Justin A. Bortnick
Curriculum Vitae
26 January 2026

EDUCATION

2015-2022 **Ph.D. in English Literature**
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA
Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Dissertation: *Communities of Reality: Game Design, Narrative and Political Play*
Dissertation Supervisor: Alice Gambrell

2013-2014 College of Liberal & Professional Studies Non-Traditional Graduate Studies
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

2013 **B.A., English, B.A., Classical Civilization**
Lafayette College**,** Easton, PA

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

2025- **Assistant Professor Educator, Game Design**
University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH
Professor in the College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning. Housed within the School of Art's Games and Animation program.

2022-2025 **Assistant Teaching Professor of English**
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA
Professor in the Digital Narrative and Interactive Design major, a program focused on preparing undergraduate students in classes of 19-25 for a career in games, immersive entertainment, digital media and more.

PUBLICATIONS

Books

2026 (proj) *Dangerous Games: Design, Narrative and Political Play* (working title), Play Story Press

Refereed Articles

2025 "Crossing Worlds: Ellison in Cyberland" (WorldCon 2025)

2023 Bortnick, Justin A. Play and Misinformation: How America's Conspiracy Culture Became Gamified. *Games and Culture*. Online First, 20 September 2023.
https://doi.org/10.1177/155541202312038.

Book Chapters

2024 Syllabus – "Narrative and Technology" in *An Educator's Guide to Interactive Digital Narrative: Syllabi and Resources from Across the World* (Carnegie Mellon ETC Press)

Reviews

2016   *Shoggoths in a Segregated America* - Book Review, *Lovecraft Country* by Matt Ruff (Los Angeles Review of Books)

Game Work - Development

Ongoing   Allfather Productions
Design Consulting (non-NDA clients disclosed upon request)

2025   What Pumpkin Games
HIVESWAP: Act 4 – Producer, Writer, Narrative Designer
HIVESWAP: Act 3 – Producer, Additional Writing

2025   Evil Trout
The Roottrees Are Dead – Additional Writing & Editing

2024-2025 Allfather Productions
Static Sky: And Yet It ████ (█落在夜空生成以前) - Designer, Writer (with Rhett Tsai)
    USC Games Expo 2025 – Alumni Selection

2020-2024 Allfather Productions
University Magician's Society - Producer, Lead Designer, Writer (Teaching Project)

2019-2022 Definitely Real Productions
Reality Games - Lead Interaction Designer, Project Archive Lead

2015-2020 Twinbeard Studios
Glittermitten Grove (2017) - Game Designer, Writer, ARG Master, Marketing, Narrative, Business Development, Publisher Relations
    IndieCade@E3 Official Selection 2017
    IndieCade Festival 2017 – Official Nominee
    NZ Games Festival Play By Play 2017 – Finalist
    Top 10 Games of 2016 – #10 (Vice, Patrick Klepek)
    Top 10 Games to Watch in 2016 – #2 (Giant Bomb, Austin Walker)

2019   Allfather Productions
Tidying Your Computer with Carrie Mondo - Producer, Lead Designer, Writer

2017   Erebus, LLC
Apocalypse Now (Canceled) - Marketing "Red Team"

2015-2016 Thinker-Tinker
OCTOBO - Writer
    National Parenting Product Awards Winner 2020
    alt.ctrl.GDC – Official Selection 2016
    IndieCade@E3 – Official Selection 2016
    IndieCade Festival 2016 – Official Nominee

Indie Prize Awards – Best Kids and Family Game, Most Innovative Game – Nomination

2007   EngliShinbok Team
Shin Bokura no Taiyō: Gyakushuu no Sabata Unofficial Translation Patch, Localization/Continuity

Game Work – Publishing

2025   Allfather Productions
How Deep is the Dark Water? – Published on behalf of Rhett Tsai
      Sónar Festival Sónar+D 2024 – Official Selection
      CURRENT Art & Technology Festival 2024 – Official Selection
      The Lumen Prize HUA Award 2023 – Winner
      Arte Laguna Prize Virtual and Digital Art 2023 – Winner
      Independent Games Festival Excellence in Visual Arts 2023 – Finalist
      San Francisco Frozen Film Festival 2023 Best Video Game – Winner
      Milan Machinima Festival 2023 – Official Selection
      7° Festival ECRÃ 2023 – Official Selection
      Intermedia Art Festival 2023 – Official Selection

Web-Based Publications

2016   *Emergent Meaning and Narrative in the Digital Space: Addressing Tensions in Games and Game-like Media* (Game Developer)

2015   *Ludic Epistolary, or, Where Have All The Letters Gone?* (Game Developer)

