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Beyond The Page: Multimodal Lab-Based Research and Development in Creative Writing

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BEYOND THE PAGE:
MULTIMODAL LAB-BASED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN CREATIVE
WRITING

by

Matthew Gordon

BS, Southern Illinois University, 2020

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts Degree

School of Literature, Writing, and Digital Humanities
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2023

THESIS APPROVAL

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Approved by

Pinckney Benedict, Chair

Rafael Frumkin

Karla Berry

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 7, 2023

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Matthew Gordon, for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing, presented on April 5, 2023, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: BEYOND THE PAGE: MULTIMODAL LAB-BASED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN CREATIVE WRITING

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Pinckney Benedict

This collection acts as the supporting evidence of the hypothesis that, while acting as Graduate Director of SIU's Digital Xpressions Lab, Matthew Gordon was able to successfully provide effective support for the digital expression of collaborator's and client's domains of knowledge while forming innovative research partnerships with academics within the SIU system and beyond.

A unique form for a MFA in Creative Writing's thesis, this collection represents the multimodal creative work a contemporary narrative designer can undertake in a single academic year when given the ability to lead a facility like Southern Illinois University's Digital Xpressions Lab.

Qualitative evidence in the form of Digital Xpressions Lab Collaborator Statements and quantitative evidence in the form of media exemplifying multimodal creative work are collected herein. Sections begin with brief descriptions of their topics as they pertain to Matthew Gordon's thesis objectives while acting as the Graduate Director of SIU's Digital Xpressions Lab from fall 2022 - spring 2023. A selection of supporting media from Matthew's full portfolio has been included in sections where relevant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks, to all of the ingenuitive and creative folx who have allowed me to ignite their creativity as a part of my thesis. Alexis Barrett, H'aeneise Coopwood, and Teya Reed, thank you for your contributions developing enthralling games and stories. A lab, and model for development, like mine can only works if uniquely creative individuals believe in the vision sincerely enough to contribute their time and effort. Collaborators and clients all, thank you for believing in my creative leadership.

Thank you to the incredible staff of The Digital Xpressions Lab for the 2022-2023 academic year for allowing me to direct your skills: Renee Davis, Andrew Primous, Dajonea Robinson, and Tyler Wilkinson. And thank you to the best unofficial Assistant Graduate Lab Director, Lindsay Pierce.

Thank you to my thesis committee for agreeing to consider the merit of my unusual work.

Special acknowledgements to my mentor Professor Benedict, Dean of Library Affairs John Politz, and Tobias Merriman. Pinckney, you trusted me with the keys, John, you welcomed me with space, and Toby, you cut the red tape.

Thank you, all.

PREFACE

The purpose of this unique MFA thesis is to usher in a modern model of experimentation in contemporary media that one should be engaging in at a MFA level. The abilities of a storyteller transcend the mode of linear narrative prose. Across film, television, games, audio drama, the theatre, installation work, & etcetera, one's ability to design that certain *'oomph'* which leaves a consumer of said media with lasting emotional impressions is the domain of the fiction writer. It is simply a sardonic quirk of history that creative writers find themselves insulated within English departments. Narrative media at the inception of creative writing programs was vaster than the novel or the short story collection and this is especially true of the landscape of narrative media today.

The act of digitally expressing one's creative self is constant and unique to each individual's digital fingerprint. This thesis attempts to provide an overview of the many digital domains a motivated collaborative collective can experiment in while demonstrating the results of those experiments for the consideration of the reader. These digital experiments are the unique creative product of The Digital Xpressions Lab as directed by Matthew Gordon and fueled by the interests and experiences of its many collaborators. Labels like *Neophyte Studios* and *The Neophyte Chronicles* were chosen deliberately to embolden the creators of and consumers of The DXL's content. The DXL is home to makers and writers alike who, through the process of respecting each other's disciplines, produce unique works beyond that which could otherwise be achieved via individual efforts. Assembled together, these works, platforms, initiatives, and events create a gesamtkunstwerk, or whole work, to be considered as the thesis of one very busy Graduate Lab Director.

So, please, dear reader of this document, look over the collection of work produced by, directed by, and contributed to by me, the Graduate Director of Southern Illinois University's Digital Xpressions Lab, across the 2022-2023 academic year and revel in the joy of digital xpression. Then go, be off with you, and create. Innovate in your domains of interest and synthesize something that excites you, something that's wholly unique.

On the irony of assembling my collected digital art objects, projects, and ephemeral virtual records for printing and binding, this causes me far less frustration than I had originally assumed. The whole pursuit is multimodal in nature and it is quite useless to become antagonized by something so absurd as a document of digital things made to be preserved in a medium fully divorced from the context of their creation. I have included media from my original portfolio in this document where relevant. However, this collection only accounts for a small percentage of the documents, games, images, websites, and videos produced and captured as a part of my original thesis portfolio. I encourage readers to explore the links and access the original media captured in this thesis paper which is, at best, a simulacrum of the gesamtkunstwerk.

