Transcript of EGC Works: Interview with Emily Rimland

[music]

(Jamie)

For EGC Works, the podcast that looks at educational gaming at Penn State, this is Jamie Oberdick.

The EGC Works podcast returns after a bit of a break. And our first episode back is an interview with Emily Rimland, information literacy librarian with Penn State Libraries. Emily has developed a game with the Educational Gaming Commons called Smoke that Search. The game teaches students the ins and outs of online research. I valuable skill that many students will need to have for a successful career. During this interview we discuss how the game works. What the desire of learning outcomes are. And how gamification can enhance a class.

Ok, Emily describe the game Smoke that Search. How you play it? What it’s for, etc.?

(Emily)

The way we play it is this is an in-class game that we play live with students. The way we play it is I introduce them to search term operators, which a lot of them are unfamiliar with them. So I teach them a little bit about that and then we put them to use in the game. So the way it works is we kind of daisy chain a bunch of search terms and operators together into one giant search within. We use Lion Search in this example, although, you could use something else. So we just keep streaming together keywords and operators to form a giant search in order to get the smallest amount of results that are still relevant. So that's basically how it works.

(Jamie)

Now what kind of desired learning outcomes are you expecting to get out of the game?

(Emily)

The desired outcomes are very specific. Well, information letter standards are very specific. And if you're familiar with them, this one addresses the second one, which is being able to access needed information effectively and efficiently. And then within that the standards talk about specifically things like identifying keywords and using bullion search operators, which this is directly in line with. And kind of building a search strategy. So that’s what the standard says and this game is meant to address that specific standard within information literacy. So the students at the end of the game should be familiar with search term operators that they maybe haven't used before. And also different strategies that they can use to make a search better. And then they should be able to employ them in their own search after we play the game. So that’s the idea which ultimately helps them be a better searcher and ultimately is a lifelong skill that they're going to need, you know, outside of the university as well.
(Jamie)

Right, because this is something that's really important for so many jobs. And also I know that I myself often rely on, outside of work. Like if I want to figure out to do something, I'll do a Google search and look it up that way. And sometimes it can be difficult to find. And if I didn't know how to do searches I might have a hard time. So it was great.

(Emily)

The other nice thing about this is that the operators and things that I go over in the class, for the game, are universal. So they work in Google. And they work in pretty much anywhere there's a search engine online. They work in all the library databases. Things like that. But also just your regular web search it'll work. So it's something you can apply very broadly.

(Jamie)

Now what sort of classes could this game be used in?

(Emily)

This could be used in, well I primarily teach library instruction courses or research sessions for English 15, Cass 100, LA 101, ESL 15, those types of classes. But really you could use it any class where you wanted to show students how to improve search strategies.

(Jamie)

Now I learned a little about how this game came about. And I understand that the game was originally a gamification project and then it sort of almost became a game. With that in mind, now if someone’s interested in gamifying a seminar or class, what kind of advice can you offer?

(Emily)

The best advice I can offer to start with is, consult with the folks at the EGC. The Educational Gaming Commons. They have been really helpful. And this is a collaborative effort. You know, this is definitely not anybody working alone. But Chris Stubbs, Elizabeth Pyatt and Brett Bixler in this case have really been the core group that we've worked on this to refine the game. And we've gone through all kinds of iterations of it. It actually, a couple weeks ago, was more of a card game that we tested in the classroom with about three sections of Cass 100. And then we changed it. So that's another thing I would recommend. Besides working with the folks at EGC, is testing it and be open to refining it based on what you find happens in real life. So that would be sort of another thing I would recommend. Is just try it and constantly kind of rework it. Test it. See how you can make it better. Because I don't think it's something, a game to me isn't something you're just going to know how to do and do it right away, perfectly. You know, it takes a lot of refinement. So that would be another thing I would recommend.

[music]
(Jamie)

And you mentioned card games. These games don't have to be computer games, correct?

(Emily)

Right, and this involves the computer, but ultimately isn't like you know a video game. I think by default anymore we think of games as video games. But definitely lots of opportunities outside of that. I mean that's such a daunting task to me to think about developing a video game from scratch, right. That would involve so many resources. But it's much easier to do something like this. And this takes about ten to fifteen minutes to do in a class. And it's really a group collaborative effort, ultimately, which is something we had in mind up front and wanted to have as a result. So, everybody in the class kind of working together in a collaborative way.

(Jamie)

Now you answered my next question partially about how has the Educational Gaming Commons helped you create this. Talk a little bit about the process of how you worked with them? So if people don't know. If someone out there has an idea for a game, how would they contact them? How would they go about working with them?

(Emily)

They can just I think contact them directly. Like, just contact Chris Stubbs or somebody like that to begin with. And then, I think, they'll sort of take it from there. But we met initially to just brainstorm what kinds of things that I tend to do in the classroom that could be gamified. And then once we got there, we took the idea of teaching students about search operators. We narrowed it down to that one thing. And how could we turn that into a game. And we went through all kinds of ideas. And then it kind of comes down to what's actually possible. What are the constraints? Like what are the time constraints? What are the outcomes you want to have? And once you define those you can kind of work out what types of games would work. Or what kind of strategies would work. That sort of thing. But it really went from a massive brainstorming. All kinds of crazy ideas. Every thing’s included. To ok, specifically how are we gonna pull this off? And what things are realistic as far as the time constraints and things like that. So they're great to work with. It is a sort of iterative process where you just kind of have to, like I said before, try different things. Refine it as you go and see what works.

(Jamie)

And one thing in that I know you mentioned some names here also, the thing that I thinks pretty good, great about the Educational Gaming Commons, is it's not just like, people might think it's just people that are gaming experts. But there are also pedagogical experts there that can help as well.

(Emily)
Definitely, yeah! The guys there that are sort of associated with Educational Gaming Commons, definitely know their stuff. And they're the real experts. But everybody else kind of brings whatever their expertise is to the table as well. So it's a really good collaborative group to work with.

(Jamie)

Now is there anything you'd like to add?

(Emily)

Just that, you know, if you’re thinking about doing this, I would just encourage you to try it. We have great, you know, a great set of people on campus that can help. I think, not every campus has this, so I think people if they're willing to do it. They should try it and definitely take advantage of the people that we have at like the EGC that can help them do this. So you're not alone out there. You have lots of support and lots of help. So if you're open to it, I would say try it.

(Jamie)

Ok, great! Emily thank you very much for your time.

(Emily)

My pleasure.

(Jamie)

For EGC Works, this is host Jamie Oberdick. Thanks for listening.