Ahu Yolaç, PhD, MSc

Internal Director and Assistant Professor of Game Design
Department of Design
College of Architecture and Design
Lawrence Technological University

Education

2021 Doctor of Philosophy
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, Art Education
Dissertation Title:
A transdisciplinary approach towards educational gaming and game design

2017 Master of Science
Middle East Technical University, Industrial Design
Thesis Title:
Multiplayer online gamers' subcultural interactions: body as a bridge in between real and virtual lives

2014 Bachelor of Fine Arts
Bilkent University, Interior Architecture and Environmental Design

Professional Experience

2024-present Internal Director of Game Design
Lawrence Technological University

2021–present Assistant Professor of Game Design
Lawrence Technological University

2017 - 2021 Teaching Assistant and Studio Instructor
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2018 - 2021 Research Assistant and Conference Organizer
The Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA)

2016 - 2017 Interior Architect
MANOTO Interiors, Ankara, Turkey

2014 - 2016 Interior Architect and Product Designer

Design-OF Studio, Ankara, Turkey

2013 Freelance Designer
KODOBUR Game Company

Received Awards, Grants and Honors

2025 Stantec Grant I Consultant
PI: Sophie Yan
Project Title: A Play-Based Participatory Toolkit for Interior Designers to Support Wellbeing and Spatial Agency in Early Childhood Environments

2024 Michigan Humanities Council $20000 | PI
Received with Julia Kiernan (Co-PI)
Project Title: Land of the Three Fires

2024 Research and Grant Incentive Award, Course Release | PI
Sponsored Research and Institutional Grants Lawrence Technological University

2023 Michigan Humanities Council $10000 | Co-PI
Received with Paul Jaussen (PI) and Julia Kiernan (Co-PI)

2022 SEED-IN Grant, $4200 | PI
College of Architecture and Design, Lawrence Technological University

2021 LTU Grant Writing Fellowship
Sponsored Research and Institutional Grants Lawrence Technological University

2021 Teaching Excellence of a Graduate Student Award
School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2021 Marilyn Zurmuehlen Scholar
The University of Iowa

2021 A+D Graduate Thesis Award
School of Art and Design, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2020 Block Grant, 1000$ | PI
Funding for Graduate Research, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2020 Travel Grant Award 750$
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2019 TIER-ED, Thesis Award 7000$ | PI
College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

2019 Travel Grant Award 750$
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Book Chapters

Yolaç, A., Crum, L. **(2024)**. The Council: Using Subversive Role-Play to Challenge the Status Quo in Design Education. Roll for Learning. ETC Press / Carnegie Mellon University.

Yolaç A. (2024). Night in the Woods and Mental Health. 50 Games for Inclusion, Equity, and Justice. ETC Press / Carnegie Mellon University.

Camacho-Valencia, P., Stokes-Casey, J., **Yolaç, A.**, Hernández-Cabal, C. **(2024)**. Cultivating Intentional Community Through Shared Practice. The Intersectionality of Critical Identities in Art Education,155-161.

Mallory, S., **Yolaç, A.**, Pell, B., Crum, L., Kiernan, J. **(2024)**. Developing an Interdisciplinary Humanities Certificate in Environmental Justice through Technology and Culture. In D. Frazier (Ed.), Teaching Humanities with Cultural Responsiveness at HBCUs and HSIs. IGI Global Publishing.

Journal Articles

Yolaç, A. (2024). Teaching intentional design practices- designing games through feminism. MAI: Feminism & Visual Culture.

Yolaç, A & Hetrick L. **(2024)**. Streamers as Art and Design Educators: Intimate Think Alouds as Pedagogical Practices. Games and Culture.

Yolaç, A., Mallory, S., Kiernan, J. **(2024)**. Leveling Up: Building Better Game Designers through Diverse Multidisciplinary Design. Practice Pathways to Diverse and Inclusive Curricula: The Way Forward. Watchung Review Journal.

Yolaç, A. (2023). Guest Edited Special Concentration: Games and Intentional Play Game Design Concentration| Intentional Play Introduction. Visual Arts Research, 49(2), 70-73.

Yolaç, A. (2023). Teaching intentionality through game jams. Visual Arts Research, 49(2), 86-101.

Stokes-Casey, J., Hernández-Cabal, C., & **Yolaç, A. (2023)**. Walking Self-Portraits: Scores for Creative Exploration of Space. Feminist Pedagogy, 3(4), 9.

Yolaç, A. (2021) Hexostasis: A Transdisciplinary Approach Towards Educational Gaming and Game Design", Journal of Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education.

Conference Proceedings

Yolaç, A., Perkin, J. **(2022)**. Can We Interpret Games Separately From Their Makers? Making Meaningful Games in Unsafe Spaces", Meaningful Play Conference Online Proceedings.

