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Some Thoughts on Using Video Games to Teach

Jan Cannon-Bowers



Dr. Cannon-Bowers holds MA and Ph.D. degrees in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of South Florida. She recently left her position as the Navy's Senior Scientist for Training

Systems to join UCF's School of Film and Digital Media, as an Associate Professor. Dr. Cannon-Bowers is continuing her work in technology-enabled learning and human performance modeling. Her goal is to leverage and transition the Department of Defense's sizable investment in modeling, simulation and training to other areas such as entertainment, workforce development and life-long learning and education.

Since their inception some thirty years ago, video games have become one of the most pervasive forms of entertainment in the world. The video game industry has ballooned into a global, multi-billion dollar business, and young people are spending more and more of their leisure time playing computer games. Due to this popularity, many educators are beginning to recognize that video games have the potential to reach and engage unprecedented numbers of learners, particularly with the advent of the Internet. But the question of whether video games will become an effective instructional alternative for educators remains uncertain. In fact, video games are in danger of suffering the same fate as other types of instructional technology—much potential, but little meaningful implementation. In the following, I'll try to take a balanced view of the future of video games in education—highlighting some possible pitfalls and what might be done to help avoid them.

So what is all the hype about?

There are several valid reasons to be enthusiastic about using video games to teach. Perhaps most obvious is the argument that good games have the power to engage players for hours on end. It is not uncommon for players to spend hours a day on popular games, and to continue interacting with a single game for years. Imagine students engaging with math, science or history content every day for five to six hours at a time. From a strictly time-on-task perspective, we would expect learning to occur when students interact with quality learning content for such periods of time. But beyond the motivational aspects, video games may actually offer some unique advantages over more traditional instructional approaches, all of which are grounded in the research literature into how people learn. Consider the following:

- In an immersive game, players learn in context by interacting with objects within a world. This type of experiential learning is consistent with an anchored instruction approach, where learners are able to make connections among concepts and build sound mental models of a domain.
- Games provide an excellent model-based environment to foster complex reasoning. Students are able to manipulate otherwise unalterable variables, to view phenomena from multiple perspectives, to observe system behavior over time, and to draw and test hypotheses.
- Well-designed games provide the player with constant challenge. Small tasks are embodied in a larger achievement; many parallel achievements feed into an overriding goal. Goals are concrete and immediate.
- The result of negotiating successive, proximal goals is that the game generates a feeling of constant accomplishment, which is likely to have a positive effect on self-efficacy. Likewise, it provides a continuous source of feedback so that players know where they stand with respect to their goal accomplishment
- Game play is self-regulating. Players are

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intrinsically motivated to accomplish the next challenge and they will readily acquire new knowledge as required to do it.

- Many games inherently require a repertoire of problem solving skills to be successful. As such, it has been argued that games teach critical thinking skills that can generalize to other contexts.
- Gaming is fundamentally a social phenomenon. Gaming often occurs in distributed social groups that resemble communities of practice. It has been argued that these communities are excellent potential learning environments.

Some of the Pitfalls

Despite the potential offered by this medium, it is not at all clear that video games will turn out to be a viable instructional alternative. There are several (foreseeable) reasons for this; hopefully by addressing them early, we can resolve them before they become a problem.

Pitfall #1—Adapting games to accomplish learning objectives for which they are not well suited or rushing to field games that are poorly designed. Either of these approaches can lead to a familiar scenario—unbridled enthusiasm about a new technology, followed by a few well-publicized failures and then abandonment of the technology as ineffective. To avoid this scenario, we need to consider carefully: how is the game designed? Are sound instructional approaches considered? Does the development team include instructional or educational design experts? Are appropriate evaluations planned? Of course, the most compelling evidence that an educational game will be effective is empirical data demonstrating its success. Despite the difficulties in obtaining such data, a few early studies will be crucial in establishing the credibility of games as serious instructional devices.

Pitfall #2—Failing to consider the needs of the teacher and/or classroom when developing educational games. History informs us that technology—no matter how good—will fail if it cannot be readily incorporated into the classroom setting. Obviously, this issue involves the quality and availability of computer resources, as well as scheduling and class management challenges. It also involves the teachers' comfort level with the technology. In the case of video games, this may be even more acute since many teachers are not gamers themselves and are not comfortable or familiar with games. Even the fine hand-eye coordination and dexterity that a young gamer seems to display effortlessly can be nearly impossible for the uninitiated to master. Perhaps the only way to overcome this situation is to give teachers a chance to understand the rationale and instructional value of the game, even if the attractiveness of game play itself is not obvious.

Pitfall #3—Accepting the attitude that “if it’s fun, they can’t be learning”. Actually, probably few modern educators would hold such an extreme view. On the other hand, the idea that video games can be effective in teaching is likely to meet with

a fair amount of resistance among educators, policy makers and parents. This is understandable, since some argue that video games are inherently bad for kids. For the most part, these arguments are associated with overly violent content, questionable moral content and/or extent of usage (i.e., wasting time playing video games at the expense of other, higher value activities). But good educational games need not (should not) be violent or morally questionable. And if a young person is whittling away hours playing a video game, but learning important science content in the process, those hours might be considered well spent. Ultimately, this turns out to be an empirical question—as noted earlier, when we have rigorous studies that show the effectiveness of video games in learning, critics will have less to say.