One more note to you, the reader, I don't intend to give myself the benefit of the illusion that my work will be significant to the point in which it is, for whatever academic reason, being consumed physically. So, to call my shot, if you are anyone other than myself some many years down the line and have accessed this document physically, reach out, I'll buy you a beer. And, if you're me sometime in the future standing in what is undoubtedly the crater that once was Morris Library, "Hello. Did they ever build the Digital Scholar's Commons? Did they credit you publicly?"

Enjoy.

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SECTION 1

THESIS STATEMENT

The purpose of Matthew Gordon's work as a graduate student, a research assistant, and as Graduate Director of the Digital Xpressions Lab is to provide effective support for the digital expression of collaborator's and client's domains of knowledge while forming innovative research partnerships with academics within the SIU system and beyond. To achieve this goal, Matthew will match client research and development needs with The Digital Xpressions Lab's available resources such as assistance in production and development, community, domain knowledge, direction, and/or technology (hardware and software) to enable said clients to release completed media products they would not have otherwise been able to produce.

SECTION 2

DIGITAL XPRESSIONS LAB MISSION STATEMENT

The Digital Xpressions Lab will assist in the digital expression of our client's domains of expertise by matching its available resources to client's research and development needs in order to facilitate the innovative and contemporary digital expression of their domains beyond that which would have otherwise been capable without this lab's support.

SECTION 3

DIGITAL XPRESSIONS LAB DESCRIPTION

The Digital Xpressions Lab is an independent research entity under the leadership of Director Pinckney Benedict and Graduate Director Matthew Gordon. The DXL is located across the 6th and 7th floors of SIU's Morris Library.

We employ undergraduate and graduate students alike to assist in the digital expression of our client's domains of expertise. Lab staff are trained in established and emerging technologies to offer the resources and expertise for all Salukis to pursue the independent learning required to digitally express themselves.

We also maintain a content publishing arm of the lab, Neophyte Studios. Via Neophyte Studios we routinely host narrative game jams on our *itch.io* page that feature submissions from international creators, publish student work to YouTube, stream regularly on Twitch, and run an active Discord.

Beyond digital expression and publishing support, the lab maintains active research and development on a number of tent-pole projects. As of Spring '23, our active research partners include Oxford University's artificial intelligence program, SIU School of Medicine, and SIU's Psychology department.

Some examples of SIU system clients we've worked with include:

Architecture and Interior Design

Center for Teaching Excellence

Creative Writing

Graduate and undergraduate podcasters and streamers

Psychology

Radio, Television, and Digital Media

SIU Foundation

SIU Honors

SIU School of Medicine

SIU Small Business Incubator

Theatre and Dance

SECTION 4

COLLABORATOR STATEMENT PROMPT EXAMPLE

"Collaborator Name:

Collaborator Position:

<u>*Prompt Questions:*</u>

1) Did The DXL assist you in the digital expression of your domain of knowledge? If so, how?

2) What was the preproduction/ collaboration process like?

3)What resources (knowledge, direction, technology, community, etc) did the lab provide you that helped you achieve your goals? What made the access to those resources significant?

4) How did getting involved the lab help you realize/manifest your project?

5) How did Matt assist in your digital expression or research as a producer, director, or collaborator?

<u>*Collaborator's Statement:*</u>*"*

SECTION 5

COLLABORATOR STATEMENTS

Collaborator Name: Andrew Primous

Collaborator Position: Graduate Research Assistant - English

<u>Collaborator's Statement:</u>

"The DXL helped my digital expression quite a bit. As a writer/artist on a college

students salary, the lab is helpful in conjuring no ways to express pieces of work. For example, a

fantasy series that would need a multi million dollar budget to create can be made for

free in the lab as an A.I audio driven podcast. This lab is special in the way that it takes

all your excuses for not getting a project done, and throws them in the trash.

Pre-production is casual and necessary. It forces you to have your idea before sacrificing

hours and hours of time on it. The difference is; doing a puzzle without knowing what it is

supposed to look like when you're done vs doing a puzzle you've not only seen, but one

in which you have already mentally completed.

Just the fact that it's a lab with people around my age and skill level makes for a

comfortable environment. The podcasting both as well as the high processing computers

have been helpful. Again, having direct access to professional grade equipment takes

out most excuses we tell ourselves to not be creative.

Me turning a piece of linear fiction into an audio series is a direct result of getting

involved with the lab. I am stuck in the realm of writing only without this lab. Now

anything I write can be made into a digital project.

Making the audio series was Matt's idea. He is very involved with everyone's progress as an artist. As he read my series he made the suggestion that I take it to the next level instead of just sitting on it until a producer wants to make it. He insisted I take things into my own hand and just make it on no budget anyway I can. We landed on making the audio series."

