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Arrrgh! Join the Educational Game Team in Making a Pirate Game

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Art by Justin Hardy

"A pirate might steal another captain's journal and read it or have to decipher a letter that's all torn up and put it back together. They can also communicate with signal flags."

Chris Keeling, Course Director for Storytelling and Design Project within GDNBS

The kickoff meeting for the project is Thursday, Sept. 30 at 4 p.m. in FS4A-138.

Many people hate studying grammar, but nearly everybody likes pirates. So a team of educators at Full Sail decided that pairing the two in an educational video game could be an engaging way to get students to brush up on critical grammar and writing skills.

And *critical* is how many educators describe the need for improvement in grammar among students nationwide, said Lester Frederick, Course Director for Leadership in the Game Design online bachelor's program (GDNBS).

While you may think that the high-tech companies that hire Full Sail students only focus on artistic and technical skills, Career Development representatives report that good writing and grammar skills are very important to these employers.

"If your resume, your cover letter and your emails are not proper – you have misspellings, you have bad grammar, bad sentence structure – that's a turnoff," said Frederick. "It's important to know when and how to communicate casually, academically and professionally."

This summer, Frederick and his coworkers spent time brainstorming a way to help students improve their literacy skills. Thus, the idea for an educational game was born.



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The Educational Game Team's objective is to design and develop a fun educational video game to help improve students' literacy skills so that they can increase their soft skills and hireable opportunities, said Frederick. The game project is not only aimed at helping students with grammar and writing down the road, it's also seen as great practical experience for students to work on a real game.

The Educational Game Team is looking for programmers, level designers, artists, animators, creative writers and testers to help build the game. Faculty specializing in English, Education, Game Development, Game Design, and Game Art will serve as leads on the project and teams will be headed by master's students or lab specialists.

The kickoff meeting for the project is Thursday, Sept. 30 at 4 p.m. in FS4A-138. The game project will be designed and developed with the assistance of the Serious Games Club, whose faculty advisor is Chris Keeling, Course Director for Storytelling and Design Project within GDNBS.

For the project, Rob Catto, the Director for Game Studies and the Math department in GDNBS, will serve as the executive director. Frederick will serve as project director and Keeling will be the executive producer.

Game Plans

Frederick and Keeling estimate that it will take six months to build a prototype and roughly a year to complete the game. Frederick said he is hoping to get as many students (including bachelor's students) on board as possible, even on standby, since some students may graduate or get busy with final projects.

Frederick said he expects teams will meet once a week, but that people will be able to participate remotely, if they are online students, and on a part-time basis.

"We definitely don't want to put too much on them that they cannot handle. So we want to make sure they maintain a balance in this, absolutely," said Frederick.

Noelani McGinley, Program Manager for the English department, said the game would be used by Full Sail students in the future, perhaps as part of the Writing Center's tools, as a remedial aid, or even in certain classes. The team also wants to create the game with a broad appeal so that it could be used by outside schools and universities, if there is widespread interest.

Keeling said the game team considered using a zombie theme, but settled on pirates because of the richness of storytelling devices and game elements

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involved, like maps, treasure, talking parrots, transportation and opportunities for battle.

Keeling said there are also a lot of comic elements, which will keep people interested. "I mean you're learning English from people who barely speak it because they can't put a sentence together," joked Keeling.

Arrrgh, indeed.

For more information on the Educational Game Project, contact Lester Frederick (lfr frederick@fullsail.com) or Chris Keeling (ckeeling@fullsail.com) or attend the Educational Game Team kickoff meeting on Sept. 30.

- Christine Janesko

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