Other Publications

Ongoing   *Red Pages Podcast*

EXHIBITIONS AND SCREENINGS

2025   *Static Sky: And Yet It* ▮▮▮▮▮ (▮落在夜空生成以前）
      "ICIDS 2025: Kaleidoscopic Machines Art Exhibition" – International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling, Malta (December 2025)
      "The Wrong Returns" –The Wrong Biennale 2025 (Traveling, November 2025 – March 2026)
      "互为劳动时代的艺术［Shared Errors: Art in the Age of Inter-Labor]" – Prestige Gallery, Singapore (November – December 2025)
      "Electrified Kids: The 8th Intermedia Art Festival" – TANK Shanghai and UFO Terminal (October 2025)
      "To the Image: A Correspondence" – ENNOVA Art Museum, Langfang Economic and Technological Development Area, China (September – October 2025)
      "2025 NarraScope Showcase" – Arch Street Meeting House, Philadelphia (June 2025)
      "Hive – AI Utopia" – Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China (May 2025)
      "Transformer 2025: AI and the Future of Games" – Kennesaw State University,

Kennesaw, GA (April 2025, work accepted, showing canceled due to Pitt travel budget freeze)
"Rear Window & Real Wonder" – HOW Art Museum, Shanghai, China (April 2025)
"Game Om: Social Play × TANK Shanghai – Shanghai, China (December 2024 - January 2025)

2024   *Static Sky: And Yet It* ███ (█落在夜空生成以前）
"The Upcoming Trend: Poetry and Thoughts in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." – Shenzhen Guan Shanyue Art Museum, Shenzhen, China (October 2024)

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

2021   *Frog Fractions 2* Development Material – The Strong National Museum of Play

INVITED TALKS

2024   **"**ARDIN Socials Talks" Association for Research in Digital Interactive Narrative, October 2024

2021   "Conspiracy, Propaganda and Social Media." Writing Program, Lafayette College, November 2021

"Vagabond Dog Industry Chats."   March 2021.

2014   "Emergent Systems in Electronic Gaming." University of Pennsylvania.

Final Fantasy VI Book Club, Overthinking It

CONFERENCE ACTIVITY/PARTICIPATION

Refereed Papers

2025   "Harlan Ellison's Video Game Adaptations," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA

2022   **"**Who Creates Games? Developers, Players, and Collaborative Authorship*,*" **Twentieth International Conference on Publishing Studies,** Rhodes, Greece

2021   **"**Dangerous Games: ARGs, Social Media Platforms and Participatory Propaganda*,*" **Electronic Literature Organization Conference 2021**, Online

2020   **"**Alternate Reality Games and Designing Propaganda*,"* **UCLA Southland Virtual Conference: Insights/Oversights**, Online

Talks, Presentations and Panels

2025   Panel: "Getting into Game Writing," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA
Panel: "The Indie Video Game Scene," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA
Panel: "Best Game or Interactive Work Hugo Potentials," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA
Panel: "Future of Scifi Is in Games," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA

Panel: "The Untapped Literary Possibility of Virtual Worlds," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA
Panel: "Interactive Fiction: Video Game Storytellers," **WorldCon,** Seattle WA
Panel: "Meet the IFTF Board," **NarraScope**, Philadelphia PA

2022 "Alternate Reality Games and Participatory Propaganda," **Hand Eye Society's Super FESTival**, Online.

2021 Presentation of Research, ICIDS 2021 Doctoral Consortium, **International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling,** Tallinn, Estonia

2018 "Rallying the Resistance: Frog Fractions 2's Alternate Reality Game," **Game Developers Conference**, San Francisco CA

Conferences/Symposia Organized

2019-2025 **NarraScope:** Treasurer (2019), Conference Chair (2020-2022) Faculty Liaison (2022-2023), Venue Coordinator (2024), Advisor (2025)

2021, 2024 **International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling:** Graduate Student Committee (2021), Submission Reviewer (2024-2025)

Festival Judging

2025 **USC Games Expo**, Los Angeles, CA
Jury – Student Games

2024-2026 **Independent Game Festival**, San Francisco CA
Jury: Nuovo Award
2019-2024 Judging pool
2016-2017 Judging pool

2016-2025 **IndieCade Festival**, Los Angeles CA
Judging pool

2019 **Indie MegaBooth**
Judging pool

2018-2019, **Boston Festival of Indie Games** (Boston MA)
2024-2025 Judging pool
2022 Narrative and Worldbuilding category judge

AWARDS, GRANTS AND FUNDING

2026 **Game Developer's Conference:** GDC Commons Partner, Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation ($19,200)

2024 **University of Pittsburgh Asian Studies Center:** China and Chinese Studies Research Grant

2022 **Information, Medium & Society**: Emerging Scholar Award

TEACHING AND COURSE DEVELOPMENT

2022-2025 **University of Cincinnati,** Cincinnati OH
    School of Art
        Game Mechanics and Apprenticeship (Spring 2025)
        Introduction to Game Design (Spring 2025)
        Topics in Game Design (Spring 2025)
        Game Tools (Fall 2025)
        Intermediate Game Design (Fall-Spring 2025)
        Paradigms of Computer-Based Education (Fall 2025)