Collaborator Name: Bryce Patterson

Collaborator Position: Graduate Assistant – English

Collaborator's Statement:

"The DXL (and, more broadly, the commitment to digital humanities) is the main factor that brought me to SIU in the first place, and my experience working with Matt and the DXL team has had an enormous impact on my overall success in the MFA.
Matt helped me to put together the audio set up for my podcast, as well as walking me through the operations of the recording booth in the lab. The knowledge, equipment, and support of the DXL has been fundamental in polishing that content and bringing it up to industry standards. We would not be able to maintain the same level of quality without the resources provided by the DXL.

More broadly, Matt's enthusiasm for the digital humanities has consistently driven me to attempt projects in new ways, including creating content specifically for virtual reality, Twine, and other mediums. In turn, I've used these tools in teaching my own classes. Moving forward, I hope to continually integrate these emergent technologies into my pedagogy. The DXL is a phenomenal resource that drives innovation at the university level, but it has also pushed me to differentiate my skill-set, and to (hopefully) better prepare my students for a rapidly changing world.

(Thanks, Matt- really appreciate everything you do for us)"

Collaborator Name: Dajonea Robinson

Collaborator Position: Graduate DXL Research Assistant / English Graduate Assistant

<u>Collaborator's Statement:</u>

"The short answer is, yes. The DXL has guided my professional experience, personal interests, and career goals with the credentials needed for any avant-garde digital humanitarian specialist position. At the DXL I create unique art that matters in real time, and I've conducted research that can change the way society functions.

The collaboration process varies from project to project. Typically, I could pitch an idea to Matt or his team and from there, we would brainstorm ways to see my idea come to life. The DXL is a place where neophytes can experiment with cutting edge technologies and receive an education that will prepare them for a wide range of careers. Artificial intelligence is also a big part of the DXL. I don't think I would have had access to the materials provided in the lab had I not ventured into it. I likely would not have become so proficient with AI had it not been for the lab's influence. The DXL has been life changing.

The DXL helped establish my focus as a storyteller, and as a result, I want to change the narrative around me. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, what happens when the beholder is a machine? The DXL aided in my composition of the "Black Goddess Project: A machine learning approach to beauty standards." Through this project the DXL gave me a platform to present my research to Ajit Jaokar's Artificial Intelligence: Cloud and Edge Implementations class at Oxford University. This project is an exploration of representation of Black beauty through generative AI art. Representation matters because it can help to shift narratives and change perceptions.

Matt directly asked me to consider showcasing my findings with Black beauty and AI art. Through his encouragement, I spearheaded the first "Tech Talks and Creative Thoughts: MFAs Explore Intersectional Representation in AI Art." This event was hosted by the DXL. I would not have had this experience if it was not for Matt.

The Tech Talks event directly inspired my peers and I to submit and later be accepted to give a presentation and be published for the 2023 Electronic Visualization & the Arts Conference in London England. We proposed an examination of "Social Memberships and Identity Representation in "Text-to-Image" Artificial Intelligence Programs.""

Collaborator's Name: Dawn Roberts

Collaborator's Position: Graduate student in Social Work, Co-Founder/Co-Owner Volitant LLC.

Collaborator's Statement:

      "I helped facilitate connecting people who had an Extended Reality (XR) project they wanted to create with the Digital Xpressions Lab (DXL) to work with Matt and the team. I then participated in the preproduction/ collaboration process. We all sat in the DXL and discussed the vision for the project. Matt and the team would ask questions to try to get the ideas concrete as to what the project will look like. Then, he would suggest a plan of action to move forward and set a rough timeline. Matt would also show the client the hardware and software available to give them an idea of what mediums they had to use – from the podcast/sound booth, to the Oculus Quest 2 VR headsets, to various XR software.

      Through Matt and the DXL, I continue to participate in the Metaversity project with Pinckney Benedict and Oxford's Ajit Jaokar. This is an exciting AI/XR project and I am thrilled to be included.

      As well, because the DXL consulted on the Innovation Center's XRDA space, Matt and I formed Volitant as a consequence of perusing the XRDA course goals. Through that partnership, I got to work closely with Matt on XR projects for clients. Matt was always quick to come up with creative and wonderful suggestions to client questions or imaginings, fostered trust in client relationships, and was very organized.

      Over the past few years, I have enjoyed working with Matt and the DXL. Matt is extremely thoughtful, understands process and procedures well, and is outstanding at facilitating

meetings. The DXL is a wonderful resource to SIU-C for the education students get in working

with clients, learning new modes and mediums of storytelling, and also for the clients who utilize

what the DXL has to offer and create amazing and unique projects (that then they use in class

and utilize as part of their pedagogy)."

Collaborator's Name: Emily Klingensmith

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Assistant – School of Theatre and Dance

Collaborator's Statement:

During the Fall 2022 semester, as Instructor for the THEA 220 course in the School of Theater and Dance at SIU, I collaborated with Matthew Gordon of the Digital Xpressions Lab, Neophyte Studios and another SIU Instructor for an ENG 119 course. Our project was a multi-creative endeavor that featured plays written by the ENG 119 students, performed by the THEA 220 students, and recorded and streamed by the Digital Xpressions Lab and Neophyte studio. In preproduction, I met with Matthew Gordon, and other members of the Lab, to plan how the project would best be served by the equipment and technology available. Matthew was extremely helpful in explaining the different set-ups and modalities that we could use for recording. He also involved the expertise of other audio/visual agents from the College of Liberal Arts technical support to aid in deciding on the best practice to achieve our performance goal.

