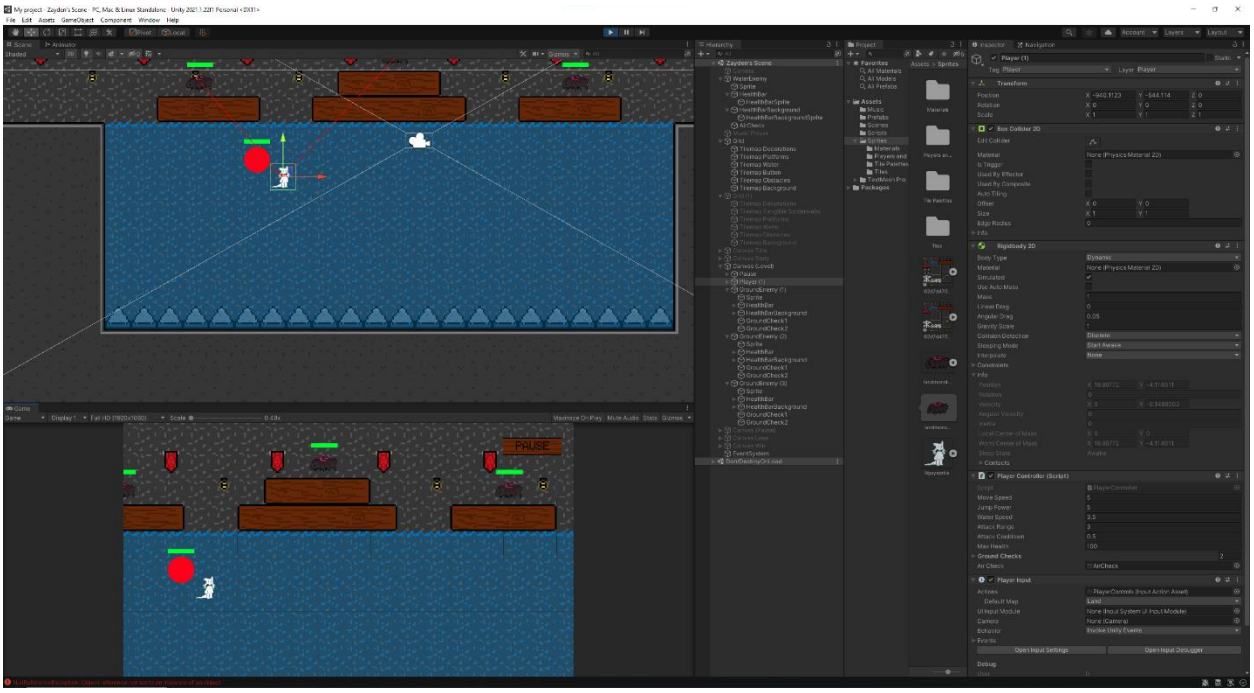
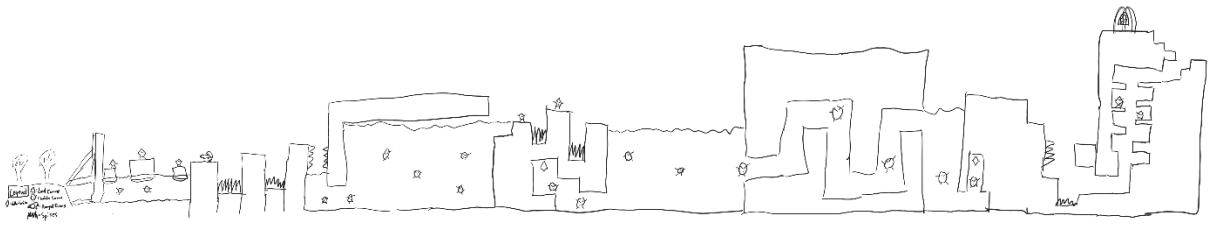
Game Design Showcase Project

By Zayden Orenstein



Today, students in Game Design, a third-year IT course, turned in the first prototype of their end-of-year project.

“I call it the Showcase project, or the passion project,” says Coach Heying, Game Design teacher. “The whole idea is getting a group of kids together who have had enough background to know how to use Unity, the Game Design engine, to make something they’re all passionate about making, because most people tend to take the Game Design class because they have something they want to make, or have this idea that they want to make videogames, so they want the experience of just sitting down for a long period of time and working on it.”