The way ahead

There are several things that need to happen if video games are to reach their potential as teaching tools. First, we need to be realistic about what instructional objectives video games can and cannot accomplish. The notion that video games will replace traditional classroom teaching entirely is simply absurd. Second, we need well-designed research studies that help us to better understand how and when games might improve learning. Specifically, we need to investigate how various gaming features affect motivation and learning so that they can be incorporated into game development efforts. Finally, we need to determine whether learner-specific factors (such as gender differences in video game interest) affect the games' ability to teach. To date, little scientific research has been done in these areas. Much more is needed.

On the development and implementation side, we need to ensure that educational game development teams include the right mix of gamers and educators—both instructional design experts and teachers. Questions of how the game is incorporated into traditional instruction should be addressed early and used to guide development efforts. If successful, early efforts can help to define deployment models that can be used to inform subsequent efforts. Finally, teacher development must be addressed early as well. In the case of video games, this means helping teachers to understand their value and potential and also how best to make use of them to support their curriculum.

Personally, I am optimistic about the future of video games in education. The pitfalls noted here are avoidable, and the barriers to implementation can be overcome. I am particularly enthusiastic about taking advantage of the motivational qualities of video games to entice learners with exciting, challenging content that they might otherwise be unwilling or unable to engage. Our lab here at UCF is beginning to investigate some of these issues. Stay tuned...

Game On: SoTL Research, Technology, and the Environment in an Honors Course on Video Games

Peter Telep and Rudy McDaniel



Peter Telep is a member of the Writer's Guild of America, (West), a produced television writer, and the author of over twenty novels ranging from television and film adaptations to science fiction, medical drama, and military action/adventure. He earned his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Central Florida and has been a GTA and Visiting Instructor, and is currently a permanent

Instructor of English at the University of Central Florida.



Rudy McDaniel is Assistant Professor of Digital Media at UCF. His research interests include narrative theory, video game technologies, knowledge management frameworks, and XML. As a consultant, he has designed Web-based applications for clients such as the IEEE Society and the Library of Congress, and has written interactive video game scripts for the Federation of American

Scientists. Rudy is currently director of the PROSE lab at UCF.

Back in late 2006, we proposed the idea of a video gaming class to the Burnett Honors College. We envisioned an undergraduate Honors Interdisciplinary team-taught seminar in which students of all majors would work in teams to study the history, culture, and design of video games. We received as much scrutiny as we did support for our proposal, which was ultimately accepted.

The course, entitled Gaming 360: The History, Culture, and Design of Video Games was first taught during the Spring 2007 semester and included 20 honors students. The class was arguably the most ambitious teaching project ever attempted by either of us. In addition to creating an entirely new course, we had to learn how to team teach, which we quickly discovered was as unnerving (initially) as it was fun.

To measure course effectiveness, we enlisted the aid of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning. Through a series of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning workshops, we were taught research methods and a host of other valuable skills and were able to turn our class into an on-going SoTL project. Our primary research question is this: How do students improve their understanding of video game production concepts (video games as technologies) and develop an understanding of video games as cultural and critical tools (video games as texts) as a result of participation in our honors seminar?

Data from our initial class last spring were mixed. Students were enthusiastic about the course and excited about the topics, as well as the chance to apply experiences from their own lives to their analysis of course materials and to classroom discussion. Although we required students to play games throughout the course, the average number of hours played per week decreased from 10.24 hours at the beginning of the course to 7.47 hours at the end. Some students suggested that the breadth of the assignments (reflection papers, journals, and individual research papers) reduced the amount of time available for them to play.



While students showed an increase in understanding the technical and historical aspects of video games, they were not as successful with identifying critical issues (gender bias and ethnic stereotypes, for example) as we had hoped. At first, we had trouble devising an instrument to measure this type of knowledge. After presenting our work at the

SoTL Commons Conference in Georgia last year, one of the attendees of our presentation suggested collecting student reactions to imagery shown in games. This has proven to be an effective strategy so far and reveals that students react to gaming imagery in very different ways.

For instance, when shown an image of Lara Croft from Tomb Raider, students' reactions varied considerably. Some identified a negative stereotype ("this image presents a stereotypical form of women. Her physical features are exaggerated"), others found a balance between stereotype and empowerment ("Tight clothing, perfect body, etc. But she is also fairly empowered, and gets to be the one doing the shooting") and still others balanced critical observations with unexpected and humorous insights ("Emphasizes strong female features, but also crosses traditional gender roles by portraying her as an action hero. She's wielding two Desert Eagle pistols...most people, even experienced shooters, have trouble with one—this could just be ignorance/exaggeration, but could also portray strength.") Similar images will be shown after the current semester's offering of the course in order to gauge the impact of our class on shaping these perceptions.

