Making the Grade: 
UCSC Edition

Darone Designs
Gabriel Darone
About the *Making the Grade* series

*Making the Grade* is a line of educational games designed to help incoming students learn about academic and social life at a university. *Making the Grade* games are individually customized for each university for which an edition is created. Each university’s real-world campus map serves as the foundation for the game world through which users traverse. Individual features of campuses are combined with a core gameplay elements to offer incoming students the chance to learn important academic information while still attempting to conquer social elements that make the university experience unique. *Making the Grade: UCSC Edition* is the first game of the series.

**Standard Features**

No matter what university a student attends, the basics of enrolling in classes, passing courses, and declaring a major are some of the essentials of the university experience. Similarly, incoming students must also find the time to enjoy some time away from classes and enjoy some of the goodies a university offers. Thus, students are faced with the challenge of balancing academic with the social. As such, academic and social challenges are essential parts of each *Making the Grade* game.

**Academic Challenges**

In every edition of the *Making the Grade* series, users must succeed in accomplishing academic tasks in order to graduate from a university in four years. **These tasks are mandatory and must be completed successfully in order for the user to graduate.** Pay close attention to messages that appear during the game to make sure you do not miss any deadlines!

**Social Challenges**

In addition to academic challenges, users may optionally complete social challenges in order to round out the university experience. Noting that social experiences are essential to university life, users should complete these tasks in order to raise their final “grade” by the time the user graduates. Take part in extracurricular activities, join a team, or explore hidden parts of the campus in your “free” time. The more active a student is in these activities, the better the student’s “grade” will be at the end.

**Making the Grade at Graduation**

Those who successfully complete academic challenges in four years move on to graduation. At that time, the user receives a grade. A well-rounded student who manages time well will be able to balance academics and social tasks and go for the ‘A.’ The student who does not take an active role in university life may not fare so well in the final analysis. At *Making the Grade*, it’s not just about doing the minimum.

**Special Features in This Edition**

Each edition of *Making the Grade* not only sports a customized game world modeled after a real university, but each game also focuses attention on features that are unique to each campus.
Making the Grade: UCSC Edition
The University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) edition is extremely unique because of the university’s residential college system. As real UCSC incoming students must do when enrolling in the university, users must affiliate themselves with one of ten residential colleges. On the academic side, students in the game live and conduct most of their university business with their college, but may need to travel across campus to attend classes or find social events not offered by the user’s home college.

Since UCSC is located in a forest, if the time is right, users may be able to participate in activities away from academia and let loose. Participate in a drum circle, climb Tree 9, or run wild during the first rain of the year. Watch out for mountain lions, though!

KZSC is UCSC’s very own radio station. Tune in… or broadcast yourself… who knows what the future may hold.

While UCSC may not sport an organized football team, try some Ultimate Frisbee! Tennis anyone? How about soccer? The OPERS facility at the East Field has everything you need for you sports nuts.

For the more adventurous types, try some spelunking in the Porter Caves! Don’t get lost, though! The last thing you want to do is miss a midterm because you couldn’t find your way out.

These are just some of the features of the campus. Remember to explore the university as much as possible in order to maximize the possibility of receiving a high game grade at graduation. Exploring may also help you find your classes a little more easily.

Gameplay
At the beginning of the game, users (students) will affiliate themselves with a residential college. Then, the students must enroll in classes by finding a nearby computer lab. This is the first academic challenge. Students must enroll in classes in a specified amount of time or risk losing their place at the university.

Once enrolled in classes, students will need to keep up with class work in order to do well in classes. At the same time, those students hoping to receive a good grade at graduation must begin seeking out social events. Activities may be generally announced in a broadcast message, may be advertised on posters around the campus, or may not be advertised at all and must be sought out by students (hint: explore the campus!). A running clock keeps time, and students must be aware of the time constraints of completing social events while keeping up with the academic challenges that may arise from time-to-time. Remember, the academic challenges must be completed by specific deadlines. Not completing academic challenges may be grounds for dismissal from the university (and game over!).
**Controls**
The main character (a banana slug in the *UCSC Edition*) is controlled by using the up, down, left, and right arrow keys. Pressing the space bar stops the character’s motion. To enter doors, simply move the main character completely over a door.

