Massively Multi-player Online Gaming: Lessons Learned from an MMOG Short Course for High School Students

David W. Brown
Maine School of Science and Mathematics
USA
dr.david.brown@gmail.com

Matthew L. Richards
Maine School of Science and Mathematics
USA
dr.david.brown@gmail.com

Justin L. Barker
Maine School of Science and Mathematics
USA
dr.david.brown@gmail.com

Abstract: Two years of short courses centered on Massively Multi-player Online Gaming (MMOG) have resulted in intense interest and participation from students in grades 10-12 in a residential school in the Northeastern United States. Team building and cooperation, economics, addictive potential, social dynamics, gender, personality projection, and the future of MMOG’s become the curricula with hands-on, daily game play reinforcing lecture, discussion and concepts from assigned readings.

Introduction:

Students readily sign up for a short course in massively multi-player online gaming (MMOG). The computer laboratory overflows and those that can furnish their own system with wireless access are allowed to exceed the course limit. Tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders have consistently enrolled in this short course that not only plays MMOG’s, but studies and analyzes a variety of questions arising around this internet activity.

Readings are assigned from the popular press, academic journals, and online papers that enhance the students’ experience beyond that of playing the games. Open and thoughtful student discussions on MMOG’s are encouraged after reading and gaming. The school has encountered instances where students have had excessively poor grades in classes and have even failed to graduate due to obsessive use of MMOG’s. This course attempts to mitigate such outcomes through education.

Rationale:

Students in a residential school in the Northeastern United States are furnished with T1 connectivity in their dormitory rooms and in many cases use this for gaming. The early hours of the morning may find some students immersed in playing MMOG’s with in-house, in-state or global acquaintances.

Many students bring, or after a brief period of time obtain, computer systems with high-end, graphical processing capabilities for the primary intent of online gaming. Specific games will catch on and become popular throughout the dormitory setting. It is posited that students will approach gaming with a differing mind-set after analyzing gaming through this short course.

Online gaming impacts student time-management when it creates an addictive influence that students do not appear to be able to control. Making students aware of the potential downsides of online gaming through the literature as well as through classroom discussion may head off potential issues.
Many students appear to have an uninformed interest in choosing a career involved with the gaming industry. The course allows these students to examine the need for not only expertise in areas of computer science such as programming, logic, and graphics; but other areas such as psychology, sociology, economics, marketing, and so on.

**Course Content:**

MMO game play and/or analysis have included:

- World of Warcraft™
- Guild Wars™
- EverQuest™
- Dungeons and Dragons™
- Halo™
- Fly For Fun™
- Project Entropia™
- Rise of Nations™

**Course Requirements include:**

- Assigned Readings
- Class Discussions
- Personal Journals
- Daily Game Play and/or Analysis
- End of Course Composite Presentation

**Concept Considerations include:**

- Modification of personality through an avatar
- In-game economics from trading, buying, selling, or killing
- In-game and real-world economic cross-pollination
- Acquisition of in-game and real-life skills through game play
- Ego issues
- Power and control issues
- Gender differences in game play, cross-gender play
- Leadership development through small group and Guild play
- Addictive issues of game play
- Anger management issues during game play

**Discussion:**

During this roundtable discussion and presentation, two students from the MMOG short courses and the instructor will be available to discuss:

- Depth and Interest of Game Play in the courses
- Reaction to reading assignments and topics covered
- Student Journal Entries
- Requirements and Outcomes of the Course Project
- Modifications for future Courses
- Student Overall Reactions to the Course
- Why Students believe they play MMOG’s