CASE STUDY: Engaging Social Interactions on Video Game Platforms

Created by Bowling Green State University CSP Masters Candidates: Matthew Angerson, Assistant to the CSP Chair Samuel Halligan, Graduate Assistant for Marketing and Communications Wesley Bolton, Office of the Dean of Students Graduate Assistant for Student Conduct and Case Management

Setting & Demographics: Big Gamer State University (BGSU)

- » A large, public STEM-focused (R1) university in the Southeast (~30,000 students) with resources to provide Minecraft and other video games at no cost to students.
- » The target audience for the event is first-year students living on-campus to build community relationship with their peers. It will also be open to off-campus students.

Video Game Friday

In a pandemic, many students are stuck in their place of living, and those on campus are especially isolated. Therefore, each Friday, the Department of Student Activities is hosting Video Game Friday for students to join and build relationships with other students in a virtual setting that is not Zoom or Microsoft Teams.







Video Game Friday

- » Who: All students but geared towards first-year students living on campus
- » What: Weekly video game events with a rotating series of games (i.e. Minecraft, Among Us, Fortnite, etc.)
- » When: Every Friday from 7-10pm
- » Where: Virtually from anywhere! Students can borrow hardware from IT and the games will be monitored by student staff
- » Why: See following slides!

Committee Membership

- » Sarah, Director of Student Activities (Chair)
 - Sarah has been given this task from the Dean and will head the Committee.
- » Residence Life Representative
 - Since on-campus residents are a primary target of the intervention, Residence Life staff will have valuable information on how to target, lead, and execute events for residents.
- » Marketing and Communications Representative
 - Marketing staff will help with the publicization and marketing for the event on a broad scale and for prospective students and families as well.

Committee Membership Continued

- » Student Recreation or Intramural Sports Representative
 - A lot of campuses hold video game tournaments through Intramurals, and can assist in the creation and formatting of the events.
- » Informational Technology Representative
 - Since a significant portion of the events will be on online servers, IT staff will be able to moderate servers, troubleshoot issues, create servers for students only to join. Also, the IT department would be able to assist with the logistics of setting up a socially distanced computer lab so students can visit campus and engage in the envent.
- » Student Government Representative
 - A student representative gives additional perspective from the target audience.

Outline

- » Every Friday from 7-10 pm, open for anyone to join at any time.
- » Students would need to RSVP at least two weeks in advance if they need technology loaned from the institution.
- » There will be moderators in multiple games and servers to join. There is a focus on Minecraft, Among Us, and Fortnite. Among Us and Fortnite are free to play. Minecraft can be provided for students to play, and all games provide varying levels of difficulty and engagement.
- » Campus wide eSports teams are on the rise.

Goals

Provide student engagement and interaction in a virtual, and socially-distant manner, while building community and relationships with other students. The video game platform allows for a fun time for students to interact and work towards a common goal. This also allows students to interact and talk about non-academic related topics, and to build connections that will stay even after the pandemic.

- » Provide a virtual alternate meeting to Zoom, to decrease Zoom fatigue.
- » Create a video game community moderated and sanctioned by the institution.
- » Have a virtual component that is familiar students.
- » Develop community building in the institution in a fun way with low stakes.
- » Curb engagement in negative behaviors such as drinking that occurs in later hours.
- Increase engagement while maintaining social distancing by having an event that students can do wherever they choose to be

Components

- » Technology
 - Hardware could be provided by the student or they could borrow a loaner laptop from IT
 - The video game softwares would need to be already owned by the student or download keys would need to be provided to the students who RSVP to the event.
 - Also, there will be a socially distant computer lab to provide an on-campus option for exposure to campus.
- » Advertisement
 - A multi-faceted approach to marketing would be vital. Using existing student groups who already engage in similar events would be beneficial. Also, using new social media tools such as TikTok would engage with students in online spaces they already spend time in.
- » Timeframe
 - Weekly, consistent engagement in these programs would help form student bonds beyond a one-time event.
 - Having the event later in the evening would decrease class-time conflicts and increase opportunities that provide students alternatives to negative behaviors such as drinking.



Publicity and Social Media Continued

- » The university will email students every week with updates to the games provided and links or codes to join.
 - The RA moderators will also share that information
- » The institution's social media (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) will post reminders about the events as well as highlight students success' and progress.
- » TikTok advertising actual gameplay between students, and is used in the promotional video.
- » Use #hashtags to easily find other students and promote easier.