2022-2025 **University of Pittsburgh,** Pittsburgh PA
    Department of English
        Game, Story, Play (Spring 2025)
        Digital Humanity (Fall 2022 – Spring 2025)
        Introduction to Game Studies (Fall 2022 – Spring 2025)
        Narrative & Technology (Fall 2022 – Spring 2025)
        Introduction to Professional Writing (Summer 2023, Summer 2024)

    College in High School Program
        Introduction to Game Studies (developed and overseen, Spring 2023 – Spring 2025)

2016-2022 **University of Southern California,** Los Angeles CA
    Department of English
        Los Angeles: The City, the Novel, the Movie (Fall 2020 [Online], Fall 2021) – TA, Thomas Gustafson
        Teaching the Heart: Emotional Intelligence and the Humanities (Spring 2019, Spring 2021 [Online]) – TA, Thomas Gustafson
        The Art of Poetry (Fall 2019) – TA, Dana Gioia
    USC Writing Program, Assistant Lecturer
        Writing and Critical Reasoning – Thematic Approaches – Technology Thematic (Fall 2017, Spring 2018)
        Technology and Social Change (Spring 2022)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2017   Los Angeles, CA: USC Worldbuilding Institute, Spaceship Earth Project

2016   Los Angeles, CA: Doheny Library Special Collections

2014-2015   Philadelphia PA: Van Pelt Library Rare Books & Manuscripts Library

MENTORING

2024-2025 **Independent Study**
    Ailina Yue, White Owls Internship Supervisor (Spring 2025)
    Xingyu Song, Internship, Human Engineering Research Laboratories (Fall 2024)
    Vivien Lin, Twine Fairy Tale Capstone Project (Fall 2024)

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant
Paige Branagan, Narrative and Technology (Fall 2024)

2023-2026 IGDA Foundation Global Mentorship Program
Video Game Industry Mentor
Mentees: Angel, Jorge Lavalle de Zamacona, Kristen Scherer

SERVICE TO PROFESSION

2025- **University of Cincinnati**
School of Art
Games and Animation Curriculum Committee (2025-)
Visiting Artists and Scholars Lecture Series Committee (2025-)

2024-2025 University of Pittsburgh
Faculty Senate - Senate Library Committee

2022-2025 University of Pittsburgh Department of English
Department of English
Digital Narrative and Interactive Design Committee (2022-2025)
Composition Pedagogy Committee (2022-2024)

Digital Narrative and Interactive Design Program
Industry Speaker Series Founder and Coordinator
Spring 2025: Shawn Pierre (in-person)
Fall 2024: SWERY (in-person), Liz Ryerson (virtual)
Spring 2024: Tyriq Plummer (in-person), SWERY (virtual)
Fall 2023: Taylor McCue (virtual)

Games Reading Group Founder

2021-2025 Reviewer, international book publishers and journals
Polity (2025)
Games and Culture (SAGE Publishing) (2021, 2023, 2025)

2016-2017 University of Southern California
Graduate Student Government English Department Representative

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2025 **World Science Fiction Society**
Member

2024- **Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America**
Full Member

2021- **International Game Developers Association**
Game Writing Special Interest Group
Executive Committee (2025-Present)
Discussion Moderator, Discord (2021-Present)

2019-　　　**Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation**
　　　　　　President of the Board of Directors (2023-Present)
　　　　　　Conference Committee (2019-Present)

2021-2025 **Association for Research in Digital Interactive Narrative**
2021-2025 Arts and Industry Outreach Task Force
2021-2022 Graduate Student Committee

SELECTED MEDIA COVERAGE

2018　　Bryant Francis, "Writer Justin Bortnick discusses the secrets of the Frog Fractions 2 ARG," *Game Developer*¸ January 2018
https://www.gamedeveloper.com/business/writer-justin-bortnick-discusses-the-secrets-of-the-i-frog-fractions-2-i-arg

2017　　John Vanderhoef, "IndieCade 2017: Interview with Justin Bortnick from Twinbeard Inc.," *GameCritics.com*, October 2017
https://gamecritics.com/john-vanderhoef/indiecade-2017-interview-with-justin-bortnick-from-twinbeard-inc/

Chris Priestman, "Frog Fractions 2 and the difficult art of mystery making," *Kill Screen*, 11 January 2017
https://killscreen.com/previously/articles/frog-fractions-2-art-mystery-making/

2016　　Justin McElroy, "The jig is up: Behind the yearslong reveal of Frog Fractions 2," *Polygon,* 26 December 2016
https://www.polygon.com/features/2016/12/26/13974966/frog-fractions-2-reveal

Katherine Cross, "Yuting Su's *Octobo*: A 21st Century Teddy Ruxpin," *Gamasutra*, 17 March 2016
https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/268346/Yuting_Sus_Octobo_A_21st_Century_Teddy_Ruxpin.php