Prior to this collaboration, I had not worked with the Digital Xpressions Lab, and was pleased to find that it held so many different resources that partner well with the performance elements involved in producing theater. In fact, for the Spring 2023 semester, I am collaborating again with the Lab and Matthew for a THEA 217 acting class, where we will be recording monologues that the students have been preparing.

Matthew was very responsive in our communication prior to the performance event, as well as prompt, prepared, and respectful on the day of the event.

What makes this kind of collaboration so beneficial to students in the School of Theater and Dance, is that it not only gives them experience in digital recording, but also provides a resource for their future professional portfolio.

Collaborator's Name: Graham (Whitney Graham)

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Assistant – English

1) Did The Digital Xpressions Lab assist you in the digital expression of your domain of knowledge? If so, how?

> "Yes! I learned a lot about Twitch streaming and AI that I'd never learn otherwise. Now I know this whole side of digital production that I've never learned before."

2) What was the preproduction/ collaboration process like?

> "Well, a lot of it was woven into our course work, but it was a lot of asking us what we wanted to do, and I appreciated that. It gave me the freedom to ask myself what I wanted to do, and how that could possibly be done with the help of the DXL. That kind of thing is great when I've come from a background where everyone is told what to do all the time; and we even see that kind of thing from our admin. The lab gives us the freedom to express ourselves more than other academic spaces at this university. It's given me the freedom to tell transgender stories and be as weird as I want to."

3) What resources (knowledge, direction, technology, community, etc) did the lab provide you that helped you achieve your goals? What made the access to those resources significant?

> "The lab helped me stream with Little Grassy and give an AI talk. The community the lab provides for fiction students gives us something to conglomerate around and have a shared community where it otherwise might be harder to find."

4) How did getting involved the lab help you realize/manifest your project?

"Well, the lab introduced me to Midjourney, which allowed me to create a bunch of pictures of trans men in Midjourney and have a talk about that. It allows me to collect academic merit for something I would've been doing anyway. So, now I'm 23, and I have a paper and a talk out. That kind of thing is unthinkable for many other 23-year-old academics."

5) How did Matt assist in your digital expression or research as a producer, director, or collaborator?

"Matt did excellent work in helping Little Grassy stream our reading, and he watched my AI talk. He is also very willing to help me set up my TTRPG table next year."

6) Did your collaboration with The DXL benefit yourself, your students, or other?

"For sure. In all the ways I have detailed, this lab is a benefit to my experience here at SIU."

Collaborator's Statement:

"This lab is a wonderful opportunity for people to explore different aspects of technology and storytelling that they'd never consider otherwise. It's a net positive to SIU, and I hope it grows forever."

Collaborator's Name: H'Aeneise Coopwood

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Student – History, Sound Engineer, Producer, Game Designer

Collaborator's Statement:

"The Digital Xpressions Lab assisted in the expansion of my knowledge domain by educating me on the dynamics of 3D modeling, animation, and video game design. The most significant work that the DXL has helped with is my video game demo, 'Sound and Spirit.' Matthew Gordan has directed me to information on game development and provided insight into the technology and digital software that has enhanced my workflow. My access to VR sets, Blender, and Unreal Engine shaped my perception of digital creation, adding to my ability to produce 'Sound and Spirit.' Collaborating with the DXL enables the members of the Lab and I to expand our understanding of digital creation. We become more experienced in the programs and consoles that remain in constant use with each conversation or joint effort used to complete projects."

Collaborator's Name: Holly Sparkman

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Student – Fiction, SIUC Staff

<u>Prompt Questions:</u>

1) Did The DXL assist you in the digital expression of your domain of knowledge? If so, how?

"Yes, the DXL helped expand my understanding of how technology can be used for narrative storytelling. Specifically, I used the DXL to produce a 9-episode Twitch interview stream and work on a Unity game engine project (unfinished)."

2) What was the preproduction/ collaboration process like?

"I met with Matt Gordon several times to discuss how to set up the interview stream, we emailed to discuss times to meet as well as questions I had regarding the interview invitations and possible Unity assets to use."

3) What resources (knowledge, direction, technology, community, etc.) did the lab provide you that helped you achieve your goals? What made the access to those resources significant?

"The main resource in the lab are the PCs that are available to use, as well as the access to the Neophyte Twitch stream page, YouTube channel, and the Unity game engine."

4) How did getting involved the lab help you realize/manifest your project?

"I tried streaming to Twitch from my tablet from home one time and there was no way that I would have been able to continue to stream from home. My tablet did not have the processing power to complete the task, so the machines available to the students in the DXL lab were invaluable to completing the interview project. "

5) How did Matt assist in your digital expression or research as a producer, director, or collaborator?

