

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

1. **Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

This initiative asks WMU to consider harnessing the talent already on campus with experience in game design, gamification theory, and content development, especially for medieval-themed games. While Esports at WMU is a club sport, WMU might want to develop some kind of intellectual program, connected to Esports. According to this list of game design schools in Michigan, <https://www.gamedesigning.org/schools/michigan/>, many schools have serious programs in game design and offer degrees, but those degrees—at a quick glance—are in Computer Science, in entertainment design, in applied sciences and few offer content development.

2. **Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

Faculty in the Department of History have experience with game theory and design and have proposed at least one introductory course; Anise Strong has proposed a course, War Games. There may well be others on campus who have an interest in game designing. Kevin Abbott, Interactive Media Specialist in the College of Fine Arts, taught MUS 5655, Game Design and Unity, and has offered workshops on gamification and developed and used games in courses. He and John MacKenzie (now in Online Education) and Jana Schulman have met and talked about developing a virtual reality Beowulf. We suspect that there be many faculty, staff, students and even administrators with an interest in gaming or teaching using games. We have recently learned that Art and Computer Sciences are working on an interdisciplinary major, possibly in Product Design.

3. **Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

WMU may not be able to compete with the other universities offering degrees in some aspect of game design but we could design a certificate for graduate students and non-degree seeking students or a minor for undergraduates that would allow interested parties to combine an interest with the past with practical course work in game theory, game design, and more. Combining two interests to develop what could prove to be a successful game (makes money) and/or teaches students about economic development, for example, in a fun and exciting way

could provide revenue (copyright) as well as grow programs and interest in WMU, especially those drawn to the University because of the Esports club team.

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

Gamification theory and game design are not new, but monetizing games is newer. The fact of the matter is that people compete in Esports competitions and win money. Many games have medieval content and, from what we understand of the market, this very subject may be a draw for some players. Since WMU is already known for its medieval programs, there seems to be a niche here.

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

Sadly, we see no likelihood of immediate cost savings, but we do see potential for eventual revenue.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

We believe it worth exploring how to develop and grow a certificate or minor and we have people on campus who are interested in this. Eventually, once realized, such a program could draw sufficient students, but what impact on workload and workload equity such a program would have is simply unknown.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

That this is an opportunity not to be missed is manifest by the fact that Loy Norrix has an Esports team and that the Esports webpage says, "WMU Esports continues to expand their roster of games. The University is committed to pioneering new initiatives within collegiate esports while helping to shape the future of the industry." Is this not a call to action?

8. Contact

Jana Schulman, Medieval Institute
Robert Berkhofer, History

