Using Gamification to Engage Students in Sport Management Classrooms

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The increasing emphasis by higher education over the last decade has indicated a move to better prepare students for future employment by taking the focus away from just learning content (Light & Dixon, 2007). Today’s college classrooms must teach students critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and how to apply knowledge to solve real-world problems (Arum & Roska, 2011; Fink, 2013). Due to the nature of sport management as a field, this means students graduating from sport management programs need to be critical thinkers who are able to acclimate in shifting environments (Skinner & Gilbert 2007; Zakus, Malloy, & Edwards, 2007). Often a university’s goal in engagement is not merely to get the student through the content, but to increase and deepen the value of classroom learning by quality interactions with the instructor, engagement in related activities, and their peers (Kuh, 2009). While sport management has seen recent articles on redesigning the tools used in classrooms, such as increasing social media use (Scott & Stanway, 2015), consideration should be given to actually changing out the toolbox. This can be achieved through the use of gamification.

Gamification focuses on the theory that participants become not only engaged, but immersed in the task they are participating in (Johnson, 2016). While gamification is often associated with the design and reward structures found in video games and creating behavioral changes, it has also been utilized as a researched instructional method for several years (Klein, 1985). This paradigm is not only used in education, but also seen recently used for increased consumer engagement a loyalty by many organizations, including sport franchises (Sutton, 2013; Tegtmeier, Neofotistos, & Noormohamed, 2013). Gamification emphasizes problem solving, motivation, mechanics, and game thinking. It helps by utilizing conflict, competition, and cooperation that will often be found in the real world, but in a controlled setting for learning (Kapp, 2012). A key struggle of teaching sport management content is that students need to understand the complicated and moving parts involved with the management process. Gamification can overcome this challenge by creating and making models and simulations of reality to form and focus on isolated specifics, creating abstract realities (Klein, 1985). While some studies have shown increased knowledge levels with the use of gamification in a well-designed learning environment, almost all have shown a large increase in student engagement and preference for the gamified classroom (Randel, Morris, Wetzel, & Whitehill, 1992; Wolfe, 1997).

Additional benefits beyond problem solving are found in understanding concepts of decision making, risk taking, leadership development, pro-social behavior, and learning from opponents (Kapp, 2012).

Using gamification in a classroom means creating scenarios in a theory called cognitive apprenticeship, where the environment created is the mentor. Students are then forced to adapt and learn based on the parameters placed on them, developing their own understanding and enhancing schemas through feedback (Browns, Collins, & Dugald, 1989). This presentation will present several methods to implement gamification into the classroom. Discussions will include designing measurable achievements, creating token economies, and competitive/cooperative play design. This will allow for creating alternate reality games as part of the classroom engagement, designed to mimic management principles in sport. Attendees are encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences and beliefs with student engagement and practices.