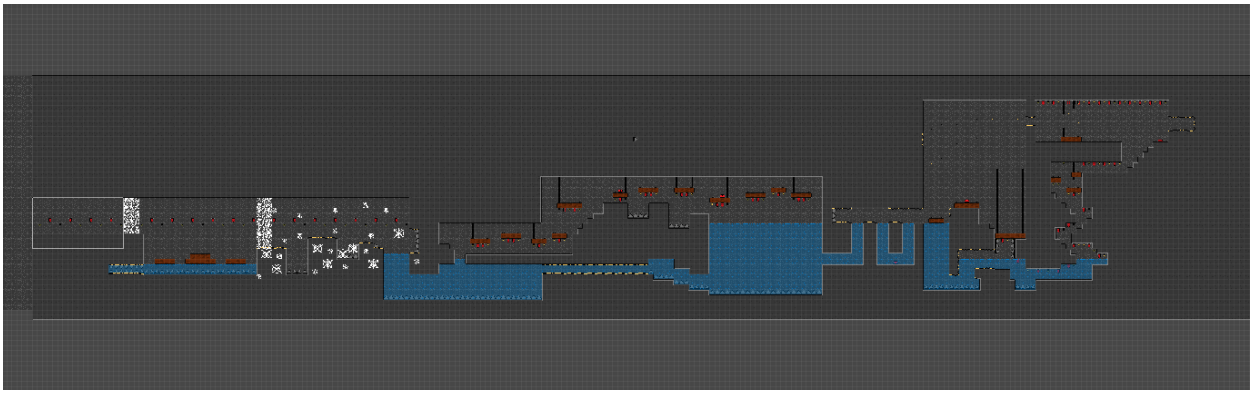


The first draft of a concept level design for a project.

The “Showcase project” name for this project originates from the Innovation Academy Showcase, which falls this year on May 2nd. At the end of each school year, Innovation Academy students show off their impressive projects to staff, students, and community members, and Game Design is not excepted from this event; each Game Design group’s project will be displayed (and playable) at Showcase. But Showcase is not the project’s only purpose.

“It’s good review,” Coach Heying continues, “because you have this End of Pathway exam near the end of the year, so I do find that students get some time to explore topics that they wouldn’t know that sometimes show up on the test, so there’s a little bit of purpose behind that of just letting kids explore the engine itself in ways that aren’t quite as directed.”

Groups are an integral part of this project. “The students submit what roles they want to do, and a vague idea of a game they might be interested in working on,” Coach Heying explains, “and then I try to match an art director, a level designer, and a programmer together who all have similarish ideas, and let them brainstorm what they want a game to be. Then, they define constraints of the game together, and they list out all the tasks that they feel like they need to do to complete that game, and sometimes it's comprehensive, and sometimes it’s not, and then they get two weeks chunked to work on a particular thing, and I give more formalized feedback at the end of each of those two weeks.”

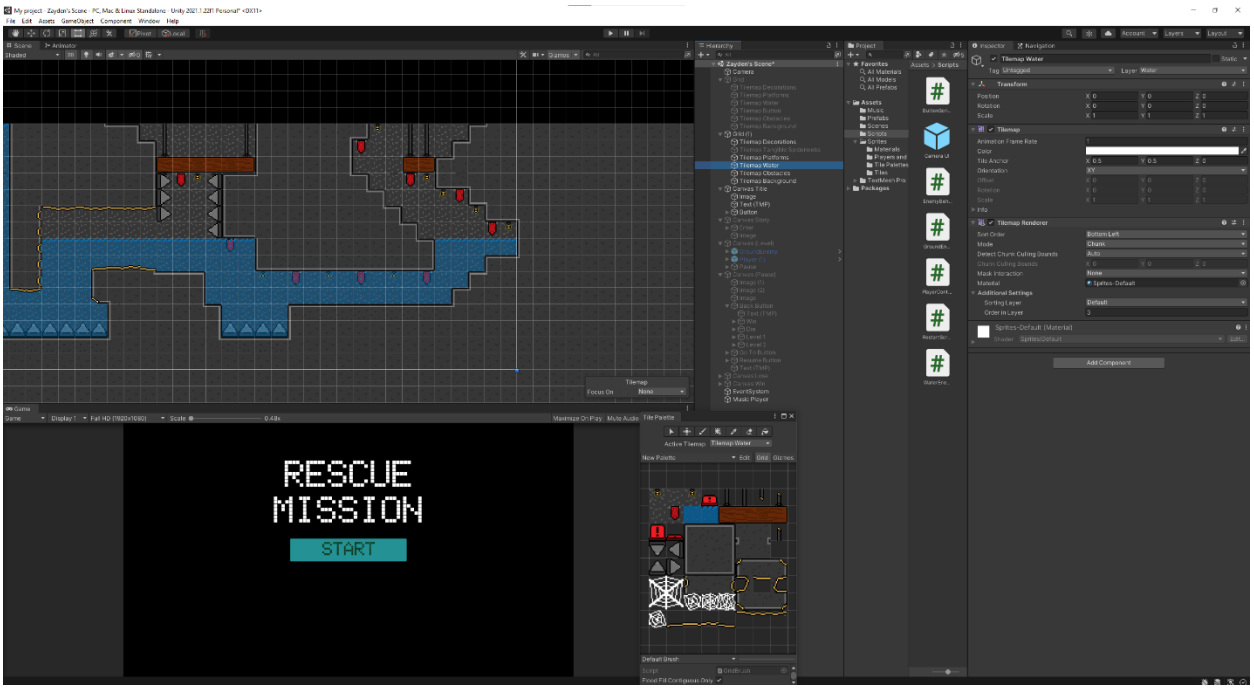


A slightly more fleshed-out level - but it isn’t quite done yet.