> "Matt met with me several times to get the Twitch interview stream formatted and up and running. He helped show me how to set up an OBS homepage, how to create scenes in OBS, how to navigate the different areas of OBS, how to use digital assets for the stream, and how to upload from Twitch to YouTube. We only met a few times regarding the Unity project. "

Collaborator's Statement:

"I'd like to state how Matt influenced my understanding of narrative prior to his assistance on my own project. I learned about Matt and Dylan's Twitch stream from Prof. Pinckney Benedict's when I was an undergrad student in one of his fiction classes. And despite not having any prior gaming knowledge I became a regular viewer of the Neophyte Twitch streams because I enjoyed Matt and Dylan's very engaging, lively discussions about games and their narrative qualities. I continued to watch as Matt and Dylan discussed new games each week and was also intrigued by the game jams being hosted. Seeing brand new games submitted by viewers emerge and their narrative merits discussed was incredibly interesting and eye-opening. I have to admit that watching the Neophyte Studios Twitch channel was a view into a world I was completely unaware of.

Then after I joined the MFA creative writing program, I had a brief discussion with Prof. Benedict regarding an idea I had for an interview show I was encouraged to get together with Matt to discuss my idea further and see how he could help. Matt and I met several times to talk about what I wanted the interview show to look like and Matt showed me how the OBS screen-

capture software worked. We worked through issues with lighting, sound, background set up, digital assets, and interactions between Zoom video chat and the OBS screen-capture software. Not only was Matt willing to help with the nuts and bolts of the stream itself, but Matt also reviewed and made suggestions for the messaging in the invitations that were sent to Professors asking them if they would be willing to be interviewed. After some trial and error, I was ready to try the system out on my own and successfully streamed nine interviews on Twitch. Once the Twitch interviews were streamed, Matt also showed me how to transfer the Twitch stream videos to the Neophyte Studios YouTube channel.

The following year, I had another idea to use the Unity game engine to create a digital gallery for my husband's artwork. This project is yet to be fully fleshed out or realized, but Matt met with me a couple times to discuss my ideas and what it would take to accomplish those ideas. Matt is very good at working on both big picture and little picture aspects of projects, he is a very good facilitator in that he is willing to say what he can provide in terms of ideas and concepts as well as pointing in the direction of tools that can be used to accomplish those end goals. Matt is willing to state the limits of his knowledge and understands that one does not need to be an expert in any digital medium in order to produce a well-written and conceptualized piece which can be synthesized using technology and information from many disparate sources.

Not only has Matt helped me with my digital projects, but Matt's own digital narratives are compelling. I am very excited to see what the future holds for Matt and where his use of digital technologies for narrative and storytelling will take him."

Collaborator's Name: Jennifer Davis

Collaborator's Position: PhD Student – Psychology

Collaborator's Statement:

"Getting involved in the lab has not only helped to give me the ability to conduct my research with the equipment needed, but it has also increased my knowledge of the equipment. The lab has so far given me some experience in operating an Oculus, which I previously had no experience. When I started my collaboration with the Digital Xpressions Lab, Matthew explained to me the assistance the lab can provide by letting me use their Oculus equipment and provide assistance while conducting my research exploring spatial memory with virtual reality. Whether that be having a student assistant from the lab assist me in collecting data to provide another set of hands in running it and help troubleshoot if I run into any issues, or just providing the space and equipment to conduct my study. Since I am at the beginning steps of my research project, he has worked with me to test out the program that I will be using for my research, to help ensure there are no issues with how it runs. Matthew has also educated me in the equipment needed to establish a virtual reality lab in the psychology department, since this is something the psychology department is looking to do. He has also informed me of varying paths that I could take to further develop my knowledge and skills with the virtual reality that I can use to conduct additional research. He has informed me of people and departments I can contact to gain more information about equipment that can be useful for a virtual reality lab and invited me to meet with members of the Digital Xpressions Lab to learn more about the oculus. Additionally, Matthew has informed me of different paths that would help me to learn coding, which will allow me to build different virtual reality environments that can be used for further research. I

currently have no coding knowledge, so this has been very helpful to know ways that I can develop this skill, one example is taking an intro to gaming class. From the beginning, Matthew has been clear about how the lab can help me, and ways the lab can help me develop coding skills, or other resources at SIU that can help me develop my knowledge and skill of both establishing a virtual reality lab and building virtual reality environments for research."

Collaborator's Name: Jodie Salazar

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Assistant – History

<u>Collaborator's Statement:</u>

"The Digital Xpressions Lab assisted me by building upon existing knowledge I had of various software and programs. They were accommodating with their scheduling, as well as taking all the time needed to assist me in my digital project.

Matt, and by extension, the Lab, provided me with a helpful, knowledgeable, and accessible environment to finish a school project. I was taught to navigate OBS software, which is an invaluable skill as I continue on with digital projects.

The Lab has provided countless tools with which to mentor students. The skills I gained there helped me to mentor undergraduates through production of their very own podcasts. Those podcasts are now available for a broader audience outside of school."