This semester, we are adding more technology assignments and also modifying the final group projects to meet the UCF common theme of environmentalism. In these final projects, student teams create "Game Design Documents" which are 30-50 page blueprints or "bibles" for games they would like to see developed. This year we decided to incorporate the unifying theme of the environment and global warming by asking students to design games that in some way address

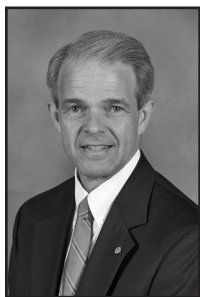
these issues. Their ideas have run the gamut from a first person shooter in which one plays against a military corporation polluting the environment to a fantastical game in which a sentient plastic bottle comes to life in a toxic waste dump and is now bent on destroying the world.

Many students are also helping to build a game to teach about ethics for an engagement grant funded by the UCF Office of Information Fluency. This game is being created with the help of Drs. Stephen Fiore and Nancy Stanlick from the Department of Philosophy. Additionally, we now ask student teams to create a “gaming glossary” of terms related to gaming and game studies as part of an information fluency assignment added to a course Wiki.

Overall, teaching using the theme of video games as critical lenses for society has allowed us to examine a host of issues relating to gender, race, identity, information fluency, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the environment. Those interested in following the development of this course or contributing their own ideas about teaching using game technologies are welcome to visit and edit our course Wiki at <http://gaming360.wikispaces.com/>.

A Lot Can Happen In Ten Years

Joel L. Hartman



Joel L. Hartman is Vice Provost for Information Technologies and Resources. As the university’s CIO, he has overall responsibility for library, computing, networking, telecommunications, media services, and distributed learning activities. He previously served as treasurer and 2003 Chair of the EDUCAUSE Board of Directors, chair of the EDUCAUSE

Learning Initiative (ELI) Advisory Committee and secretary of the Seminars on Academic Computing Coordinating Board.

Congratulations to the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning on your first ten years of service to UCF (see event: <http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/Events/10thanniversary/>). Last year, UCF’s online learning initiative, Online@UCF, also celebrated its ten-year anniversary. Over the past decade, UCF has provided faculty members with numerous opportunities for faculty development and exploration of new methods and tools to enhance teaching and learning.

The groundwork for UCF’s exploration of online learning was laid in the mid 1990s as an outcome of the 1995 SACS reaffirmation of accreditation, strategy meetings with President Hitt and then-Provost Gary Whitehouse, a faculty-led committee to study distance learning, and campus presentations

by outside experts. An initial cohort of 12 faculty volunteers began preparation of UCF’s first fully online (W) courses in the fall of 1996 with the assistance of Steve Sorg and Barbara Truman. These pioneer faculty members went on to successfully deliver their online courses, which were enthusiastically received by UCF students.

When Chuck Dziuban observed that three-fourths of the students in the initial set of online “distance learning” courses resided on campus, a second online modality was created: the mixed-mode, or M modality. The first mixed-mode courses were developed in 1997, and since that time fully online and M, or blended courses, as well as enrollments have grown exponentially. In academic year 2006–2007, fully online and blended learning courses accounted for 15% of the university’s total student credit hour production, up nearly two percent from the previous year.

Steadily, over the years, the organizational capacity needed to sustain a quality online learning service was developed, leading to the departments we know today as the Center for Distributed Learning <distrib.ucf.edu>, Course Development & Web Services <cdws.ucf.edu>, and the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness <rite.ucf.edu>. These units were gradually merged into the division of Information Technologies & Resources, where they can collaborate with other units that provide support for online learning: Computer Services & Telecommunications and the Library. All of these units have collaborated with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning to offer program support for FCTL’s winter and summer faculty conferences, as well as other workshops and activities.

As of fall 2007, 810 W courses have been developed and offered (484 undergraduate and 326 graduate), and 809 M courses have been developed and offered (487 undergraduate and 322 graduate). Nearly 800 faculty members have participated in the IDL6543 or ADL 5000 faculty development programs, and an additional 289 faculty members have participated in the ESSENTIALS program, which provides preparation for the enhancement of regular face-to-face courses with online resources and activities.

In addition to its rapid growth and adoption, Online@UCF has also become a strategic resource that is contributing to the fulfillment of UCF’s institutional goals. Strategic initiatives involving online learning include the creation of online courses that can fulfill requirements in each GEP category, helping to facilitate completion of GEP requirements for many students who could not otherwise schedule the required courses. The growth of online learning has helped mitigate the impact of the shortage of classroom space, and proper scheduling of M courses can allow two to three course sections to share the same classroom and time slot. Online courses have become a major factor in the growth of UCF’s regional campus enrollments, and recently UCF was awarded a \$650,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to further extend the collaboration between Regional Campuses and Online@UCF.

Following a similar strategy, Graduate Studies is currently considering strategies to increase graduate student credit hour production through targeted use of online learning.

The availability of online services, resources, and courses has come to be an expected feature of university life for today's students, most of whom are members of the "millennial," or "Net" generation. These students grew up with the Internet, the Web, and the personal computer, and have never known a life without them. It is no wonder, then, that student demand for and satisfaction with online courses has remained high over the past decade.

Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness staff enhance faculty members' experience with online learning by providing resources and support for scholarly engagement. If a faculty member expresses a wish to explore, from a research perspective, some facet of online learning, RITE staff will, upon request, assist with refining the research hypothesis, develop or acquire the data collection instruments, help collect data, statistically analyze the collected data and provide the results back to the faculty member in publication or presentation-quality format. RITE can also provide editorial assistance, should the research result in a journal article, and in selected cases will provide partial travel funding for faculty members to present their work at a professional conference. By these means, RITE is helping faculty translate their experience in the online environment into directed research that supports the scholarship of teaching and learning. At any given time, approximately 20 to 40 faculty members are collaborating with RITE on a research project.

