**IF YOU GAME IT, WILL THEY LEARN?**

Fostering Student Autonomy, Motivation, and Reflection Through A Gamified Course Design

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**BACKGROUND**

Political Science 101

In the age of Google, facts and information are less than a dozen. Higher education, even at the gateway course level, should not focus on information provision, but helping students take charge of their own learning to maintain, solve problems, and learn to exercise sound judgment.

**INVESTIGATING POLSCI 101**

Beginning in 2005, as part of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s POLSCI.101, students were offered the opportunity to take part in a gamified version of POLSCI 101. Students who opted in contributed to the course by creating content, participating in the course, and, in turn, receiving a higher grade.

**COLLABORATION**

Collaboration worked in several ways in the course. On the one hand, gamification prepped some degree of collaboration activity. On the other hand, created collaboration and collaboration skills were made a part of the gamified course. In the course, students were asked to engage in a collaboration group project and if it was meaningful to the collaboration.

**MOTIVATION**

Students are motivated either by grades, whether we want it or not. One of the central goals of the gamified course design is to create the necessity of grades into more intrinsic — or at least more reflective — motivation.

**LEARNING**

The goal of the game is to win. If students wanted to win, they would have to engage in a collaborative effort. Students who were not motivated to engage in the game would be motivated to engage in the course.

**BIOS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Mika LaVaQue-Manty graduated with a B.A. in Political Science and International Studies in 2013. She was awarded a POLSCI.101 in Fall 2007 and became the first faculty member to implement gamification in the course.

Elise Ghattas is a graduate student at the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan. She was a part of POLSCI.101 in Fall 2009 and has been involved in many of the course’s gamified elements since then.

Benjamin Peterson is a professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of Michigan. He has been teaching POLSCI.101 since 2005 and has been involved in the course’s gamified elements since the beginning.

**FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS**

Consider the following quotations from follow-up interviews:

“I learned a great deal in this class. Maybe not all about polisci, but I know that doesn’t disappoint you. It’s made me think about my life and the world around me differently, I mean that.”

“...I learned more things because I couldn’t just memorize facts to get me by. I had to make sure I understood concepts in order to write essays and blog posts. When I was taking notes in class, I didn’t feel pressured to write down everything Professor LvM said because I feared it could be testable material. Instead, I was able to listen better and understand the concepts better.”

“...Our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he should know, what he shall do.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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The circle on the right represents our most significant findings.