Keeping on Track: Using Basecamp to Manage a Classroom-As-Game-Studio

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Learning is discovery, the discovery of the cause of our ignorance. However, the best way of learning is not the computation of information. Learning is discovering, uncovering what is there in us.

— Bruce Lee

In designing my Game Development 2 course that is finishing up now, I made some bad assumptions that in hindsight feel *obviously* bad. This presentation is largely a story about those assumptions. It is also a story about working within limited curriculum to create an experience that mirrors as closely as possible a professional game development experience, while simultaneously allowing students to be learners, to encourage them to accept their role as tough critics, and to encourage them to get comfortable and practice their roles as professionals.

Outline

1. Introduction to the course

2. Course design and assumptions*

3. A comparison of the relevant features of Canvas and Basecamp for the particular aims of this class.

4. Assumptions challenged and lessons learned.

I prefer to call these assumptions rather than outcomes or even goals, because they are based on educated, but imperfect, course design decisions that I don't yet know the outcome of.

Game Development Sequence

- Games 1: Design & Architecture

- Games 2: Implementation

- That's it!

So I feel a strong responsibility, for the time being anyway, to build as much meaningful experiential learning in as possible so that students can continue their studies outside of these classes.

Games 2: Implementation

- Team-based, project-based approach with one semester-long project.

- Three teams of three, one team of four

- Each team had a principle programmer and principle artist; other roles more fluid

- One wrinkle: two audio "freelancers"

Publication of Project

Each team must publish their game (as a demo or complete product) by the end of the semester.

Assumption: This would motivate students to push for a quality product, within and among the teams.

But, as we'll see later, this caused problems with the balance between learning and professional polish.

Weekly Reports

Each student must account for at least 6 hours of work per week outside of class in a weekly report.

Assumption: this would create accountability to each other as a class, since the reports are viewable by everyone in the class (since the automatic check-in was asked at the team-level).

Instructor as "Executive Producer"

The professor will serve in a de facto executive producer, but teams would have the majority of the responsibility for the progress of their projects.

Assumption: Students would care enough about the product that they would be sufficiently self-directed.

One Major Project

One major group project, worth 75% of the grade.

Assumption: This would be a sufficient balance - start with a C and build from there.

Other Assignments

"Optional" assignments in three categories to encourage professional positioning:

- Professional Engagement

- Participation (In-Class and Online)

- Reflection and Synthesis

Assumption: The assignments would contribute to envisioning oneself as a professional that our students need.

Assumptions Challenged and Lessons Learned

A lot of people mistakenly embrace the concept of or when it's not necessary. There really needs to be and. And and doesn't necessarily cost more… it just offers more.

— Sal Soghoian