/>), which provided me with insights into how a well-designed game can make the history and culture of a geographic area more engaging and accessible. This type of game would be particularly relevant to students in the Tourism and Hospitality program. I am also currently the lead designer and producer for “Just Press Play” (<http://play.rit.edu>), an achievement system designed to better engage undergraduate students in their campus community. These experiences would be immensely valuable in designing appropriate curriculum for ACMT, as well as enriching the educational experience for students in my classes there.

Having spent the spring of 2013 in Dubrovnik, I feel I have a good understanding of the cultural challenges and opportunities that the city and the country offer. In addition, during my time in the country, and since my return to the US, I have worked to build a strong relationship with faculty and administrators at the ACMT Dubrovnik campus. Their enthusiasm for the addition of game design courses to their curriculum will be critical to the success of the new minor.

I am eager to work with my Croatian colleagues—both at ACMT and in the Croatian game industry—to help build a strong educational program in game design in Dubrovnik. I hope that the Fulbright Scholar Program will be able to help me accomplish that goal.