

Realizing Arts 100: Gamifying Student Engagement in the Faculty of Arts

Allen Ball

I. Project Overview and Rationale

Building on our 2015-2016 TLEF award, Arts 100: Gamifying Student Engagement in the Faculty of Arts (please see pages 17 – 54), we are seeking funding to complete the research, development, and design of Arts 100. Central to the Faculty of Art's new strategic plan, Arts 100 is an innovative, online "mini-course" that will be required of all future students entering the Faculty of Arts. The course will ensure that all of our students learn about the exceptional opportunities that the Faculty of Arts and the University of Alberta have to offer in support of their academic and personal goals.

This project, Realizing Arts 100: Gamifying Student Engagement in the Faculty of Arts, aligns with and epitomizes the University of Alberta's institutional plan For the Public Good (2016- 2021) and its vision to "inspire the human spirit through outstanding achievements in learning, discovery, and citizenship in a creative community, building one of the world's great universities for the public good."

The Faculty of Arts has fifteen departments and offers 40 majors, as well as program enhancements such as Community Service Learning (CSL), Study Abroad opportunities, more than fifteen certificate programs, and Arts Work Experience (the Faculty of Arts independent coop work experience program). Our internal research surveys indicate that students are not always aware of the many opportunities available to them in the Faculty. The same research also identifies that students lack key knowledge and skills in important areas: understanding of academic expectations, avoiding misconduct, and developing generic research skills (Allan & Clarke, 2007). Although there are multiple avenues for disseminating important information to students, we presently have no way to assure that students are engaging in this content in a meaningful way nor to track and evaluate students' engagement with this curricula in order to improve the overall student experience.

Arts 100 History

Arts 100 is a mini-course currently under development by the Faculty of Arts. The proposed course will be required of all undergraduate students in the Faculty of Arts, and will use gamified learning strategies to connect students systematically with content intended to increase the likelihood of their university engagement and academic success.

Arts 100 was initially proposed by Associate Dean Mickey Adolphson and the Faculty's Arts Teaching and Learning Engagement Committee (ATLEC) in 2014, and was widely supported by the Faculty's departments and internal units. A committee was developed to implement Arts 100 in eClass. However, the committee recognized that an effective course might require more technical and design expertise than initially thought. It was determined that further research into the best strategies and platforms to "gamify" Arts 100 was in order. This research aimed to ensure that the final curriculum would be sustainable, robust in terms of data-analytics, and truly engaging and useful for students.

The Teaching and Learning portfolio was added to my role as Associate Dean (Student Programs) in the Faculty of Arts on July 1, 2015, with a mandate that included realizing Arts 100. Given the need for an expert research opinion on the most appropriate platform for this initiative, I applied for, and received a 2015-2016 TLEF Award, Arts 100: Gamifying Student Engagement in the Faculty of Arts, for funds to hire and work in collaboration with an instructional designer. We hired instructional designer Sandra Schwab (MA in Humanities Computing/ MLIS) to conduct: a literature review of gamification, a feasibility study of various options for the delivery of Arts 100, and an initial proposal of criteria that would inform an evaluation of Arts 100. Together, we created, Gamification in Arts 100: A Literature Review and Feasibility Study Prepared for the Faculty of Arts (please see pages 17 -54).

Arts 100 Description

Arts 100 will strengthen student well-being and academic achievement in three key areas. First, students will learn about the broad range of learning options available to them in the Faculty of Arts. Students will be required to explore different departments and majors in the Faculty through a quest-based game, and will also learn about undergraduate awards, co-curricular activities, and specialized offerings available to enrich their programs of study. Exploration and awareness of program choices increases the likelihood that students will form meaningful educational goals, which in turn contributes to persistence (Karp, 2011).

Second, Arts 100 will create an engaging online experience to help students learn strategies to enhance their academic success. Gamified elements will teach students study skills and academic expectations. It is anticipated that this component of the course will reduce the risk and incidences of academic misconduct.

Third, Arts 100 will ensure that students are aware of the availability of our University's extraordinary support services. Although many campus supports are available to students, a lack of awareness of these supports may be a barrier to an optimal learning experience. Arts 100 will ensure that all students are aware of supports available to them (e.g., International Student Services, Centre for Writers, and the Student Success Centre), and exactly how to they can access and utilize these supports.

Since it will be a requirement, Arts 100 will provide a common framework and point of entry for every student in the Faculty. Once the Arts 100 course is completed, it will be archived so that students have persistent, personalized links to what they have learned in the course. As a complete online course, Arts 100 will be accessible to students for their entire undergraduate career. Arts 100 will also provide a common core curriculum of academic resources and services that all instructors in the Faculty of Arts can use as a reference tool for students.

It is important to make clear that the Arts 100 mini-course will not duplicate existing online resources and services; rather, it will ensure that students are aware of these resources and services, and know where to find them in a timely manner.

