Teaching video game design requires novel approaches, as it is an interdisciplinary field that blends coding, design, storytelling, and a variety of other concepts. Video game scholars such as Eric Zimmerman and Tracy Fullerton advocate for introducing students to game design through tabletop games: the idea is to remove complexities like 3D modeling, programming, and game engines from the equation, allowing people to explore game design concepts without the challenges of learning to operate such software. In addition, because most modern video games are made by large teams, group projects are common in game design courses, and learning teamwork skills are a key objective of almost any such class. A common structure for assignments in game design courses is therefore having students create physical board games in teams. This strategy is quite challenging to implement during a global pandemic, however, as it simply not safe to ask students to work together in teams to create physical board games.

In this paper, I will outline some of the challenges faced by game design instructors during a global pandemic and present some solutions to those problems that I have implemented in my own courses. I argue for the use of digital tabletop tools that allow
students to virtually collaborate and create games without needing to meet in person or have experience in programming or game engines. I also discuss the benefits and drawbacks of two such tools that my students used: Roll20 and Tabletop Simulator. I also suggest that instructors require students to hold a live online gameplay demonstration to showcase their work and offer some best practices for managing such presentations. Finally, I discuss how these techniques could be used in the future, as the need for physical assignments that can be easily shifted into a digital format has become obvious.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

I am a PhD Candidate in the University of Central Florida’s Texts and Technology program. I study games, digital media, Writing Across the Curriculum, and critical theory. I am particularly interested in scholarship that explores connections between these areas. In my dissertation, I explore the intersection between narrative, theory, and teaching. I am also building a game to demonstrate how games can engage with these concepts.

I am currently an instructor in University of Central Florida’s Games and Interactive Media Program. I taught English full-time at the college level for five and a half years while working on my PhD coursework and started teaching at UCF in August 2018.

I conduct scholarly work that bridges my various research interests as well as my teaching, exploring connections between the two and allowing them to inform one another. I have frequently found that lessons I learn from teaching my students benefits my scholarly work and try to find ways to bring the theoretical concepts that I develop in my scholarship into the classroom. I believe that games can be an effective way to explore critical concepts and hope to expand on the idea of “critical playing” as a mode of theoretical practice.