

Role-playing game increases empathy for immigrants, study shows

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Brandon Bouchillon. Credit: University of Arkansas

Role-playing the administrative experiences of immigrants led students to empathize and trust them, according to a new study by two University of Arkansas researchers.

Brandon Bouchillon, assistant professor in the School of Journalism and

Strategic Media, and Patrick Stewart, associate professor in the Department of Political Science, created a role-playing experience for students to learn what the process of applying for citizenship might be like for immigrants. The experience was integrated into an online American Government class.

"Games-based learning initiatives offer a way of creating shared experiences between groups that have come to interact less, such as racial or ethnic majorities and minorities," Bouchillon said. "This was a valuable learning experience for the students, and for us as researchers as well."

The research used a [game](#) called Citizenship Quest. Students in the class created a fictional persona from randomly assigned countries of China, India, or Mexico, then applied for green card status with the ultimate goal of obtaining citizenship. Results of the study suggest that the exercise helped students build [trust](#) even though they had little direct contact with immigrants. Researchers believe that trust in others, including marginalized groups such as immigrants, can be increased with shared experiences.

The study, titled Games-Based Trust: Role-Playing the Administrative Experience of Immigrants, was published in in the journal *New Media & Society*.

More information: Brandon C Bouchillon et al, Games-based trust: Role-playing the administrative experience of immigrants, *New Media & Society* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/1461444819900557](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819900557)

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