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Measuring Learning in an Honors Interdisciplinary Course on Video Games

A fair amount of research suggests that video games can be effective tools for learning complex subject matter (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002; Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Ricci, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; Randel et al., 1992) and for teaching students how to manage and work with information in project settings (McDaniel et al., 2006). In our session we will discuss our experiences teaching and conducting SOTL research in an undergraduate Honors Interdisciplinary team-taught seminar. The course, entitled Gaming 360: The History, Culture, and Design of Video Games was taught during the Spring 2007 semester and included 20 Honors In the Major (HIM) students. It was taught by professors from the Digital Media and English departments. Our primary research question was this: How would 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?

To answer this question, we identified salient video game literature in each of the following categories: pedagogy, history, design, culture, and gender, as well as research on teaching in Honors programs. We then designed a survey measuring these areas of learning and conducted our research using a quasi-experimental repeated measures analysis of variance design. In this presentation we plan to present an overview of our curriculum and the assessment tools we used to measure student outcomes. We will also discuss how successful our efforts were and in what ways students improved their understanding of video games as cultural and critical tools. We will present our survey data as well as more qualitative measurements of student observations (gathered from writing assignments such as gaming journals and a larger, end-of-semester Game Design Document, or GDD). Lastly, we will discuss our plans for improvements based upon our discoveries.

One way we will involve the audience in our session is to engage in a small group activity that we used in our class to demonstrate innovation and creativity in game design. Attendees of our session will gain useful strategies for conducting similar SOTL research with their own classes and will explore new possibilities for incorporating interactive media in their own classrooms. Furthermore, attendees might decide to incorporate video games as texts in their own classes and conduct SOTL research on students' ability to engage with them as such.