Collaborator's Name: John H. Pollitz

Collaborator's Position: Dean of Library Affairs

<u>Collaborator's Statement:</u>

"Matt helped us conceptualize how we could expand the footprint of the DXL in the Library. I worked with him as I was creating plans.

The DXL represents a critical partner in the future of Morris Library. I first met Matt when he was a graduate assistant to Pinckney Benedict. They were demonstrating audio recording and the concept of storytelling using podcasts. The concept caught my imagination and I began thinking that the library could be a place where students could create non-textual scholarship. Soon we had a podcast booth on the second floor of the library. Matt and graduate students in the Creative Writing MFA program began working with the SIU Press to create radio theater like audio books from the Press's backlist. The audio books became part of the WSIU Thursday morning line-up. As the Creative Writing program moved to new forms of Xpression, Pinckney Benedict realized that the future was in creating a lab closer to students. We found a small classroom space in the library that could solve that problem. Matt worked with me and library staff to create the new studio/lab on the sixth floor of the library. This required Matt to demonstrate strong organizational skill. The room, in a very public building, had to be secure and staffed. Matt created a well-run lab where hours were regular and open to student walk ins. The space was popular with students and faculty from across wide disciplines. It provided me with a proof of concept that I have used to plan an expanded area on the first floor of the library. I have used video of DXL activity that Matt provided to get donors to know how their support will benefit SIU students.

Last fall Matt came to me with a request for temporary space where graduate students and faculty could create a streaming studio where classes could meet and further investigate new forms of digital expression and pedagogy. His explanation on how streaming game playing could provide writers a way to hone their craft as they created stories while playing Dungeons and Dragons live on Twitch. We temporarily turned over another classroom to the DXL, this time on the seventh floor of the library. The collaboration created another success and has helped me see the need to create a permanent classroom on the first floor across the hall from the proposed Digital Scholars Commons.

Concepts developed in the DXL will provide guidance to the future of non-textual scholarship in Morris Library."

Collaborator's Name: Katherine Hashimoto

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Assistant – English, Writing Studies Assistant

Collaborator's Statement:

"I arrived in the DXL during my first year at SIUC with trepidation, as I'm a

nontraditional student – i.e., a 60-year-old former lawyer (and mom-of-three!) whose sole

creative output up to then was traditional, Word-document-type stories. I was unfamiliar with

digital expression even as consumer, having never played, much less written or coded, a

digital/computer game or simulation; livestreamed anything; used tools like OBS; recorded or

edited audio; used AI; worked with animation software; or had any VR experience.

Given the nature of our MFA program, I was expected to pick up these competencies with

alacrity and deploy them with sufficient skill to create engaging fictional narratives: a big

challenge. I'm happy to report that, at this point, I've managed to create more than a dozen

fiction works that incorporate audio, visual, gaming, and/or multi-media elements. Matt's

assistance was invaluable. He helped me get my feet wet with many digital tools. For example,

the first time I asked him to familiarize me with "computer games," before I tried to write one,

he spent a couple hours, one-on-one, identifying and demonstrating games that he thought would

match up well with my narrative interests. Another time, Matt patiently worked with me, again

one-on-one, during my lengthy process of trying to master the OBS tool. He and other DXL staff

also helped me record in the DXL's podcast studio, in service of my various audio projects. I've

also benefited from Matt's management of the MFA program's role-playing fantasy series –

again, my first exposure to this narrative form. In addition, he was integral to the success of my

weekly workshop experience. As is customary in some of our classes, I livestreamed

performances of various types, with audio and visual elements, and he handled streaming and recording aspects so that I could concentrate on putting my narrative across.

More generally, I've found my DXL experiences to be welcoming, interesting, and low-stress – not a foregone conclusion, I think it's fair to say, for someone in my demographic. Participating in the Neophyte Studios Discord and Twitch chats has provided a source of community and been an unexpected pleasure. Matt's management of the DXL seems to foster a mellow, yet helpful, vibe, and the good attitude of the DXL student staff, who have invariably provided effective assistance and been pleasant to work with."

Collaborator's Name: Michaela Zelie

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Writers Forum Director

<u>Collaborator's Statement:</u>

"Throughout the year Graduate Writers Forum organizes and conducts readings that feature current MFA candidates. Our goal with these events it to raise money and awareness for our largest, most precious event, the Little Grassy Literary Festival. Matt Gordon made it possible to stream our events, which allowed for more people to donate to our program. The production and collaboration process was quite seamless, and stress free, something I appreciated as I was new to this service. The ability to reach an audience who couldn't be in the physical location was really important to me, and the fact that Matt made it as stress free as possible was really nice."

Collaborator's Name: Nathan Colombo

Collaborator's Position: Founder, Brand Advocacy Group, Inc / Creatordale

<u>Prompt Questions:</u>

1) Did The DXL assist you in the digital expression of your domain of knowledge? If so, how?

"The DXL lab was a direct contributor to the launch of the Creatordale project, helping to organize and give purpose to physical organization of digital creators."

2) What was the preproduction/ collaboration process like?