Yolaç, A. (2019) Virtual Learning Spaces: Designing Learning and Learning to Design, in Börekçi, N., Koçyıldırım, D., Korkut, F. and Jones, D. (eds.), Insider Knowledge, DRS Learn X Design Conference 2019, 9-12 July, Ankara, Turkey.

In Press/ Accepted Work

Plowright, P., **Yolaç, A.** Disconnected Measures: Exploring the Relationship Between Critical Thinking Tests and Design Studio Outcomes. DRS Learn X Design Conference 2025 (Accepted)

Yolaç, A., Plowright, P. Design Thinking Pedagogy in a Culture of Information Immediacy. DRS Learn X Design Conference 2025 (Accepted)

Yolaç, A., Kiernan, J., Ten Brink, J. Land of the Three Fires: Teaching Indigenous Histories through Play. Open Screens Special Issue on Teaching Video Games in the Humanities: New Media, New Pedagogies (Accepted)

Yolaç, A., Kiernan, J., Ten Brink, J. From Environmental Justice to Eco-Futures: Indigenous Futurisms as a Framework for Video Game Design. Beyond Green: Intersections of Ecology, Culture and Conservation (Accepted)

Yolaç, A. Tabletop Role-Playing Games in the Classroom: A Systems Thinking Approach for Quick Implementation and Meaningful Learning Outcomes. Teach RPG: Analog Role-Playing Games In the Classroom. Taylor & Francis (In Press)

Yolaç, A. Illusion of Choice: Designed to be Joel or Abbie. The Psychgeist of The Last of Us. (In Press)

Hetrick, L. & **Yolaç, A**. Twitch Streamers at the Fault Lines of Education: Exploring their Approaches to Engage Disinterested Students. INSEA 2023 Proceedings (In Press)

Yolaç, A. Hexostais: A game design study on environmental justice through in-game ecologies and player impact. Video Games as Ecomedia (Accepted)

Yolaç, A. Teaching Criticality Through Game Design Methodologies: Learning by Teaching. Yolaç, A, Kiernan J, Mallory S., (Eds.) Essays on the Intersectional Nature of Game Studies, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers (Accepted)

Yolaç, A, Kiernan J, Mallory S., (Eds.) Essays on the Intersectional Nature of Game Studies, McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers. (Under Contract, Manuscript Review in Progress)

Crum, L., **Yolaç, A**. Systems Thinking in Design: Frameworks and Methodologies for the Emerging Designer, Bloomsbury Publishing. (Under Contract, Manuscript in Progress)

Presentations and Panels

Peer Reviewed Conference Presentations and Workshops

2026 Seeing the Whole: Implementing Systems Thinking and Mapping in the Art and Design Classroom. (Design Interest Group), NAEA 2025 | Presenter

2025 Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Ecological Knowledge, and Sustainability Storytelling. Conference on Community Writing 2025 | Co-Presenter

2025 Disconnected Measures: Exploring the Relationship Between Critical Thinking Tests and Design Studio Outcomes. DRS Learn X Design 2025 | Co-Presenter

2025 Design Thinking Pedagogy in a Culture of Information Immediacy. DRS Learn X Design 2025 | Co-Presenter

2025 Land of the Three Fires: A Design-Based Research Project for Meaningful Learning Outcomes, 2025 PCA National Conference | Presenter

2025 Systems Thinking for Social Change: Implementing Systems Thinking in the Arts Classroom (Design Interest Group), NAEA 2025 | Presenter

2024 Land of the Three Fires: Designing for Inclusivity, Playful by Design Symposium | Co-Presenter

2024 Implementing Intentional Worldbuilding into the Game Classroom, Playful by Design Symposium | Co-Facilitator

2024 Meaningful Play Outcomes: Land of the Three Fires, Meaningful Play Conference | Co-Presenter

2024 Building Intentional Worlds for Meaningful Play Outcomes, Meaningful Play Conference | Co-Facilitator

2024 Land of the Three Fires: Intentional Game Design and the Affordances & Constraints of Creating Authentic, Transdisciplinary and Critical Learning Outcomes, IGBL'24 | Co-Presenter

2024 Enacting Sustainability and Stewardship across Technological Landscapes, LTU Research Day 2024 | Co-Presenter

2024 The Last of Us: An Embodied Shift of Ethics through Game Design, SWPACA | Presenter

2023 Twitch Streamers at the Fault Lines of Education: Exploring their Approaches to Engage Disinterested Students, INSEA 2023 | Co-Presenter

2023 Facilitating Critical Design Through Meaningful Play Practices, HASTAC 2023 | Co-Presenter

2023 Recognizing Twitch Streamers as Unintentional, yet Purposeful, Arts Educators: Methods to Heighten Students' Classroom Engagement, NAEA 2023 | Co-Presenter