Online@UCF has been externally recognized as one of the strongest online learning initiatives in the nation. UCF's faculty development for online teaching and learning—IDL6543—was named in 1998 as a North American Best Practice in Supporting Faculty Use of Technology in Teaching by the American Productivity and Quality Council and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (APQC-SHEEO), cited as a Best Practice in New Learning Environments in 1999 by the EDUCAUSE National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII), received the 2000 United States Distance Learning Association (UDSLA) Excellence in Distance Learning Programming award, and received the 2003 Sloan Consortium award for Excellence in Online Teaching and Learning Faculty Development. Online@UCF received the 2005 EDUCAUSE Award of Excellence for Systemic Progress in Teaching and Learning.

As we move forward into the second decade of Online@UCF, we continue to focus on the core questions that have brought us this far: how can we engage the majority of faculty members in systemic initiatives to make sustained improvements in teaching and learning; how can we make learning more active and student-centered; how can we better meet the needs of today's students for engaging, flexible learning environments; how can we address our institution's rapid growth while improving student learning outcomes; and how can we develop

a culture of evidence so that we know we are succeeding and have the information we need to continually improve?

If the past decade is any indication, the next ten years will be filled with exciting developments, new technologies, and enhanced opportunities for UCF faculty members—and students—to explore innovative new ways to enhance the UCF teaching and learning environment. The Division of Information Technologies & Resources salutes the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning and looks forward to new avenues of collaboration in the coming years.

Trash Talk: Cross-Cultural Comparative Research on Environment, Nature, and Dirt Among College Students in Japan and the U.S.

Kimiko Akita



Kimiko Akita is an Assistant Professor of communication at the University of Central Florida. She taught about the environment, among other things, in her native Japan for 10 years before coming to the United States to earn her Ph.D. at Ohio University.

When I moved to Orlando in 2005, I was heartened to find wild birds, fish, and other creatures living in my neighborhood near UCF. At the same time, I felt sad to find trash tossed along streets and into ponds and streams. It was painful to see the pollution of these creatures' habitat—our habitat, too. Trash and litter clog creeks, pollute ponds, and eventually may be swept out to sea.

It's not just bags of trash that appear to have been abandoned, perhaps thrown out of cars. I noticed many pets were being abandoned, too. I was startled by how many hungry and miserable cats trolled dumpsters.

So I started to police Rouse Road between Colonial and SR 408 every week, picking up trash. And I got involved with a TNR (Trap, Neuter, Return) program and became active in CARE Feline Rescue. In two years, I rescued 102 cats (yes, some diseased cats must be euthanized, and fetuses are aborted) and adopted two ferals, Chame and Chibi, whom I have been able to domesticate.

During the hours I spend picking up trash, I have plenty of time to think while trying to ignore horn blasts from passing drivers, some of whom evidently think they're supposed to throw their empty bottles, cups, and cans directly at me. As I wonder about why people only want to pollute their own habi-

tat, my mind sometimes wanders. I think, for example, about the cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan, where I am from. Generally speaking, Americans and the Japanese think differently about nature, dirtiness, public space, and the environment.

I have observed that Americans tend to alienate themselves from nature, choosing to encounter it rarely and preferring instead to attempt to control it. Most Japanese, in contrast, integrate nature into their everyday life.

A central example of this contrast is the treatment of litter. Picking up trash or cleaning public space voluntarily is a typical sociocultural practice in Japan; in the U.S., however, to clean up someone else's mess is a dirty job most eschew because it connotes social inferiority and is publicly embarrassing and demeaning to self-conscious citizens. When I ask my UCF students about litter on campus—discarded newspapers, plastic cups, and other detritus of our throwaway culture—they tell me that they think little about littering because other people are paid to clean up after them and that it is uncool to be seen picking up trash!

In Japan, cleanliness is an extremely important cultural value, partly out of necessity because of crowded conditions and limited space on the island. Tokyo, for all its problems, could be worse, even unlivable. Most Japanese devote time each day to cleaning up. From kindergarten through high school, students clean their classrooms, rest rooms, and schoolyards after the last class each day. This educates them about the value of cleanliness, makes students feel more connected to and respectful of their school, and helps them appreciate that cleaning can be difficult and dirty work! Community residents get together usually once a week to clean their neighborhood and public parks. In Japan, Dec. 31 is spent cleaning before welcoming the new year.

The cultural differences may derive in part from ideology, religious beliefs, and history. According to ancient Shinto, the indigenous religion that lingers in most minds and lifestyles in Japan, anything that blocks the flow of air, water, or energy is considered dirty and must be removed. My research of the history of Western sewage—yes, we academics find no subject too raw for study!—has found its lagging evolution to be more pragmatic and related to capital.