At the beginning of each class, each group member shares with their groupmates what they did for the project in the previous class period, and what they plan to do during that day’s period. Then, they update the tasks they wrote out on sticky-notes and placed on a board at the beginning of the project; these tasks are categorized as future tasks, work-in-progress tasks, tasks that are done but are still being reviewed by other group members, and tasks have been reviewed by every group member and can be declared as fully done.

In terms of each role, art directors coordinate how the game looks, designing sprites and animations for the player, enemies, and other elements of visual design. Level designers

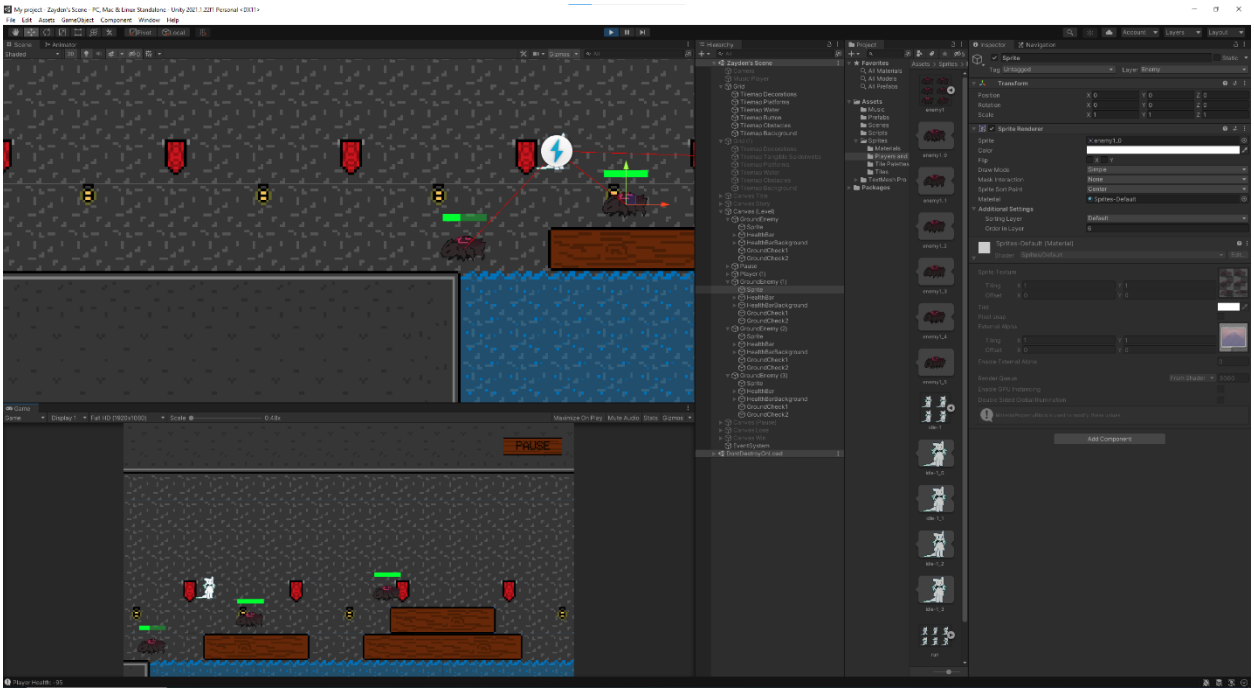
instead build the level, bringing them all the way from basic concepts to fully constructed levels. Finally, programmers, as the name suggests, actually make the game work, writing code that assigns user input to player controls, makes enemies move, and the like.



Hey - the game has got a title screen now!

What does Coach Heying want from this first project checkpoint? “I expect to see a relatively fleshed out idea of a level,” Coach Heying answers, “and some sort of movement or user input. And what I’m really looking for is: how do those things feel together; how do they play together? Is it obvious where I’m supposed to go and what I’m supposed to be doing in that level, [or] do we need more structure around, directing the user towards a particular thing? And then, also, is there unified art design, does it all feel cohesive? Those are the sorts of things I’m trying to catch now so that we don’t have to scramble.”

“Also, I’ve known in the past that when we push merging the products off to the last week, it gets really stressful, and then we’ve had a month and a half of work - six weeks’ worth of work - and no one has ever put it all on the same computer, and I’m trying to prevent that by getting [the students] to merge things earlier rather than later.”



Now the enemies are here - and they can track the player and move towards them, thanks to the programmer.

What next, after this project is complete? “[At] the end of [April], we’re going to do some more studies into videogames that have already been made: how are they advertised? How are they marketed? How would we want to advertise this particular game?”