

M.S./Ph.D. in Critical Game Design

Rensselaer's Critical Game Design program is designed to graduate entrepreneurial, critical-theory savvy game developers who work to change the face of games research and the games industry.

The Critical Game Design M.S./Ph.D. program is designed to train scholar-practitioners who are deeply versed in game production, game studies theory, and scholarly writing and research. Graduates from this program will be well-positioned to teach and conduct research at the university level, as well as to apply their skills within the games industry and independent spaces as consultants, directors, and producers.

Academic Advisor

See your advisor first about almost everything. The Office of Graduate Education specifies that you meet with your advisor each Spring semester to review your progress, update your plan of study, and complete and file a Doctoral Student Yearly Review (DSYR) form.

The Graduate Program Director assigns all incoming students an interim adviser upon entering the program. In the case of students who enter the program funded under a specific research grant, the faculty member holding that grant will typically serve as their adviser. A student may later choose a different member of the faculty as her or his dissertation adviser. Since this process involves balancing multiple considerations, the student should consult with both their current and prospective advisers and the Graduate Program Director to ensure a smooth transition.

Graduate Student Services Administrator (GSSA)

Jennifer Mumby, Sage 4305, x4784, email: mumbyj@rpi.edu.

See GSSA about forms and paperwork. GSSA submits all forms to the Office of Graduate Education electronically once they are signed. Please maintain your own file in electronic and/or paper form.

Graduate Program Director (2019-2022)

Prof. Mei Si, West Hall 314B, x3778*, sim@rpi.edu or meisi.g@gmail.com

See GPD with questions about paperwork, course and program requirements, and other matters if your advisor cannot answer them. Please keep the GPD informed of all plans regarding your progress to degree, including when you intend to finish various requirements, when you need to go on leave, or other matters.

Co-term and M.S.:

Total credits required for graduation: 30

Duration: 1 year

Curriculum:

YEAR 1 FALL (Semester 1, 15 Credits)	YEAR 1 SPRING (Semester 2, 15 Credits)
<p>Game Studies: Theory + Praxis (3 credits) -Introduces major game theorists and explicitly ties them to design practice -paper prototyping -writing a research paper - For Master's students: developing your Master's project plan of action</p>	<p>Research Methods in Critical Game Design (3 credits) -Survey of research methodologies in game studies and games research -For Master's Students: developing the written component (the design document) of your Master's Project.</p>
<p>Topics in Games Research (3 credits) Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program</p>	<p>Topics in Games Research (3 credits) Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program</p>
<p>HASS Elective (3 credits) -A graduate level class within the School of HASS that is intended to serve as a focusing or supplementary guidepost for the Master's Project. This class is chosen in consultation with your advisor.</p>	<p>HASS Elective (3 credits) -A graduate level class within the School of HASS that is intended to serve as a focusing or supplementary guidepost for the Master's Project. This class is chosen in consultation with your advisor.</p>
<p>Free Elective (3 credits) -A graduate level class across any of the Schools at Rensselaer, intended to serve to help the student complete their Master's Project. The student will need to choose this class in consultation with their advisor, and when necessary, in consultation with the instructor of the graduate class in order to determine the student's capacity to succeed in the course. *It is highly recommended, but not required, that one of the Master's students' Free Electives be taken from the Lally School of Management. **Up to two 4000 level classes may be taken for graduate-level credit in satisfying either HASS or Free elective credits.</p>	<p>Free Elective (3 credits) -A graduate level class across any of the Schools at Rensselaer, intended to serve to help the student complete their Master's Project. The student will need to choose this class in consultation with their advisor, and when necessary, in consultation with the instructor of the graduate class in order to determine the student's capacity to succeed in the course. *It is highly recommended, but not required, that one of the Master's students' Free Electives be taken from the Lally School of Management. **Up to two 4000 level classes may be taken for graduate-level credit in satisfying either HASS or Free elective credits.</p>

Master's Project (3 Credits)	Master's Project (3 Credits)
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The Master's Project

The Critical Game Design Master's Project is an independent, individual student project undertaken throughout the student's Master's education. It serves as both a demonstration of the student's first steps into the world of independent game design research, as well as a portfolio piece or proof-of-concept that can serve the student as they enter the workforce, establish their own independent games studio, or continue on in academia.

Master's Projects include a production aspect, such as a deliverable game, interactive installation, or tech demo, as well as a written document that firmly establishes the project's methods and grounding as research-driven through a design document that includes an academic literature review. The design document/literature review should pull from disciplines that contribute to game design, including, but not limited to, visual arts, humanities and media studies, social sciences, psychology, and computer science. Each Master's student will be advised by a member of the GSAS faculty.

