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# SIGCHI Games: The Scope of Games and Play Research at CHI

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**Abstract**

The games research community at CHI has become an ever-growing significant part of the conference, demonstrated by the SIGCHI-sponsored CHI PLAY conference and the inclusion of a games subcommittee at CHI 2016. Given the increase in quantity and variety of submissions, and the involvement and engagement of practitioners within the community, it is important for the community to have this SIG as a forum. We plan to give a brief overview of the history of game research at CHI as well as its current state. Then, we want to engage the community in a discussion about the scope that games research at CHI should have and where we want to take this community from here. We want to vibrantly explore new outlets for academic dissemination, community outreach, and collaborations with practitioners.

**Author Keywords**

Video Games; Entertainment; HCI; Games; Play; Gamification; CHI PLAY; Player Experience; Gameful

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.2 [Information Interfaces and Presentation]: User Interfaces – *Interaction styles*; J.4 [Computer Applications]: Sociology, Psychology – *Social and Behavioral Sciences*; K.8.0. General: Games

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### Introduction

With a shift of focus from traditional usability studies toward user experience studies, came a shift of focus to emotionally engaging experiences at CHI. This has likely also inspired a new trend within CHI to focus on technology that is playful and highly immersive, meaning technologies that are built around video games or leverage game design in some form. Video games have moved from niche leisure activities to a new art form, drivers of healthy behaviour, killer applications of virtual reality headsets, drivers of the eSports industry, and with games like “That Dragon, Cancer”, even forms of spiritual expression and personal struggle. It is now more important than ever to study the human impact of video games. There are now more games papers submitted to CHI than, for example, health-related papers. Studying video games is a serious and important area of research at CHI that continues to grow as games pervade into many areas of research. The game papers presented at CHI are of high quality, resulting in many best paper nominations at CHI over the years [1,2]. In addition, the games community at CHI has grown over the years and it has organized a number of different workshops (e.g., several different games user research workshops [3]).

Within SIGCHI, games have grown as an important area as well. The games community now has its own conference called CHI PLAY and this year, for the first time in its history, CHI has added a subcommittee for games in the review process, which handled more papers than some more established subcommittees and pioneered the use of a virtual PC meeting for SIGCHI. At CHI, games span many domains, techniques, and contribution types. Games are finally taken as a serious area of study with potential social and economic

benefits that reach far beyond implementing entertainment artefacts.

The games community includes researchers and practitioners focusing on player-centered design and evaluation of games and entertainment applications, but it might not stop there. Community members are interested in player-oriented game development including analysis, design, games user research and evaluation of desktop games, mobile games, mixed reality games, table top games, serious and educational games, exertion games, and affective games. In addition, community members are also engaged in research of other forms of entertainment such as the development of (interactive TV) formats, DVDs and related media; interactive applications for media consumption and usage on the web, in the car, and using mobile platforms; and other entertainment-focused applications. Furthermore, the use of gaming techniques is now pervading new applications, allowing software applications to employ *gamification* or incorporate playful elements in an attempt to harness the power of games to engage people with technology. Together, these three sub-areas (games, play, and entertainment) have a big impact on HCI.

The games researchers at CHI are an extraordinary community because players of entertainment applications care most about the moment-to-moment experience, rather than task outcomes, and may be driven just as much by their emotions as by logic and reason. What is usable and satisfying may not always be the easiest or most straightforward interface. These criteria make development and evaluation of video games more challenging.

The Games SIG at CHI will have to discuss where it is at and how it can move forward from its past incarnations [4,5].

### **Issues to cover during the SIG**

The aim of this SIG is to provide a forum for the members of this important sub-community of CHI, to plan ways to serve the community best at upcoming CHI conferences. These issues have been identified:

*Scope of games research at CHI.* As games research at CHI continues to grow, also through CHI PLAY, it is important to think about the boundaries that define game interaction research. Can and should it include other areas as well? For instance, do we include more broad entertaining interactive experiences? How can we identify certain areas and tie them to SIGCHI's other communities?

*Expanding the scope outside of CHI.* Games has constituted itself as a strong academic community. From here, we would like to strengthen the field in general with better journals and strong scientific outlets for publishing games research. Also, to maintain our high academic standards, we need to educate new people coming into CHI about the publishing standards, common methodologies, and of course the reviewing process that is ever changing, but always focused on keeping its quality.

*Integrating other research communities.* SIGCHI is not the only organization with a games community. There are other interesting venues that would like to improve their quality by collaborating with us. Outlets like ICA (International Communication Association) game studies and Digital Games Research Association

(DiGRA) have always been important for games research and will remain publishing venues that we could consider working with. In addition, we need to also discuss possible integrations or scholarship support for researchers working within the game developers conference (GDC) or other professional conference venues. A strong part of the success of the games research at CHI has been the relationship between academic researchers and the games industry and relevance of the work for them.

*Industry collaborations.* In the past, we have successfully integrated industry speakers in CHI and CHI PLAY talks and panels. What is a good strategy to continue to involve these practitioners and developers?

### **Intended Audience**

One of the goals of this SIG is to help people interested in the field of games and entertainment form the community and organize action groups. Our goals and action items are more specifically:

- To bring the community together to share their work (conferences and workshops)
- To ensure that the feedback of the review process of game-oriented submissions is of CHI quality by mentoring researchers new to the conference
- To make games and entertainment content even more prominent during the conference, including on-site games during the conference
- To document the community efforts beyond the standard publications by extending existing work in the area of games user research

*How to reach them*

Overall the SIG is of interest to a broad range of regular CHI attendees. We already have nearly 200 active researchers attending CHI PLAY and have over 300 contacts gathered from previous CHIs and other games community contacts. We do want to increase the representation of commercial game practitioners at CHI. For example, we organized the CHI GUR workshops in collaboration with industry and facilitated the submission process for practitioners. This led to more than half of the attendees being practitioners and sharing their experience at the conference. We will also ask all CHI 2016 game-related workshop organizers to communicate this SIG to all their participants.

**Process/Schedule/Agenda**

We will inform the games community members about the SIG goals beforehand to enable participation of the attendees in the organization of the SIG. As this SIG is central to the success of games and entertainment related activities in 2016 and beyond, the agenda is planned as follows:

Intro and Recap (10 minutes) of what was done this year and the new subcommittee, and how we interfaced with the main conference planning. Gathering ideas and aspects on how to move forward with the community beyond 2016 (using whatever game-like support people feel comfortable with). The following topics will be discussed 20 min each:

(1) Identification and collation of tasks/topics that the community should focus on in the coming years; (2) Prioritisation of tasks identified and creation of next step action items for completion in 2017; (3)

Identification of volunteers that are willing to lead community actions in 2017 and beyond (4) Wrap-up, collate, and write up results and action items. We plan to conclude the meeting with a concrete plan of how to move forward with the community in the coming years based on the input of everyone attending the SIG.

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