

MICHAEL W. MERRIAM

Educator · Narrative Designer · Game Studies Researcher

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Researcher and educator whose work bridges game design, creative writing, and the humanities. Developer of **ludoception**—the theory that game-sense is a trainable perceptual faculty for detecting rules, affordances, and incentives in any system. Designs curricula where the classroom operates as a collaborative design space, assessment is structured around iteration and playtest documentation, and students test mechanics and prose in tandem. Columbia-trained in medieval studies and comparative literature, with industry experience in narrative direction, escape room design, and digital publishing.

EDUCATION

Columbia University in the City of New York 2015
Master of Arts, Medieval & Renaissance Studies

Columbia University in the City of New York 2010 – 2014
Bachelor of Arts, Archaeology / English & Comparative Literature — Summa cum Laude

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of Central Florida 2023 – 2024
Instructor of Record

- Created material and designed modules for Introduction to Digital Media (asynchronous online)
- Taught Game Design Portfolio Development

Full Sail University 2018 – 2022
Course Director — Writing for Games, Script Analysis & Criticism, et al.

- Designed and delivered courses for BFA and MFA students in the Creative Writing program
- Led complete overhaul of Script Analysis & Criticism: new content, new assessment strategies
- Created modular, synchronous online Writing for Games course teaching game design through collaborative writing (MFA)
- Taught MFA: Visual Storytelling; Character Creation & Development. BFA: Science Fiction; Children's Entertainment
- Prepared curriculum maps; organized faculty training on curriculum mapping for the Creative Writing MFA
- Designed Gamification professional development course for fellow instructors
- Direct experience with ACCSC accreditation standards and processes

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

Marauder Tech 2024 – Present
Narrative Director, Quest Designer

- Narrative design, lorekeeping, quest/mission design, and character design for a multiplayer mobile game
- Lead a team of writers; coordinate with product, art, and engineering leads

Partly Wicked / Escapology 2015 – Present
Design Consultant — Escape Room & Experience Design

- Design escape rooms, puzzles, scenery, and narratives for venues in Orlando and Las Vegas
- End-to-end project coordination: budgets, deliverables, stakeholder and regulatory management

CONFERENCES & PRESENTATIONS

- **Game, Text, Match: Diegetic Games as Narrative Systems** — *NeMLA 2026* — *Chair & Organizer*
- **Shadow Math: On Shirley Jackson and The Lottery** — *ACH 2025* — *Poster & Talk*
- **Undead Computer** — *ELO 2024* — *Interactive Exhibit*

- **Equity Quest: Incorporating Real-World Inequalities into Gamified Modules** — *Virtual-Based Games in Education Conference, 2024*
- **Risk and Re-word: Board Game Themes as Encrypted Cognitive Tools** — *NeMLA 2024 — Seminar*
- **Checkmate or Chat-Bot? Leveraging AI to Gamify Classroom Learning** — *NeMLA 2024*
- **Metattendance: Social Deduction Games as Models for Asymmetrical Policies** — *CFA Games Conference, U. of Kentucky, 2024*
- **Game Balance and Classroom Fairness** — *SIGDOC 2023 — Interactive Poster Session*
- **Branch vs. Root: On Skill Trees in Gamified Classrooms** — *Games-Based Learning Virtual Conference, 2023*

RECOGNITION & SELECTED WRITING

Profiled in **the New Yorker** (Talk of the Town, 2008) for pioneering work in digital publishing. Published in **LA Review of Books**, **World Literature Today**, **Financial Times**, and **Time Out**. Anthologized in *City x City* (Faber & Faber)—Publishers Weekly 15 Best Books of 2015.

SKILLS & TOOLS

Curriculum & Instruction: Course architecture, curriculum mapping, rubric design, assessment analytics, ACCSC accreditation, gamified pedagogy, LMS administration

Game & Narrative Design: Quest design, branching narrative, game balance, Twine, Ink, Unity, Unreal

AI & Educational Technology: Prompt engineering, AI-assisted content generation, LLM integration in course design, synchronous/asynchronous online instruction

Research: Practice-led prototyping, player community analysis, game studies, digital humanities, close reading