

# TC 448: Machinima Syllabus

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Class Location: 242 Communication Arts Bldg. (PC Lab)

Class Time: 10:20am-12:10pm F + 1 hour arranged

Course Website: [www.gel.msu.edu/machinima](http://www.gel.msu.edu/machinima)

## Course Description

Two things that add time to making a film are setting the scenery and directing actors. What if the scenery was already made for you and the actors were just puppets that did exactly what you told them to do? This is what Machinima gives to a filmmaker.

Machinima is a filming technique that uses video game engines to provide the scenery and actors for a film. By capturing the animations of in-game characters a Machinima producer can then add their own sounds and effects to create a unique film experience. This special topics course will allow a group of students to study the techniques of Machinima. Throughout the semester students will look at filming and story creation techniques that apply to traditional film, look at how these can correlate to Machinima, and critique current examples of Machinima films. Outside of class students will collaborate, putting forth a large amount of effort to write and produce their very own Machinima.

## Course Objective

To give students a chance to learn and practice the skills needed to envision and produce Machinima products. Students will be given the chance to express themselves creatively through their work as well as work in teams to produce larger projects. Students will have a wide variety of skills that each of them can bring to the production process and are encouraged to help one another in the pursuit of their creative work. The course will require a lot of hard work but the students should leave with a greater understanding of what it takes to produce Machinima.

## Suggested Prerequisite Skills

Experience in one or more of the below skill areas will help in this course:

- 1) Film / Video Editing
- 2) Audio Production / Editing

### 3) Special Effects Production

Other areas that are valuable:

- Writing
- Storyboarding
- Game Scripting
- 3D modeling
- Video Distribution and Presentation
- Gaming Knowledge

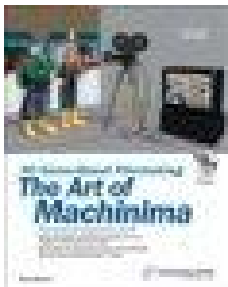
## Required Materials

**Video Capturing Software** – (Any type that allows for at least 24 frames per second capture rate inside of a video game environment.)

Since there are not any games available on the computer labs, for your final project, video captured footage will have to be from personal computers. Please make sure you have access to a full version of some sort of video capturing software that will not watermark or affect the captured video in any way. The free version of FRAPS will not count.

## Suggested Material

*Book:*



**3D Game-Based Filmmaking: The Art of Machinima** (with CD-ROM)

*Software:*

**Machinimation Version 1 or 2** – Version one is a stand alone application based off the Quake 3 Engine while Version 2 is a modification program that needs Doom 3 to run. Offered from Foutainhead Entertainment for \$25 for Version 1 while Version 2 is free if you have Doom 3. Machinimation v1 is installed in the PC Lab for students to use.

**FRAPS** – Fraps is a video capturing tool that works well with PC video games. Offered from Beeba for \$37. A free version of FRAPS is offered in the room 242 of Comm Arts. Bldg.

**Snapz Pro X** – Another video capturing tool that works on Macs, offered from Ambrosia Software for \$69.

(A longer list of helpful programs is provided on the course website.)

## Lab Facilities

### **PC Lab 242**

Our class will take place in room 242 of the Comm. Arts building, also known as the PC Lab. This computer lab offers high-end PC machines that have Maya, Photoshop and other programs that might help in our Machinima making process. Machinimation, Virtual Dub, DivX and Xvid codecs, and FRAPS (Free version) are all available on the PC's in the PC lab.

### **DMAT Lab 236**

In room 236 of the Comm. Arts building is the DMAT lab which offers G5 Macs. These machines have Final Cut Pro, and SoundTrack for video and audio editing, respectively.

## Suggested Materials

It is highly recommended that you have access to a quick, reliable, and portable means of transferring large amounts of video, audio, and other files to and from different computers.

Some options include:

- Blank DVDs (or to a lesser extent CDs)
- Flash Drives
- Portable Hard Drives

Video editing usually takes many Gigabytes of memory in order to hold all your files so keep this in mind when preparing to create any Machinima projects.

## Tentative Schedule

### Class Topics

Sept. 1: Class Overview, Machinima Overview

Sept. 8: History of Machinima

Sept. 15: Machinimation Tutorials

Sept. 22: Script Writing / Story boards

Sept. 29: Pre-Production Techniques/Capturing and looking at games

Oct. 6: Storytelling

Oct. 13: Cinematography

Oct. 20: Video and Audio Editing

Oct. 27: Final Projects Initial Presentation and Brainstorm

Nov. 3: Special Effects

Nov. 10: Group storyboarding and scripts presentation

Nov. 17: Compression / Deliverables and Scripting

Nov. 24: Thanksgiving

Dec. 1: Group trailer presentations

Dec. 8: Where Machinima is going

Dec. 15: Final Videos Shown (10:00am – 12:00pm)

### Assignment Start and Due Dates

Sept. 8 – Sept 21: Critique of Machinima

Sept. 22 - Oct. 5: Scripts and Storyboards

Oct. 6 – Nov 2: Individual Machinima (3 minutes)

Oct. 20 - Dec. 8: Final Group Machinima (6 minute)

## Attendance Policy

Since class is held once a week, class is deemed mandatory. Students are also required to make an extra hour available during the week to fully devote to this class outside of any other time required to complete the assignments for the course.

In class activities can not be made up. Excuses for missing class will be given for religious observation (that are brought to the instructors attention beforehand), documented medical leave, university sanctioned events (that is brought to the instructors attention beforehand and with documentation from a university faculty member or administrator) and extreme situations.

## Grading Policy

### **Grading:**

5% In class assignments  
10% Critique of Machinima  
10% Storyboard  
25% Individual Machinima  
50% Final Group Machinima

All assignment will be graded on a 4.0 scale. Expectations for assignment quality will increase as the semester progresses.

### **Late work:**

Assignments must be turned in by 11:59pm of that assignment's due date. Any assignment received after this time and up to a week after the due date will be marked down one full grade point (i.e. a 4.0 project will now receive a 3.0). More than a week will result in two full grade points taken off. Any assignment not turned in by the end of the current semester's finals week will receive a 0.0.

Technology always messes up when you need it the most so please plan accordingly for the assignments. These assignments will help in the learning the skills required for Machinima production as well as other creative projects. Assignments turned in on time will allow for proper feedback which will help improve your future work. Procrastination will put you too far behind and may affect other students as well.

## Academic Policy

### **Copyright (and Fair Use)**

This is a big issue that plagues the entire Machinima community. Who owns the right to images from commercial produced games? We will discuss this in class but for now we need to move past it.

For class we will take the stance that these assignments are for academic purposes and are not for financial gain. So any video footage from video games will be allowed for this class. Same goes for any audio. But with such liberties to use copyrighted material you must provide adequate credit reference for any of these works you use. You'll notice that online Machinima do this often and it helps protect our right to create work that people can freely view.

Also any work that is deemed Creative Commons, Fair Use, or Free must still be credited for assignments.

### **Academic Honesty**

In the Academic Freedom Report it states “the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” See additional references to Academic Honesty in Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide.

### **Plagiarize**

Copying material and claiming it is your own is considered plagiarism. Again please give credit where credit is due. Students who plagiarize will receive a 0.0 for the assignment or fail the course.

### **Submitting Work from Other Classes**

I doubt if many classes make it available to turn in a Machinima for a project but if so please make sure that you are producing original work for assignments in this class.

### **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for People and Disabilities to develop reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice or 355-1293 (TTY)).