**Credits**
Gabriel Darone  Executive Producer, Level Designer, Artist, QA Tester

**Special Thanks**
Moira O’Deady, for her wonderful contributions and for her support of the project
FINAL REPORT

DEMO VERSION
The scope of the game as originally pitched was too grand in scale for the time allotted to the project—especially since I worked without a partner. As such, while the game’s concept remains intact (as outlined in the game manual above), the game is submitted as a “demo” version. In order to reduce the scope of the project, the follow restrictions are in place:

• The main character is restricted to Crown and Merrill Colleges in order to reduce the scope of the game. Users attempting to leave the confines of these colleges are stopped and turned back
• Many of the features listed in the game manual are not implemented as they would appear in other areas of the campus which are outside the range of Crown and Merrill Colleges
• Not all doors lead to a sub room and only appear on the map for accuracy in mapping of the campus features
• To enroll in a class, users are directed to use a computer lab. In the full version, one may expect the user to also seek out his or her own dorm room and enroll using a personal computer
• Many of the social activities are not implemented

EDUCATIONAL VALUE (+10 points)
While the submitted demo may be lacking in gameplay elements due to time constraints, the concept of the game is educational. As the game concept document stated, Making the Grade is “an educational game geared towards incoming students (mainly first-year students) to teach users about aspects of life at a university.” The underlying purpose is to acquaint incoming students with the university introducing the academic logistics and available on-campus activities. The grading system used at the end of the game (not implemented in the demo) is structured to reward users who accomplish both academic and social tasks prior to graduation. The game is not marketed for the masses but instead to universities and their students.

NO VIOLENCE (+5 points)
No NPCs, bullets, or shooting exist in this game. The ESRB would be proud to rate this game “E for Everyone.”

SUMMARY
The scope of this project was very big. Despite being reduced in size, the level design proved to be the most time consuming aspect of the project. Unlike other “adventure” games, the map was designed from an existing source (campus maps) and could not be freely designed without loss of accuracy. While many concepts were proposed in the Game Concept document, time alone prevented their implementation.

Additionally, learning Game Maker on the fly was not an easy task. While simple concepts were covered in class lectures, many mid-to-advanced ideas had to be
researched. A lot of time was spent trying to figure out how to move the main character from room to room when the main character exits one room by walking off the screen. Since rooms have multiple potential starting positions, starting positions could not be established. A method was finally found where a “gate” mechanism is used. When the main character encounters an invisible “gate” at the edge of a room, the main character is “jumped” to a relative position on the other side of the screen while the rooms change. Unfortunately, because the character must be moved at relative positions, individual “gates” had to be defined for each possible room transition.

Furthermore, the concept of the time line became an essential part of the design. However, implementing the time line to work with the game’s design was a challenging one and required much research.

Hindsight being 20/20, I would have tackled this project differently had I had it to do over again. My initial focus would not have been on trying to implement the entirety of the campus. Room sizes would have been increased to 1024x768 instead of 640x480 to minimize level design issues and reduce the dependency on the number of room “gates” that exist. A full-time artist on staff would be nice, too.

Ultimately, this game could be very strong, and I am disappointed that the final product is only a shadow of what potentially could be made out this concept. I hope that the bonus points will help counter the loss of points that will surely be suffered for an incomplete implementation. I’ve been nearly perfect in this class thus far, and I would hate to see my grade dragged down too much by this project considering the number of hours I put into the game.

**SUGGESTED NARRATIVE EVALUATION DESCRIPTION OF THE GAME**
*(Excerpted from the game manual. Feel free to edited and modify as appropriate.)*

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