Career Exploration: Gamifying Learning Experiences in an Undergraduate Sport Management Course

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Of the many challenges that teachers face in the classroom, motivating students to become engaged learners continues to be at the forefront of concerns for educators (Mellecker, 2013). When students are engaged, they have increased student achievement and overall satisfaction. Perhaps even more important is the fact that many college sport management faculty struggle to find ways to provide rich information to students about career opportunities that are tailored for a variety of students’ skill sets. Thus, the purpose of the Career Exploration through Gaming Project is to develop an active learning module that instructors and undergraduate students could use throughout the semester to explore possible careers in sport management and begin to make informed decisions regarding career path and development. The goals of the active learning module includes increasing student engagement, motivation, achievement, and satisfaction within professional development and course related material.

Since the 1970's, video games have increased in popularity as a fun way to spend leisure time (Dominquez, 2013). Due to the ability of these games to engage its participants, education researchers have watched with significant interest, hoping to apply the design features and concepts to academic instruction and professional development (Kebritchi & Hirumi, 2008). Today, computer games are thought to be effective tools for teaching challenging and complex procedures without the negative impact from wrong or unjustified choices. Research indicates that the use of gamification, defined by Dominquez (2013), as the use of game design elements and game mechanics in non-game contexts, are beneficial to engaged learning. Games are active, increase motivation and satisfaction, accommodate a variety of learning styles, reinforce mastery, and provide interactive decision making context (Charles and McCallister, 2004; Egenfedle-Nielsen, 2005; Squire, 2004).

Combined with the aforementioned benefits of gamification in learning environments, it is believed that when used in addition to personality and career choice research, stronger and more informed career decisions can be made by students, thus producing a more engaged, motivated, and satisfied learner. Previous research has indicated that many of the personality types (Myer Briggs Type Indicator; MBTI) tend to have distinct preferences in their career choices (Katz et. al.1999). McCaulley (1990) described the MBTI as an “effective tool in increasing self-awareness, enhancing understanding of decision-making processes and preferences and improving interpersonal communication”. When used with the Myers Briggs Type Indicator Career Report, a list of occupation types most and least similar to one’s personality is produced.

Active Learning Module Steps:

Students taking Introduction to Sport Management undergraduate sport management course will be asked to complete a short version of the MBTI. Then students consider their career aspirations within the sport management field and to evaluate whether, according to the MBTI, what sport management careers fit best. An instructor will lead discussion and explain that a mismatch between individual career aspiration and MBTI did not mean that a career was unattainable, but merely highlighted that some skills or characteristics that would have to be developed. Students will be assigned to teams and be presented with a group profile that represents one of the sixteen MBTI profiles and contains a unique sport management career choice. As a team, students will be presented with the challenge of making career decision choices (educational activities “class assignments”, internships, graduate school, job opportunities etc.) on behalf of their Avatar. These choices will prepare their Avatar for the “dream” career identified on their Avacard; thus experiencing the process similar to that of professionals making career choices. Each choice made will require the group to complete a “low, moderate, or high stakes” activity and produce some instructor approved proof of completion. Group choices will be made using the discussion forum online or choice
module in Moodle (a free, open source web application that is used as a course management system) and will be evaluated by the instructor and/or teaching assistant. Based upon the quality of the choices made by the group, the team’s (Avatar) will be awarded points that add to and or diminish the time left on their Avacard’s (lifeline). The goal of the game/simulation will be for groups to navigate their Avatar from its starting position throughout the semester and attempt to reach the career goal of their Avatar before their lifeline is used up. It will be expected that some teams will not meet the “dream” career goal expressed on the Avacard, and perhaps will decide to alter the career path of the Avatar. Students will post discussions regarding group decisions in a course online forum that initially will only be seen by members of the group and course instructors, but at the end of the semester students will share their findings with the entire class in a gamification wrap-up session.

Data analysis and evaluation will occur throughout the spring 2014 semester and will be completed in late April 2014. To determine the overall effectiveness of the learning module, motivation and engagement of the gamification experience on students in the undergraduate class, qualitative measures including the review group forums and reflection statements will be employed by the instructor and the teaching assistant. Activity usage data from Moodle will also be evaluated. Student satisfaction and achievement will be measured by student course evaluations (mid semester and final course evaluations). Student achievement will be measured by performance on quizzes and examinations.

This active learning module will provide a way for students to explore possible careers in sport management and begin to make informed decisions regarding career path and development. We hope that other sport management faculty will be able to use a similar gamification programs to help engage students.