What counts as "independent, individual student project" is very open to interpretation. Some students are interested in pursuing their own project, more or less independent from their advisor's research. Others may be working collaboratively with a faculty member or on a team on an ongoing broader project. The student's advisor is responsible for helping them to develop and break the project down into a doable chunk (including design + writeup) that is reasonable in a two-semester timeline.

Ph.D.:

The Ph.D. program in Critical Game Design has students learn and apply game studies, user-centered design theory, critical design, the digital humanities, and qualitative/quantitative research methodology in order to contribute to scholarly bodies of research in interactive design fields. Graduates of the Ph.D. program will be prepared to enter academic positions as researchers and teachers and to contribute to the games industry as entrepreneurs, practitioners, and consultants.

This degree program is a hybrid theory and practice program that deeply immerses students in the game studies literature, game design principles, and topical concentrations on the social and structural issues surrounding digital games and interactive media commensurate with the student's research area. The program is designed to be completed in 4 years, with core game studies, methods, and game design courses in the first year, and speculative and experimental studios/theory courses the second year, supplemented with an array of interdisciplinary electives and participation in research labs under the supervision of GSAS faculty. Throughout the program, students will be challenged to work to synthesize critical theory with design

practice in rigorous ways that can contribute to both textual scholarship and interactive practice. An exam at the end of the second year will test a student's proficiency in a broad array of scholarly literature surrounding games and interactive media (to be selected in advance by the GSAS faculty, and supplemented with literature from the student's own research area). A candidacy exam at the beginning of the third year will evaluate whether or not the student has sufficiently incorporated that literary expertise into their dissertation research design. The dissertation itself will comprise both a designed interactive media piece, as well as a written document that frames the work within larger bodies of scholarship, documents the design and creative process, and applies rigorous qualitative and/or quantitative methods in evaluating the efficacy and/or impact of the media piece upon intended audiences.

Total credits required for graduation: 72

Duration: 4 years

Curriculum:

YEAR 1 Ph.D. Credits

YEAR 1 FALL (Semester 1, 9 Credits)	YEAR 1 SPRING (Semester 2, 9 Credits)
Game Studies: Theory + Praxis (3 credits) -Introduces major game theorists and explicitly ties them to design practice -paper prototyping -writing a research paper	Research Methods in Critical Game Design (3 credits) -Survey of research methodologies in game studies and games research
Topics in Games Research (3 credits) Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program	Topics in Games Research (3 credits) Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program
Elective (3 credits) -To be determined in consultation with program faculty	Elective (3 credits) -To be determined in consultation with program faculty

YEAR 2 Ph.D. Credits

YEAR 2 FALL (Semester 3, 9 Credits)	YEAR 2 SPRING (Semester 4, 9 Credits)
Critical Game Design: History/Theory/Futures (to prepare students for their Qualifying Exam) (3 credits)	Advanced Game Design/UX Methods (Methods/Studio) (3 credits) Theoretically informed topics in game usability, interface design, and UX for interactive media
Topics in Games Research (3 credits)	Topics in Games Research (3 credits)

Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program	Rotating course, content varies based upon faculty research interests and the changing needs of the GSAS graduate program
Dissertation/Research Credits (3 credits) Research Advisor must be selected. Independent research with advisor, or Dissertation Credits if the Doctoral Committee has been approved by OGE and has passed the qualifying exam.	Dissertation/Research Credits (3 credits) Independent research with advisor, or Dissertation Credits if the Doctoral Committee has been approved by OGE and has passed the qualifying exam.
	<u>No later than the end of Year 2: Qualifying Exam</u>

YEAR 3 Ph.D. Credits*

YEAR 3 FALL (Semester 5, 9 Credits)	YEAR 3 SPRING (Semester 6, 9 Credits)
	<u>No later than the end of Year 3: Candidacy Exam</u> (Dissertation Proposal Defense; Doctoral Committee must be approved ahead of time.)
Dissertation/Research Credits (9 credits)	Dissertation (9 credits)

YEAR 4 Ph.D. Credits*

YEAR 4 FALL (Semester 7, 9 Credits)	YEAR 4 SPRING (Semester 8, 9 Credits)
Dissertation (9 credits)	Dissertation (9 credits)

*A minimum of 36 dissertation credits are required for graduation.

If the student is on a TAsip, they need to take minimally 9 credits, and no more than 16 credits per semester.

If the student is on a fellowship, RAsip, or self-paid, they need to take minimally 12 credits, and no more than 16 credits per semester.

