Gamify Your Class Within Your Course Management System

Abstract:

Student interest and thus learning may be enhanced through a gaming approach to your course; however, few faculty have the expertise or the resources to build a complex game. Integrating key gaming components into your existing CMS benefits students and faculty. Learn to give your course a gamified face-lift incorporating specs grading, self-directed learning, and a popular TV show theme. Discuss tools instructors can use such as a scoreboard (assessment), "level up" language, and challenges and quests (assignments).

3 Key Words: gamification; self-directed-learning, specifications-grading

Introduction:

Gamification activities were used in an online course for third-year undergraduates and could be used without adaptation in any course with a Course Management System. Instructors of a required course for all third-year students were challenged with teaching a one-credit hour course to approximately 350 online students. The course is the final course students take in a three-part professional skills or talent management curriculum. All three of the courses map to Emotional Intelligence (EI) competencies. In the third year, students focus on relationship management and how they lead or influence others. Students learn to lead and participate in effective remote meetings. The primary challenges for instructors involved student satisfaction, assessment, and widely varying student needs.

Assessment of student deliverables demonstrated success on the student learning objectives, yet student evaluation of teaching scores remained low. Additionally, assessment is thorny in the course. With a student count of 350-400, instructors are limited in the amount of

meaningful feedback they can provide to students. The skills being learned are difficult to assess in a traditional way. For example, how does one determine if your ability to empathize warrants a letter grade of "A," "A-," or "B+?" Finally, students have widely varying needs. Some students have lined up their summer internship already. Others haven't even begun the search. Some students excel in the "soft skills." Others are technically brilliant but EI challenged.

One instructor designed and piloted a gamified version of the course. The gamified version of the course retains the student learning outcomes but introduces a gaming theme, allows for student choice, and moves assessment to a specs grading process.

Theoretical Foundation

Gaming and student perception

L. Dee Fink (2003) argues that ENGAGED STUDENTS and HIGH ENERGY CLASSES are characteristics of significant learning experiences. Many students play video games for hours on end, embracing the iterative process of trying a task, failing, and starting again. The enticement of "leveling up" or moving on to new challenges keeps students motivated even when faced with ambiguity and repetition. The gaming nature of the redesigned course was intended to increase levels of engagement and energy.

Student choice and perception of learning

Self-directed learning is correlated to student perceptions of learning even more in online than in face to face classes. For example, in distance learning courses, student control over pace and timing of learning was more important than in face to face courses. (Roblyer, 2014). By creating optional "quests," the course design aims to increase student satisfaction and perception of learning.

Specs grading

Specification grading removes the emphasis on assigning a letter grade or point value and instead requires students to reach a certain level of performance for an assignment to be acceptable. The final grade in the course is based upon bundles of assignments that the student has satisfactorily completed. Using specifications grading is intended to enhance students' motivation to do well, lower their stress and confusion over academic expectations, strengthen their work ethic, and ensure greater rigor(Nilson, 2015).

Activity Objectives:

- Students will report an increased sense of learning on course content
- Grades will more accurately reflect proficiency on course objectives
- Students will engage more frequently with course content

Exercise Overview:

Within existing course management systems, instructors can build a "gamified" version of their course using popular television themes, "leveling up" language to pace learning, "quests"

to promote self-directed learning, and specification grading to focus learners on key learning objectives. The course pilot used the popular television program, Survivor, to heighten student interest in course material. Introducing "leveling up" language and iterative quizzing opportunities, the instructor sought to mimic video-game experiences. Quests were self-selected assignments designed to allow students to tailor the learning experience to their needs. Specification grading was used to change the feel of traditional grading and assessment to a more game-centric scoring methodology.

Session Description:

15 minutes: Demonstrate Scoreboard, gaming theme, specs grading syllabus wording, quests, and leveling-up

15 minutes: Brainstorm and discuss potential gamification of participants' courses

References:

Fink, L. (2003). *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses.* San Franciso, CA: Josey-Bass.

Nilson, L. (2015). *Spefications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Roblyer, M. (2014) Is Choice Important in Distance Learning? A Study of Student Motives for Taking Internet-Based Courses at the High School and Community College Levels. *Journal of Research of Computing in Education* 32(1) 157-171.