Project Activities

The Gamification in Arts 100: A Literature Review and Feasibility Study Prepared for the Faculty of Arts reviews existing best practices at the University of Alberta in terms of the delivery of student support services, as well as some of the software used in the creation of gamified educational interventions. The study proposes an Arts 100 prototype, while identifying Trajectory IQ as the platform of choice to design, create, deliver and host Arts 100 (please see pages 55 – 94), since it will:

1. provide meta-data to track and document student progress and completion;
2. incorporate engaging, gamified elements; and
3. be sustainable with respect to the financial and human resources required to maintain the course content, monitor student outcomes, make effective use metadata for faculty and department level program planning and evaluation, and otherwise optimize the course.

TLEF funding will be used solely to cover the expenses of Arts 100 through Trajectory IQ, with the Faculty of Arts providing the ongoing year-to-year expenses associated with maintaining and updating the online course. Every department within the Faculty of Arts will be providing the initial and ongoing course content for Arts 100.

II. Relation to Educational Theory and/or Empirically Validated Practice

Student Success

Universities are increasingly complex institutions. As student populations, have grown and become more diverse, universities have responded with increased programming choices, and a wide array of support, co-curricular and ancillary offerings. Providing many choices has clear benefits because institutions can be more responsive to varied individual student needs (Dietsche, 2012). However, choice can also be overwhelming: students must know where to access and how to keep track of program choices and information (Karp, 2011; Renick, 2015); but, students may not be aware of the choices and supports available to them (Winograd & Rust, 2011). As Collier & Morgan (2008) observe, university success is “not just about academic achievement; an important part of success is mastery of the... ‘student role’” (p. 425). This more holistic understanding of student success is supported by a large body of research that links campus engagement with academic success and persistence (Kuh, 2009).

Gamification and Student Engagement An ongoing concern for student support providers is tracking whether and when services are accessed by students. The best programs are of little value if students are unaware of them, or do not access them. By “gamifying” the experience of exploring program options, student support services, co-curricular opportunities and program enhancements, we anticipate that students will be more inclined, and more positively inclined, to pro-actively plan their programs and seek support when they need it. Gamification is the incorporation of game design concepts into non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). Games are generally understood as challenging activities, constrained by rules, with a known objective or winning condition (Deterding et al., 2011; Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Educational gamification applies game-like elements to learning outcomes in order to stimulate learner motivation to acquire knowledge and develop skills (Kapp, 2012). Gamified activities include ‘interactive learning events’ that use game design principles as a way to

encourage, motivate and influence learner behaviour (Kapp et al., 2014). Elements of gamification can include virtual goods in the form of badges and trophies, progress tracking through the completion of levels, and social aspects like leaderboards and group challenges (Kapp et al., 2014; Antin & Churchill, 2011). While individual and group competition stimulates learners to complete activities (Banfield & Wilkerson, 2014), challenging and competitive tasks, such as those found in games, can help to reinforce skills like problem solving, communication, and collaboration (Dicheva et al., 2015).

III. Evaluation Criteria

Innovation

Gamified learning is still in its infancy and, from our search of the literature to date, has no precedent in the context of supports for student learning. Arts 100 is innovative because it ensures that all students have access to information/tools to succeed. Further, the gamified environment applies learning psychology and motivational theory to incentivize behaviours on the part of students that while valuable, are ultimately voluntary. Arts 100 will be integrated with student records in such a way that the Faculty will have assurance that students are fully exploring the options and resources available to them.

Collaboration

ATLEC is a committee that includes the Undergraduate Associate Chairs from all departments in the Faculty of Arts, plus undergraduate student members, Senior Undergraduate Student Services Advisors, as well as representatives from the library. Arts 100 will be developed through ATLEC, with the input from all the committee members working closely with the instructional designers from Trajectory IQ, to provide ongoing input and needs assessment.

Evaluation

The overall aim of this project is to develop an actionable, evidence-based plan for the development of Arts 100. In this sense, the project itself will offer an incredible amount of useful data, created while tracking users' course utilization. The study will identify the best platform and gaming elements to achieve the goals of Arts 100. The accompanying literature review will identify the criteria that ought to inform a good design for Arts 100. The criteria will also be used to monitor and evaluate students' course experiences.

Sustainability/Impact on Students

Although considerable investment is required upfront to design and implement the Arts 100 learning experience, once it is established, it will be easy to modify and update its components as access points, services, program requirements and program enhancements change. Arts 100 will be a very cost-effective and proactive way to offer student supports, and to encourage them to take an active, informed role in building their programs of study. Dissemination Findings from the project will be presented in a formal report to the Arts Teaching and Learning Enhancement Committee and the Deans Executive Committee. ATLEC members will take the lead in presenting the findings to their own

departments. APRIL (the Arts Pedagogy Research and Innovation Laboratory) will also host a campus wide presentation and present the findings at the CTL Festival of Teaching.

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