eLearning and Fun

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ABSTRACT

In this Special Interest Group (SIG), we will look at one aspect of eLearning: how to make online learning fun. Taking an online course is often far from a fun experience. Fun should ideally enhance and not interfere with learning by turning it into gaming. Fun has the potential to mitigate some of the drawbacks of eLearning, such as isolation. Fun is itself an elusive concept [7] and there is no consensus on how to design enjoyable experiences [10]. Engagement is accepted as important in online learning but is similarly elusive. In the SIG, we will discuss and define fun with respect to eLearning, looking at innovative approaches to online course design; if fun can increase motivation, engagement, and retention; and how multimedia, games, entertainment, and fun are related.

Author Keywords

Learning, eLearning, education, training, fun, motivation, engagemement.

ACM Classification

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

INTRODUCTION

eLearning is becoming more prevalent for education and training, yet many online courses are poorly designed. Some are little more than electronic versions of paper-based materials; others attempt to replicate a traditional classroom offering; while others follow an instructional design approach used for classroom instruction. As a result, the reputation of online courses is not good and the exception, rather than the rule, is a well-designed course that effectively teaches a topic to its target students.

Many CHI attendees are involved in eLearning as students, teachers, or developers of online courses or technologies. However, to date there has been insufficient focus on designing and facilitating a positive learner experience. This SIG builds upon the well-attended SIGs on eLearning at CHI 2001, 2002, and 2003, and the SIG on eLearning and Fun at

CHI 2004, by examining in greater depth the issues and perspectives of the eLearning and HCI communities and fostering better communication and collaboration between these communities. The goal is to enhance the eLearning field with a more user- or learner-centered perspective, while at the same time extending the perspectives and reach of HCI designers, developers, evaluators, and researchers.

Those seeking to design, develop or evaluate online courses confront a variety of complex issues to leverage technology to provide the best learning outcomes. New synchronous and asynchronous eLearning technologies are introduced on an almost daily basis, further complicating these tasks. The growth of eLearning leads to a wealth of cultural, language, and universal access issues. In addition, this truly international market is changing rapidly due to new entries, acquisitions, and mergers as well as some notable failures of online programs.

CONTENT

In this SIG, we propose to examine the following issues:

- When and how does fun enhance learning, motivation, engagement, and retention?

- What can we learn from recent work on emotion and design [10]?

- What makes learning fun for different topics and different types of learners [9]?

- Do notions of fun differ across cultures and generations and how does this impact learning?

- What do recent studies of computer and video games teach us about designing online learning? What promise do simulations, multiplayer games, stealth games, and other online games have for learning?

- When does fun turn into gaming instead of learning?

- Can current models for instructional design support the implementation of courses perceived to be more fun or are new instructional models needed?

- How can the selection and use of eLearning technologies increase fun?

- What are the factors influencing the design, delivery, and evaluation of a rich and compelling eLearning experience [9]?

- What is the impact of peers, instructors, mentors, and support staff on fun with respect to the learning experience?

- Why are so many existing courses "page-turners" and how can the learner experience be better incorporated into all phases of course design, development, and evaluation?

All these questions tie-in closely with the design and usability issues that are at the core of HCI research and theory. We believe that both the eLearning and CHI communities would benefit substantially from a strengthening of ties between practitioners in these two related fields and building upon the research from these and related fields [1,2,3,4,5,6].

DISCUSSION

We will start by asking participants to identify themselves and state the 2-3 major issues impacting them from the above list or from their experiences. We will be especially interested in how participants' jobs and e-learning experiences impact their perspectives. We plan to use a discussion list (Yahoo! Groups) to seed this discussion (perhaps with issues and ideas identified during the CHI 2004 SIG), so some participants may even come in prepared to discuss specific issues. We will then organize brief discussions around the topics on which there is the most consensus. We have found this format successful during previous SIGs.

We will document the SIG discussion for publication in eLearn Magazine, going into more detail about the perspectives of individual participants than we did in the documentation of the SIG at CHI 2004 [8]. We will invite SIG participants and others interested in the topic to continue the discussion online following the conference. In addition, we see the online discussion as an easy way for people to share resources and announcements on this and related topics.

ABOUT THE SIG LEADERS

Lisa Neal is Editor-in-Chief of eLearn Magazine, ACM's first online magazine. She is an e-learning consultant whose clients include the Cognitive Science Society, AFS, Aptima, ONR, and Plimoth Plantation. Lisa is Adjunct Assistant Clinical Professor at Tufts Medical School where she teaches on New Technologies for Health Communication. Lisa holds a Ph.D. in computer science from Harvard University.

Ray Perez is a Science Officer for the Office of Naval Research in the Cognitive and Neural Science and Technology Division he currently manages a program whose focus is on the development of science and technology to support training and education. Ray holds a Ph.D in Psychology from University of California Los Angeles. He has conducted research on the development of expertise in instructional designers.

Diane Miller is a senior human systems engineer at Aptima, Inc. She has led a series of e-learning projects exploring the application of motivation and gaming theory and practice to the development of effective, engaging e-learning courses. Diane recently completed an M.Ed with a concentration in Educational Technology and received a Graduate Certificate in Human-Computer Interaction, both from the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. She has helped design and teach several graduate-level online courses.

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