To move beyond my mere musings about all of this, I am undertaking a cross-cultural research project about American and Japanese attitudes toward the environment. I strongly believe that environmental awareness and leadership are imperatives in our pedagogy of the global classroom. Last semester, through the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning Winter Conference, I began helping a colleague prepare to teach environmental journalism. His students were responsible, through their stories in the campus newspaper, for promoting awareness of the Focus the Nation events in January. I guest-lectured them in February on cat overpopulation, and they will accompany me in spring on a Rouse Road cleanup

to learn first-hand about the trash problem.

So I have begun working with FCTL to learn how to integrate ideas about the micro issue of litter and the macro issue of global climate change—the GEP unifying theme—into the undergraduate and graduate communication courses I teach. Under the aegis of an Innovative Project grant, I plan to study both UCF students and college students in Japan to discover differences and similarities in their beliefs, attitudes, and communication about the environment, nature—and picking up litter. I hope to arrange an audio/visual synchronized classroom interaction between UCF and a university in Japan. From all this, I am planning a new course proposal about intercultural communication and the environment that may help others integrate cross-cultural understanding of the environment in their classes.

I know from teaching overseas that Japanese students would be eager to interact with Americans in English. Communicating in a common language itself would be a great intercultural challenge and lesson welcomed by the Japanese. As for UCF students, they might be interested in and learn from Japanese sensibilities toward the environment, recycling, and saving energy—and the planet—in everyday life.

Student Engagement in the Unifying Theme Project

Shari Hodgson



Shari Hodgson has been a faculty member at the University Of Central Florida Nicholson School Of Communication for seventeen years. Due to her dedication to the development of innovative teaching methods, she was the UCF 2004-2005 recipient of the “Teaching Incentive Program, TIP” award, and the 2007 Florida Communication Association’s “Outstanding Teacher” award.

Students enrolled in the summer and fall “Fundamentals of Oral Communication” classes were encouraged to choose environmental topics related to the GEP “Unifying Theme.” The series, “Planet Earth,” was shown on assorted environmental subjects during class periods. Students were asked to conduct scholarly research on topics of interest. Their research became the foundation and inspiration for students to use to fulfill informative and/or persuasive speech assignments. The results during the summer term were beyond expectations. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive regarding the profound effects of their investigations, research, and speech presentations on their level of awareness and concern for environment. It was any professor’s dream to watch participants evolve from becoming interested, to becoming informed, to

becoming experts, to becoming passionate, and ultimately, to becoming activists in movements targeted at healing their planet.

However, this was not the only result of using Unifying Theme assignments. One might expect the students presenting topics to be inspired. However, it was the student audience members' levels of passion regarding environmental awareness that came as a surprise. Their responses made it clear that exposing students to environmental issues via their peers had powerful and influential implications.

In an effort to further the affects experienced during summer term, the fall SPC 1600 curriculum included assignments that were designed to heighten awareness and interest, and increase the breadth and depth of students' research and involvement in presenting environmental topics. Students identified the overall goal of these assignments was to increase:

- Student involvement: classmates would commit to take action,
- Campus involvement: classmates were urged to join environmental groups,
- Political involvement: classmates learned, then discussed, presidential candidates' environmental policy, and
- Global involvement: classmates identified and funded organizations that have global focus.

Students chose specific environmental topics, accessed the GEP Unifying Theme website and scholarly resources for information, then designed PowerPoint slide presentations for both the informative and persuasive speeches. Topics ranged from "Global Warming, Hybrid Cars, Use of Plastics, Recycling, Depletion of Ozone Layer" to the other extreme, "Myths of Global Warming."

In addition, student speeches and student audience reactions were video-taped. A grant was awarded to produce a documentary to be used as a faculty and/or student resource on the GEP Unifying Theme web site. The documentary, started during the FCTL Winter Conference, will be finished and posted by the end of the Spring semester, 2008.

Professionalism, Service, Leadership

Wilfried Iskat



Wilfried is an Associate Professor in the Rosen College of Hospitality Management. A career in hospitality spanning several continents and all aspects of restaurant and hotel businesses, especially training, led Wilfried to a position as lecturer and dean at a school of hospitality management. Active in professional organizations, he has earned several professional certifications from the Hotel Catering and Industrial Management Association and from the American Hotel and Lodging Association as well as the National Restaurant Organization.

The Rosen College of Hospitality Management of UCF has a strong responsibility to its motto of Service, Professionalism, and Leadership. To ensure that the courses I teach in lodging management all lead to the ultimate goal of instilling these core values in our students, I have implemented a relationship with local hospitality and lodging providers, inviting them to guest lecture or facilitate student field trips to their locations to establish the foundation for experiential learning in my courses.

One of the most important considerations when deciding upon the use of guest lecturers and field trips is that this virtually ensures that the students will hear about operations, work philosophies, and procedures used in the industry that are current and up-to-date. Just as it is beneficial for us as instructors to take advantage of the well-formulated and constantly updated professional development practices coming out of the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, we can in turn ensure a similar upgrading on our course content, simulate current industry practices, and role-model professional behavior expected by industry recruiters who hire our graduates.

