

# Mercyhurst pioneers game-based learning in teaching strategic intelligence

January 4 2011

---

Kris Wheaton pushes a key on his computer and the reminder transmits to dozens of intelligence studies students: Game Lab Tonight!

Himself a long-time gamer, Wheaton is a pioneer in game-based learning as it applies to the teaching of intelligence analysis.

Whether wrangling over the next move in "Defiant Russia," a board game based on the 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union, where players control the units that fought in the campaign; or strategizing over the online musical puzzle journey that is "Auditorium," there's lots of learning going on.

"In terms of taking commercial games and using them as a fundamental part of our curriculum, I don't think anyone is doing it to the level that we are," said Wheaton, an associate professor of intelligence studies at Mercyhurst College who has presented his pedagogical approach most recently at the Global Intelligence Forum in Dungarvan, Ireland, and the Game Education Summit at the University of Southern California. He has an article on the subject due out this spring in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*.

As faculty with the world's oldest and largest full-time intelligence studies program in academe, Wheaton teaches the capstone course in "strategic intelligence" at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The centerpiece of the course is a strategic intelligence project for a real-world decision maker. In the past, [students](#) have completed projects for

the FBI, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Fortune 500 companies like Target and local businesses like Team Dispatch.

Eighty percent of the student coursework is project development; the remaining 20 percent – until a year ago – had been a standard mix of lecture, discussion and classroom exercise. But Wheaton was convinced there was a more effective way of teaching strategic theory than lecture and turned to games.

Believing that much of his own understanding of strategy originated with a variety of war games he had either played or designed over the years, and cognizant of the increasing number of studies endorsing game-based learning, Wheaton began integrating games into his syllabi in fall 2009.

Students embraced the curriculum addition almost immediately, although they soon discovered it wasn't all fun and games. It was hard work. Wheaton had them learning the rules and playing two different games each week.

"They found that difficult, but I didn't want to lessen the load; I wanted to keep the incessant rhythm because I felt they would get better at thinking," he said.

What he did do was offer a special weekly Game Lab, where he'd work with students in a more social environment. He acquired a \$500 grant from the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management (which has a student chapter at Mercyhurst) to buy pizza and pop and opened the lab to other intelligence studies students who expressed an interest.

"The lab, which is voluntary, has become pretty popular," Wheaton said. "The fewest we've had is four; the most, 20. I'd say we average around 10-15 students weekly."

Although his research is incomplete, Wheaton said the introduction of games appears to have strengthened his students' critical thinking skills, expanded their ways of thinking about intelligence problems and helped them to discover better solutions to problems.

If the endgame is to elevate the quality of students' work and produce better and more confident analysts, Wheaton figures he's on the winning track.

Provided by Mercyhurst College

Citation: Mercyhurst pioneers game-based learning in teaching strategic intelligence (2011, January 4) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-01-mercyhurst-game-based-strategic-intelligence.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.