2022 Can We Interpret Games Separately From Their Makers? Making Meaningful Games in Unsafe Spaces, Meaningful Play Conference | Co-Presenter

2022 Hexostasis, Craft in the Digital Age Exhibition | Presenter

2020 - Why Video Game Narratives are Important?, Playful by Design Symposium | Presenter

2020 - Enacting Space-Making: Bodies, movement and spaces as materials in art education , NAEA 2020 | Co-Presenter (Accepted, the conference got canceled due to COVID-19)

2019 - Virtual Learning Spaces: Designing Learning and Learning to Design, DRSLXD19: DRS Learn X Design | Presenter

2019 - Video Games as Virtual Learning Spaces", Playful by Design Interdisciplinary Game Studies Symposium | Presenter

2019 - Making and taking space: expanding the understanding of materials and spaces in art education, NAEA 2019 | Co-Presenter

Invited Talks, Conversations, Panels and Reviews

2025 Humanities in Unexpected Places Podcast Series, Michigan Humanities | Guest

2024 Simulating the Commons (ARCH509), University of Michigan | Guest Reviewer

2023 Thesis Studio (2G4/3G7) (ARCH662), University of Michigan | Guest Reviewer

2023 Intentional Design Practices, IGDA Detroit | Guest Speaker

2023 HALA Career Panel | Panelist

2022 Designing Games with Intention, NTX Gaming Symposium | Keynote Speaker

2022 - Emergent Virtual Arts Communities: Ways of Being Together in Uncertain Times, NAEA 2022 | Panelist

2021 - Hexostasis: Transdisciplinary Game Design, TIER-ED, UIUC | Guest Speaker

2021 - Marilyn Zurmuehlen Selected Works in Art Education, NAEA 2021 | Panelist

2021 - The Life of a Journal Article: Where Does It Go and How Do We Know?, University of Illinois Spring Publishing Symposium | Panelist

2020 - Hexostasis: Design Based Research and Mixed Methods", EPSY 575 Mixed Methods Research, UIUC | Guest Lecturer

2020 - Video Games and Education", IS 581 Educational Technology and Youth – UIUC | Guest Lecturer

University Service

2025-ongoing, Committee Member
Center for Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee LTU

2024-ongoing, Faculty Council Chair
Faculty Council, LTU CoAD

2024-2025, Committee Member
Architecture Faculty Search Committee, LTU CoAD

2023-2024, Committee Chair
Interior Design Faculty Search Committee, LTU CoAD

2023 – 2024, Area Chair and Organizing Committee Member
ALT+F4 Rebooting Community After GamerGate Symposium, LTU

2022 -2023, Committee Member
Interior Design Faculty Search Committee, LTU CoAD

2022 -2023, Committee Member
Portfolio Committee, LTU CoAD, Department of Design

2022 -2023, Committee Member
Horldt Family Writing Center Director Search Committee, LTU

2022 - present, Committee Member
Faculty Council, College of Architecture and Design, LTU CoAD

2021 - present, Faculty Advisor
LTUX Organization Committee, LTU CoAD, Department of Design

2021 - 2023, Faculty Advisor
Infinite Machine Student Organization, LTU CoAD, Department of Design

2021 - 2022, Committee Member

Lectures and Exhibition Committee, LTU CoAD

2021 - present, Curriculum Development
Game Design Program, LTU CoAD, Department of Design

2021 - present, Academic Advisor
Game Design Program, LTU CoAD, Department of Design

Professional Service

2025, DRS Learn X Design 2025 Intertwinia in Design Education Conference | Reviewer

2025, Teach RPG: Analog Role-Playing Games In the Classroom | Chapter Reviewer

2024, Journal of Information and Culture | Book Reviewer
Posthuman Gaming: Avatars, Gamers, and Entangled Subjectivities

2024, Meaningful Play Conference | Reviewer

2024, Design Research Society Conference | Reviewer

2023, Hey! Listen! Hypertext Rhetoric and The Legend of Zelda,
Studies in Gaming Series, McFarland | Book Reviewer

2023, Routledge Handbook of Esports, Routledge | Chapter Reviewer

2023, Videogame Sciences and Arts: 13th International Conference, VJ 2023 | Reviewer

2022, Meaningful Play Conference | Reviewer

2022 - present, The Journal of Visual Arts Research, University of Illinois Press | Area Reviewer for Game Design and Game Studies

Professional Affiliations

2024 – present, Women in Games | Ambassador

2024- present, PCA | Member

2021 - present, Inclusive Games | Member

2019 - 2022, TIER-ED Community, UIUC | Member

2018 - 2021, Playful by Design Research Cluster Symposium Committee | Member

2018 - present, NAEA | Member

2018 - present, Design Research Society | Member