With 50 plus years background in hospitality operations, from dishwashing to corporate level human resource management, and 20 years in post-secondary education, I believe strongly that not everything can be learned from textbooks in this predominately people-to-people business. Each instructor comes with his or her own specialization, in my case food and beverage management and international hospitality, but having taught over 40 different courses in industry and educational settings, I feel that certain topics such as maintenance engineering, food production, convention and meeting management, and guest service operations are explained best when enhanced by subject matter experts facilitating a guest lecture or in a field-based location. Therefore, I have found that students greatly benefit from meeting face-to-face with experienced practitioners in this industry both in the classroom and on-site.

While I feel some content can be learned from textbooks and traditional teaching methodologies, I believe that students in hospitality management benefit greatly from “Hearing,” “Seeing,” and “Doing.” Internship experiences give many students the opportunity for hands-on training and education, but especially in the area of undergraduate studies, the students often do not have a realistic understanding of the hospitality industry even though they have chosen a segment of this field as their major. A visit to a large hotel with multiple food and beverage venues and conference centers gives the student a more vivid understanding of the breadth and scope of the hospitality industry as well as the myriad career opportunities it offers. In addition, company policies, management methods and operational procedures used in existing hotels are often more up-to-date than those cited in even the most recent textbook because it takes 2–4 years from the time of writing to publication. Additionally, guest speakers and managers at a hotel often possess more current industry information since they are involved directly in the day-to-day operation of a hotel, whereas the instructor’s work history might already be outdated in this rapidly changing field.

Professionalism

At the Rosen College, Dean Abraham Pizam has ensured that every student receives a copy of a supplementary course textbook “Professionalism is for Everyone,” because a heavy emphasis is placed on conveying all aspects of professional behavior to our students. Guest speakers and on-site visits to hotel properties help the students understand how important professionalism is in the hotel industry, and the concept is reinforced by the appearance and behavior of the guest speakers and hotel executives both in class and on-site at the field trip location. Additionally, a positive impression is made when the students are being asked to “dress up” for the field trip and can observe the similar attention to detail in appearance that is required in the successful upscale lodging locations where the field trips take place. As a final note students get to see the preparation and details of planning required of the classroom instructor, the people conducting the field trip tour, and operations management in making the field trip into a successful learning experience.

Leadership

By being exposed to guest speakers and executives in the classroom or their work environment, the students can understand leadership as it relates to seeing the executive as an extremely self-confident person. They see how dressing for the position affects visual appearance and demeanor and observing how experienced managers field individual questions in a direct and effective manner. When visiting hospitality operations, the interaction between managers and supervisors with their employees and the general public can yield valuable understanding of body language, speech patterns, and courtesy. Other observations, though not as frequent, can also shed light on how successful managers apply discipline, earn the respect of their subordinates, deal with such subjects as absenteeism, tardiness, performance improvement, and dealing with difficult guests or high stress situations.

Service

Of the many obvious benefits to witnessing service in an existing hotel operation, four particular areas stand out. Observing the interaction of lodging employees with guests, witnessing the exchange of employees to employees in delivery of guest services, seeing the relationship managers have with their staff under stressful conditions, and finally becoming aware of the relationships between the members of various departments and the overall hotel operation are all highlights learned by experience that can never have the same impact just from reading a textbook.

Perhaps the greatest recognition of how service is accomplished is when students have the opportunity to observe an on-going operation and see what physical labor, management planning, and operational supervision are required to set up 500 chairs in a ballroom setting in thirty minutes, “turn over” several hundred rooms from check-out at 11AM to check-in at 4PM, or serve 1,000 lunches in half an hour.

With regard to the benefits that a guest speaker brings to the classroom, the ones most often cited by the students are learning about the corporate culture and what the guest speaker and the management at a hotel do to ensure understanding, training and implementation of a “service mentality” by the employees. Another often-mentioned cognition is to hear what various hotel companies or “brands” are doing to ensure quality guest service and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Last, but not least, many guest speakers will expand on the practical operational requirements to install a reward system and show how line-level employees are being empowered so servers understand the importance of the service concept.

Recommendations

It may require substantial effort on the part of the instructor to develop a good working relationship with lodging operations to allow for field trips. The benefits to the hotel, however, are that the visiting guest speakers and/or the executives observing the students during field trips have an opportunity to identify the best potential candidates for employment to their operations. Many times I have identified the candidates for employment long before a job fair or end-of-the-year job interviews come about. Thus the hotel operations will always have preferred access to a body of potential employees.

It is very important that prior to any field trip or visit by a guest speaker that a discussion take place: what is to be covered, what departments are to be toured, the textbook’s view, what are the anticipated outcome(s) of the learning experience, and so on. To facilitate this I often “gift” a copy of the textbook to the hotel as well as send any pertinent Power Point presentations, test questions and discussion points in advance. Attention to detail is of the utmost importance and facilitation of both on-site field trips and guest speaker visits must be controlled by the instructor in order to maximize the benefit of this experiential learning opportunity.

There are some unexpected obstacles that you must be prepared for, such as what to do if the guest speaker cancels because of operational necessity. Arranging a field trip with 20 students will take considerably less effort than setting up a field trip for 200 students. The latter may require splitting the entire class into special interest groups, preparing the lodging operation for a massive onslaught of students, making sure that all the students know how to get to the location, how to talk and how to be recognized for attendance.

At all times the field trip and/or guest speaker appearance may be cancelled in the last minute because of operational emergency. Therefore the instructor must be flexible and able to reschedule or use an alternative activity and be able to communicate these changes electronically to the students. Also it helps to brief the guest speaker on the contents of the course text.