"In person meetings discussing philosophical and organizational functions of the collective group being created."

3) What resources (knowledge, direction, technology, community, etc) did the lab provide you that helped you achieve your goals? What made the access to those resources significant?

"Broad clarity in the next steps to organize individuals and their talents for mutual access within a creative community."

4) How did getting involved the lab help you realize/manifest your project?

"It helped get beyond the conceptual stage and take the leap into project execution. That project execution looks like public meetings, goal setting, and progress monitoring on and informal but influential basis."

5) How did Matt assist in your digital expression or research as a producer, director, or collaborator?

"Matt provided the missing piece of the puzzle – validation for the concept to move to the next stage. He did so by expressing ideas parallel and matching to the

Creatordale project, ultimately leading to a merger of concepts that have the greatest

possibility of future action."

Collaborator's Name: Dr. Richard Selinfreund

Collaborator's Position: Head of Pathology Instruction, SIU School of Medicine

Collaborator's Statement:

"Mr. Matthew Gordon was the student leader that headed the collaboration between SIU Carbondale (Digital Xpressions Lab) and our Medical School Students in Springfield Illinois. Specifically, in this collaboration we developed a new method for medical students to self-assess their knowledge on specific diseases using gamification of learning. Matthew provided the student leadership that guided over five undergraduate student members in Carbondale and fifteen medical students in Springfield. His leadership and collaborative skills will likely " change the way second year medical school is taught" around the nation. Matthew's core competency is making digital words on paper come alive in 3D Avatar renderings inside of a learning context. His skill set has allowed student and faculty mentorship to enter educational games in a 3D teaching context for student to use before high stakes examinations and clinical responsibilities. His work in 3D avatar expression is pioneering in the field of medical instruction and will likely be the basis of patient – physician disease education in the future. I rank Matthew Gordon's collaborative skills on this project in the top 1 percent of all the collaborations during my tenure at SIU, Vanderbilt and Yale Medical Schools."

Collaborator's Name: Teya Reed

Collaborator's Position: Graduate Assistant – English, DXL and Studio 754 TTRPG Director

Collaborator's Statement:

"I went to Matt my first semester at SIU with the basics of an idea for a livestreamed or recorded D&D table that had been mentioned as an idea an goal of the Lab's. I wanted in, and Matt gave me the freedom and guidance and the help that I needed to make it come to fruition. We spent a few meetings getting the basics together, figuring out what supplies we needed, working together with the library for a new production space that would fit our needs, and deciding how to get our content out into the world. Now, we have three successful tables running that will end this semester, along with at least one table in the works for next semester. I was able to produce something beautiful with the collaboration of the entire DXL team along with my fellow creative writers. This has truly been a wonderful experience in both being able to produce a professional product that does well, as well as collaborate on a creative project with multiple people."

Collaborator's Name: Tyler Wilkinson

Collaborator's Position: Lab Assistant, Digital Xpressions Lab

Collaborator's Statement:

"As a lab assistant, the Digital Xpression Lab provided me with unique opportunities compared to the other students and groups utilizing its services. Instead of developing a singular project, I enlisted the help of my fellow staff members and lab resources to develop my skills to aid others with their projects. This has not only made me more versatile in my field of knowledge, but created and facilitated a network of connections that most undergraduate students could only imagine.

Mathew Gordon has been instrumental in this process. As director of the lab, he connects me with those that need my help. Additionally, his pre-production meetings with clients ensure that they are serious about their project and that my work will not go to waste. It is thanks to my affiliation with the lab and those that run it that I have skills, experience, and a number of publications that make me stand out among my peers."

SECTION 6

CONTRIBUTING SUPPORT

The following is a list represents a selection of research and development projects that Matthew Gordon, and The Digital Xpressions Lab under his direction, contributed to in a minor capacity across the 2022-2023 academic year. Included after each listing is the contribution provided and the URL by which a project can be accessed or additional information can be gathered.

Black Goddess Project, created by Dajonea Robinson

DXL Contribution: Access to natural language to AI image generation website, *Night Café,* provided by lab during project's inception.

Access Link or Additional Information: https://www.instagram.com/blackgoddessaiart/

Return to the Telepod(Cast), created by Bryce Patterson and Kevin Serrano-Echevarria

DXL Contribution: Recording equipment on loan for production.

Access Link: https://redcircle.com/shows/return-to-the-telepodcast

Sound & Spirit, created by H'Aeneise Coopwood

Sound and Spirit is an open-world community-builder set during America's reconstruction era in which they player assumes the role a recently liberated African American finding their place and voice in thriving and harmonious community.

Designed and created by MA of History, H'Aeneise Coopwood, this game underwent significant preproduction and was developed in The Digital Xpressions Lab. Matthew Gordon contributed to the project as a Writing Consultant.

Untitled Research, Jennifer Davis

DXL Contribution: Equipment (Tethered VR [Oculus Quest, Desktop PC]) used in pilot study of research to run NavWell software. Consulted on potential future XR acquisitions.