The Qualifying Exam

Year 1 and 2 PhD. coursework is specifically structured to not only build Ph.D. students' skills as critical game makers, but also provide the scaffolding necessary for success in the qualifying exam. The qualifying exam provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate mastery over

core material necessary for engaging the game studies and development fields in-depth, at the doctoral level.

The qualifying exam will be supervised by a committee consisting of the advisor and at least two other faculty members, preferably from CGD. The membership of the committee is informal and does not have to be approved by the Office of Graduate Education.

The committee's sole responsibility is to approve the student's proposal for the Qualifying Exam and whether the student passes or fails the exam. The committee can decide how the exam will be administered. However, in general, there should be both a written and an oral component.

The written component could be a comprehensive literature review, a research paper submitted to a journal or conference with the student being the first author, or essays that answer specific questions designed by the committee based on a reading list. If the student/committee chooses to write a comprehensive literature review or a research paper, there will be an iterative process of writing, reviewing, and rewriting with the first rounds between the student and advisor. The advisor will review and provide feedback on no more than two iterations. The paper will then be sent, by the Advisor, to the committee. If the student/committee chooses to give the student essay questions, the committee should work with the student at the beginning of the semester to form a reading list. Then the student's committee drafts a set of 4 essay questions based on the list. The student has one month to produce the set of 4 essays, which will be directly submitted to the committee.

In all cases regarding the written component, the committee may (a) make a preliminary approval, (b) decide that the work does not meet scholarly criteria and therefore the student fails the qualifying exam, or (c) return the paper to the student for improvements and another iteration.

After the written component is approved by the committee, the student will prepare for a public presentation about their work. After a period of questions by the committee and the audience, the committee will meet with the student for further discussion, and then the committee will meet in private to vote on whether the student passes.

The Candidacy Exam

The candidacy exam consists of both the writing and oral defense of a dissertation proposal by the student, and will take place no later than the end of the sixth semester.

The proposal defense portion of the candidacy exam will open with a public presentation by the student of the proposal, for feedback from all in attendance. All graduate students and faculty will be strongly encouraged to attend these defense proposal presentations, to aid in fostering an intellectual community in the graduate program, and making clear the expectations for student performance in the candidacy exam.

Immediately following the public portion of the proposal defense, a private meeting will be held during which the student meets with the committee alone to receive feedback directly. After this,

the committee determines whether or not the student has passed the candidacy exam, passed with any conditions that need to be met, or not passed the exam.

Ph.D. Dissertation Structure and Evaluation

The Critical Game Design dissertation is expected to include both traditional scholarly methods in writing and/or experimental design as engagement with the game studies field, as well as a research-as-practice component, meaning the student is expected to also design and build an interactive project component as part of the dissertation work. This combination of scholarship and practice could take many forms. For example, a written portion might focus on analysis of philosophical perspectives on game design, while the accompanying project portion might be a game that embodies a particular philosophical point of view.

As in any dissertation across fields, a core expectation is that the student has achieved an understanding of the games field that is both broad (in terms of grasping the limits of the field) and deep (in terms of engagement with the student's particular area of interest), such that the student can identify an approach for their own research to make an original contribution to the field that is meaningful. The project portion of the dissertation is expected to be at the level of a polished, completed project (as opposed to a functioning prototype). Both the written and project components of the dissertation will be carefully archived, and housed at the institute dissertation repository.

The dissertation defense is expected to take place in the Spring semester of Year 4. Similar to the candidacy exam, the dissertation defense includes both a public portion, and a private portion. The student's presentation of their completed work takes place in a public setting, and all graduate students and faculty are strongly encouraged to attend. Immediately following the public defense, the student meets with the committee privately, to receive feedback directly from them. Then the committee meets alone to determine if the student has passed the dissertation defense, passed with conditions that need to be met, or not passed the dissertation defense.

Dissertation work is evaluated by the student's committee, which consists of a doctoral advisor (who must be a core faculty member in the Games program), two additional faculty members (who must also be affiliated with the Games program), and an outside member (a faculty member from outside the Games program). In special cases, where additional expertise is sought, a fifth committee member may be added from the Games program, any other program at Rensselaer, or from any other institution (pending approval of the proposed committee member by the Rensselaer Office of Graduate Education.) Games faculty will as a group develop a set of guidelines or recommendations for evaluating dissertation work, based not only on the core expectations expressed above, but also reflecting the Critical Game Design Ph.D. Program's specific identity, as embodying a unique, forward-thinking fusion of critical theory and practice. It will be important for students' dissertation work to also reflect this key positioning.