In preparation for writing this article I have reviewed a body of work written in academic journals that deals with the instances of experiential learning, and I will be more than happy to share these findings with anyone interested in pursuing this further.

Practicing 'Midterm Students Evaluations' as Assessment Devices

Martha Garcia



Martha Garcia is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Languages & Literatures. She is a UCF alumna and returned as a faculty member in 2005 from Vanderbilt University where she earned her Ph.D. She teaches Spanish language and courses related to her specialization in Medieval and Golden Age Literature. She is currently working

on her second book project and several other articles.

This all started with some questions within my mind: Why invest time in Mid-term Student Perceptions? How may this early assessment be beneficial for my course objectives? How can I implement this practice as part of my semester course plan?

One of the dilemmas that I encounter every semester is the fact that the students in each class tend to differ in learning styles, and their expectations vary from one group to another. Consequently, I am not aware of their learning abilities and expectations until the semester ends, when I read their comments and suggestions on the UCF Student Perception of Instruction forms. In the following comments I address the students' specific needs in order to perform more efficiently in Spanish language and literature classes.

Why invest time in mid-term student perceptions?

First of all, yes, there will be a better probability to obtain higher scores on the Students' Perceptions at the end of the semester, and I would say more fair results because we—the professors—have been aware of the areas that might need more attention and address them in a timely manner. Secondly, it has helped me to prepare more efficient lesson plans for each group based on their specific learning needs, minimizing the time I devote to areas which may not yield beneficial results for a specific group. Third, my students have noticed that I am willing to modify my teaching agenda—when that is applicable—in order to improve their performance, so their level of motivation in the subject improves.

How may this early assessment be beneficial for my course objectives?

The questionnaire that I prepare for the students as mid-term perceptions are directed to evoke topics related with my course objectives. For example, what materials covered at that point are stimulating the learning process? What teaching techniques are helping them to grasp difficult concepts in literature? What homework is particularly challenging for them and why? In effect, I can acquire the kind of information that helps me to maintain an alignment between my course objectives and their actual learning outcomes. So I am able to restructure any area which may be problematic at that specific point and coordinate the dynamics implied in both areas involved—teaching and learning—towards the achievement of the course objectives.

How can I implement this practice as part of my semester course plan?

This practice—a midterm or pre-evaluation tool—is a mechanism that I have been using and implementing for several years now and I have been experimenting with different approaches and/or techniques. One of them consists of including a questionnaire as part of their mid-term exam regarding what aspects of the materials, texts, or topics studied up to that point are more interesting or attractive to them. I also include these types of questions on the final exam in order to complete the task and obtain a panoramic vision through the point of view of the student regarding the materials covered in the course. I compile these answers, and generally, they are a good indicator of the reception of the materials, and it helps me to determine the selection of readings and activities for the rest of the semester and/or for the next time that I teach the course. The second device that I have used is a short survey after the mid-term exam containing the following questions:

- 1) What aspects of this course and/or the instruction have contributed to your learning?
- 2) How are these aspects helping you to learn in this course?
- 3) What pertinent recommendations would you like to offer to your professor in order to help you learn more effectively?
- 4) Any additional feedback?

Pros:

- Knowing in advance the expectations of my students and being able to detect potential areas of learning difficulties before the end of the semester allows me to solve any possible problem when it arises—which is generally correctable—rather than waiting until the end of the semester when it could be too late.
- This proactive mode not only keeps me focused in my teaching involvement but aware of the learning process as well, so I can consolidate my course objectives, lesson plans, and the selection of materials with the student homework, assignments, and exams.
- Being able to discover the student perceptions at this earlier stage becomes an assessment method for my own self-evaluation and the students become, then, co-participants of the learning process.

Cons

- Some students may utilize this task to express unrealistic demands of the subject or to address irrelevant complaints. However, I have found that this exchange of opinions might serve as an opportunity to engage both parties involved (professors and learners) in an open dialogue and reaffirm the objectives of the course and my own personal standpoint. They realize that I am willing to take into consideration their points of view as long as they are valid and presented in the appropriate manner.
- Because this process is not anonymous, the students may feel intimidated or reluctant to share their insights and opinions. In my experience, I feel confident in saying that most of them have been sincere and appreciate being taken into consideration.

A final thought

As professors, we are always searching for new ways to evaluate, assess, and improve our students' performance. Showing our students that we are willing to take their suggestions, comments, and recommendations into account demonstrates to them what we already know: effective teaching is closely related to the art of learning. After answering these questions for myself and applying these principles and techniques in my classes, I have experienced that the time that I invested in this task has been well spent.

Utilization of Classroom Response System for Sequential Learning

Tad Hara



Tadayuki (Tad) Hara is an Associate Professor at Rosen College. After completion of a PhD at Cornell, he taught at the School of Hotel Administration there. He was previously the Senior Manager at the Industrial Bank of Japan, where he spent 17 years (currently Mizuho Corporate Bank), and Assistant Director of the Middle Eastern Peace Process at the Japanese Foreign Ministry. His current research interests include quantitative economic impact modeling in the field of regional science, peace science, and tourism studies with emphasis on financial aspects.