Points of Caution

- » Hight Cost to the Institution and/or Student
 - Cost of the video games and necessary hardware can be high and create barriers to students who want to engage in the program
- » Student Technology Accessibility
 - Students with accessibility needs would need to be taken into consideration when looking at technology used in the program
 - While the institution would have technology to loan to students, this resource may be limited and that limit could inherently limit engagement

Promote Social Interaction

- » Students will be able to interact via the gaming servers and chat on a Discord channel, which will all be moderated by an RA or IT staff member.
- » These gaming platforms allow interactions to occur virtually without the stress of a face sharing platform like Zoom and provides a common goal to influence conversations rather than Zoom icebreakers.
- » Students can relax in their places of living while engaging with other students and can continue these outside of the Video Game Fridays.

Publicity and Social Media

- » Social media can be used to highlight winners to increase engagement and promote future events.
- » Keep statistics on game winners or engagement and use this to create competition between students on vs off campus or between residence halls.
- » Can be a way for parents and family members to see what the institution is providing for students.

Social Media Examples



Big Gamer · Feb 21

Hey Beavers! Every Friday for the rest of the semester we will be hosting a video game program for you to socialize with other students!

Click this link to learn more about upcoming programs this semester and how to claim your free Minecraft key: events.Biggamerstateuniversity...

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Promo video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHV ifLR5CgM

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BiggamerUniversity

Hey Beavers! Check out what some of our students created in Minecraft this Friday on our server building socialization night! Click this link to learn more about upcoming programs this semester and how to claim your free Minecraft key: events.Biggamerstateuniversity.edu

FEB 21



Why This Social Media Plan?

"A study investigating social media usage among the top 100 institutions listed in the U.S. News, 2010-2011 Best Colleges: National Rankings, 92% of the colleges reported using social media in conjunction with their official websites as a way of connecting with their various stakeholders" (Clark et al., 2016; Greenwood, 2012)

The average user spends nearly 1.72 hours per day on social media platforms, which equates to almost 30% of total time spent online (Clark et al., 2016).

These studies illustrate the importance of a proper university social media plan, we chose Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and other social media platforms as student engagement on those platforms is rising over time.



Video games are socially interactive in campus environments that lack a physical aggregate component (Strange & Banning, 2015; Granic et al., 2014).

Interactive and social video games have a causal relationship with social interaction, well-being, communication skills, and learning (Barr, 2017; Buckley & Anderson, 2006; Granic et al., 2014)

Video games can also help neurodivergent populations who may struggle with social interaction (Ringland et al., 2016; Zolyomi & Schmalz, 2017)

Why Minecraft?

- » Minecraft has been around for the majority of incoming first-years lifes.
- » It is a build-your-own universe with varying levels of difficulty for all the play.
- » Students can work together to build campus buildings (like the Union or of football stadium) and are able to work together.
- » While it does cost money, some students more than likely have it and the university does have the funds to provide.
- » Furthermore, the Minecraft servers can be exclusive to students only and can be easily moderated by staff.

Why Among Us?

- » Free to Play
- » Available on Microsoft Windows, Xbox, Nintendo Switch, iOS, and Android
- » Allows cross-platform play
- » Among Us is currently a popular game online and has heightened engagement currently with the college demographic.
- » No experience is necessary to play the game, as it has simple mechanics
- » Lobbies cannot exceed 10 people, creating a smaller space that allows for more individual engagement

Why Fortnite?

- » Free to Play
- » Available on Microsoft Windows, Xbox, PlayStation Nintendo Switch, iOS, and Android.
- » Allows cross-platform play
- » Fortnite is currently a popular game online and has heightened engagement currently with the college demographic.
- » Lobbies allow for 100 players which gives the opportunity for broader engagement.
- » Students can play in squads together to be on a team.

Video Game Engagement From a Student Development Perspective

- » Astin's Student Involvement theory states that students who engage actively in their environment will grow and develop as students and leaders (Astin, 1984)
- » Studies have found that student involvement increased through use of social media and technology (Heiberger & Harper, 2008; Junco et al., 2010)
- "Community building and its associated tasks have become a major focus in how we perceive educational goals and how we achieve them" (Strange & Banning, 2015).
 - Without a physical environment to community build it is important to build a strong virtual community through our video game programming initiative Because of the online setting and lack of a physical setting students will be
- » Because of the online setting and lack of a physical setting students will be engaged through technology and still getting the opportunity to grow and develop as leaders in a virtual setting

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