Increasing Engagement through Narrative and Choice in an Online Course

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Summary

In this presentation we describe a new online course platform that uses narrative and student choice to build students’ skills using and creating emerging media technologies. The “Adventures in Emerging Media” (AEM) course structure allows students to take a personalized, non-linear path through the learning content. It is a strategy that has been implemented previously in industry training, but has had little application in undergraduate education. The course also employs a pervasive storyline—pursuing one’s dream job with the eccentric billionaire CEO of a fictional conglomerate—designed to motivate students to build their competencies toward a desired career path.

We will present a video that will show the audience several aspects of our project including story animations, sample video content from the learning modules, and interviews with course designers and students who took the course in the Fall 2010 semester.

The remainder of the presentation will focus on data that was collected on the effectiveness of our platform for increasing student learning and engagement. The evaluation included an extensive 3-part survey that was administered to the approximately 100 students who took the AEM course and a modified version of the survey administered to 3 other large online courses taught in different departments during the same semester. AEM Students reported higher confidence in 15 of 17 skill areas (e.g., using social media, designing with new media platforms such as mobile and VR technologies, etc.) at the end of the course relative to the beginning. Compared to the other courses surveyed, AEM students reported a stronger belief that the course affected their career goals. AEM students also reported that the course involved less memorization and more analysis and application than the comparison courses. Additional analysis will be presented on student learning artifacts, such as a comparison of pre and post digital media creations that students made for the course. Finally, excerpts of student feedback from course evaluations and a brief summary of a post-course focus group will be included.

Presenter Bios

Jon Friskics is an instructor with expertise in mobile application development and sound design.

Robb Lindgren is a researcher interested in the design of learning technologies, immersive environments allowing for embodied interaction, and new methods of assessing instructional technologies.

Rudy McDaniel is a researcher interested in interactive narrative, video games, and Internet technologies. He is co-author of *The Rhetorical Nature of XML* (Routledge, 2009).

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