When you teach a course in which students have to understand a set of basic skills to proceed to next stages, it would pose an interesting challenge for an instructor to verify the effectiveness of his/her teaching and the students' learning.

Accounting and finance are two of those courses, where students can learn the next topics well only after they understand the previous level of knowledge. To make matters worse, students tend to have a stereotype that finance courses are intimidating and boring.

How can you preach the importance of financial discipline if they cannot create their personal amortization table in MS-Excel in order to learn how the principal repayment interest expense interacts with change in interest rates? Or how can students learn the various investment analyses technique of Net Present Value (NPV) or Internal Rate of Return (IRR) without a foundation of solving the simple time value of money questions? Do we assume students learn each step now simply because “we taught them all”?

In the Hospitality Finance course from Fall 2007, students and I started to experiment with the Classroom Response System (Clickers) concurrently with another instructor, Ms. Vivian Ray. Even though the initial learning processes are challenging even for a tech-moderate instructor, once the initial ritual is mastered, it has been an effective means of communicating with students in the class. It became “indispensable” for Spring 2008.

What do I mean “effective communication,” when I am already in the same classroom with tens of students? If you ask students whether they understood what you had explained, for example, “how much money you receive back from your savings account after 5 years if you deposit \$1,000 today with 5% annual interest rate compounding annually”, only a few out of

50 students in the class may nod back to your inquiry, and the other 45 are sitting there silent without a trace of emotions. In the traditional environment, an instructor has to proceed to the next step in order to keep up with the published syllabus.

The usage of clickers may dramatically change the systematic lack of students' feedback to the instructor's favor, without burdening us with extra paperwork or grading. At any time of the class, you conduct a mini-quiz, almost like a game. You can mildly challenge students by saying "if 2/3 of you got it right, I can finish the class 5 minutes earlier because I do not have to explain it again. Deal?" You can correctly guess what the reaction of students would be. Once all students answer with their clickers, the instructor can stop the collection of data which is automatically followed by results and even graphical charts popping up in front of them, making students react vibrantly like never before. In each class I conduct such mini-quizzes, and since I make the exam questions in Webcourses similar to those clicker questions, students who attended and practiced the clicker quizzes will feel the benefit of understanding what the instructor truly wanted them to master. In the finance course, students are asked to master how to use a financial calculator to calculate bond pricing and various time value of money questions. With clickers, you can immediately check if students understood what you want them to understand.

Clicker questions can be used to check if students mastered important concepts of risk-return or required rate of return to manage the organization, immediately followed by video-clips relevant to emphasize the importance of right answers.

Combined with Webcourses and other electronic devices such as Cyberlab (short digital video clips), 10 weekly homework assignments, 3 case studies, all in MS-Excel, 10 self mini-quizzes and a final exam, the clickers push students hard to study a lot, without any exchanges of physical papers. With the clicker system, students and I are not taken by surprise because all of us (students and the instructor) know where students' level of understanding stands in each class we meet. The system is just fabulous, and you are saving trees!

Click.

Awards/Recognition

The Office of Experiential Learning received the "Program of the Year" award from the National Society for Experiential Education, October 2006 for excellence in institutional commitment, quality and collaboration.

Dr. Sheri Dressler was selected to receive The Dean Herman Schneider Award from the Cooperative Education and Internship Association at their annual conference in March, 2008. This is the organization's leadership award for educators, reflecting a significant and comprehensive record of contributions for the advancement of the philosophy and practice of cooperative education.

Announcement

The University of Central Florida Libraries proudly presents Bill Belleville, environmental writer and documentary filmmaker. Mr. Belleville lives in Sanford, Florida and has written and researched extensively on such themes as nature, wildlife, conservation, and adventure-travel.

7:00–9:00 p.m. Tuesday, April 15
University of Central Florida Libraries, Room 223

His presentation will relate to the UCF General Education Program's Unifying theme, "Our Planet, Our Education, Our Future" series. His most recent book, *Losing It All To Sprawl: How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape*, was named one of the "Best Books of 2006" by the national *Library Journal* and won the Al Burt Excellence in Journalism Award by the 1000 Friends of Florida. *In Marjorie's Wake*, is a new documentary film that retraces the journey of Pulitzer winning author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on the St. Johns River. The film captures the many ways in which the river has shaped culture—literature, art and music—over time. It is being presented to a national PBS audience by the Miami PBS affiliate WPBTV in 2008, funded by a grant from UCF Learning Institute for Elders (LIFE), and is free and open to the public.

Submissions

The *Faculty Focus* is a publication for all instructors at the University of Central Florida. This includes full-time and part-time faculty and teaching assistants at all UCF campuses. Its purpose is to provide an exchange of ideas on teaching and learning for the university's community of teachers and scholars. It is envisioned that this publication will inspire more dialogue among faculty whether in hallway discussions, departmental meetings, or in written articles. This represents an opportunity for faculty to reach their peers throughout the growing UCF community. The *Faculty Focus* invites you to contribute your ideas on teaching and learning in a short essay.

See the guidelines for submission online at <www.fctl.ucf.edu/focus/guidelines.htm>. Please send your submissions to fctl@mail.ucf.edu.

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