Access Link or Additional Information: https://navwell.cs.nuim.ie/home

Wake Podcast, created by Jodie Salazar

DXL Contribution: Training for production (Recording, OBS) received at DXL.

Access Link or Additional Information: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xx3-ecT12ow

SECTION 7

CREATORDALE

The Creatordale project exists due to the shared desire for artistic and economic development in the Southern Illinois region. Creatordale is a grassroots partnership between The Digital Xpressions Lab and Brand Advocacy Group. The measurable impacts of this initiative will exist outside the scope of this research. Creatordale's inaugural meeting, set to bridge the divide between regional independent, private, and university media-makers and digital artisans, is scheduled for April 20th 2023 post-publication of this thesis.

As a client, Brand Advocacy Group benefited from event direction to create scalable meeting to engage private, public, and student audiences, marketing consultation, strategic direction, and technical writing assistance.

Relevant media as it exists at the time of this publication will be included in this section.

Video URL - "Your Invitation to Creatordale":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHktLTbwxt4&t=1s

Creatordale Press Release

A transformative media project bringing together private partners, a university development lab, and the community-at-large is launching in Carbondale.

Creatordale, an independent media Carbondale project, will hold its first meeting at the Dunn-Richmond Center at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 20.

The inaugural meeting will be to present the framework of the Creatordale project and invite feedback from attendees.

The SIU Digital Xpressions Lab and local media and content company, Brand Advocacy Group, Inc., have been independently working towards a similar goal. Now, with the combination of resources and an invitation to the community-at-large, they hope to spur the development of a new digital media production industry in Carbondale and the region.

"We're inviting independent creators from all technical and creative backgrounds to share their talents through the Creatordale project," said Matt Gordon, Graduate Lab Director for SIU's Digital Xpressions Lab.

"By organizing our creative community through the Creatordale project we'll provide community creators the creative network needed to realize projects and grow," said Gordon.

At the same time SIU's DXL Lab has grown its vision, private company Brand Advocacy Group, Inc. has been working towards parallel goals in the Carbondale community.

"In 2021 we won the Regions Business Plan competition with the pitch that BAG would contribute to this larger project of Creatordale," said Nathan Colombo, founder of Brand Advocacy Group, Inc.

"Developing a creative economy centered on media production is going to take a collective effort. The Creatordale project is meant to organize that effort," said Colombo.

Organizers say they are looking for creators with any kind of background, professional or amateur, including: writers, actors, content creators, videographers, graphic and visual designers, costumers, game developers, podcasters, online personalities, business, and anyone who would like to integrate content creation and media into their work.

For more information, please contact Nathan Colombo at Nathan@Creatordale.com or visit Creatordale.com

Creatordale's mission statement is:
Creatordale's mission is to grow a new media production industry in Carbondale. Creatordale is a grassroots project that will accomplish this mission by rallying the resources and talents of individuals and institutions to realize creative projects at scale.

Ideal attendees include: home content creators, student content creators, videographers, graphic designers, audio production, writers, actors, audio producers.

Figure 1

SECTION 8

EVENTS AND CONFRENCES

This section encapsulates the unusual series of conferences, events, and symposia, that
Matthew Gordon and his lab presented at, developed, or contributed to in some significant way.
Notably, no literary contests grace this list. Where the forum for great ideas does not exist, create
your own.

Media relevant to each event or conference is included after a short description and a list
of associated links under said event or conference's entry.

2023 DIGITAL NARRATIVE SHOWCASE – SIU, Carbondale, April 19th 2023

> The 2023 Digital Narrative Showcase is an event to watch. Developed with the
> intention to scale into a national conference, the 2023 event features innovative
> multimodal digital narrative work from SIU students. The showcase, scheduled post-
> publication of this thesis

Figure 2

In October of 2022, Matthew Gordon co-presented on the gamified learning Spanish language *Mayan Virtual Reality Escape Room* software development project he directed. Matthew presented with Lead Developer and Assistant Professor of Digital Media Arts & Animation Kevin Mercer. Their talk was titled *Interdisciplinary Virtual Reality: Merging Game Design & Language to Facilitate Student Engagement.*

Meaningful Play Program URL -

https://meaningfulplay.msu.edu/program.php?presentation=3380&type=microtalks

Interdisciplinary Virtual Reality: Merging Game Design & Language to Facilitate Student Engagement Abstract**:**

"Southern Illinois University's Digital Narratives Lab has begun a collaboration with Assistant Professor of Digital Media Arts & Animation, Kevin Mercer, and Associate Languages & Linguistics Professor, Lourdes Albuixech, to develop a fantastical Spanish language VR escape room. Ancient, slightly surreal, Aztec and Mayan environments populated with logic and language-based puzzles await students. The currently unnamed project will function as an opportunity for undergraduate Spanish students to immerse themselves in an entertaining space designed to challenge their language acquisition and reinforce learning objectives of an otherwise pedagogically traditional language course. Key developmental consideration is paid to designing for an audience of intersectionally diverse students with a broad range of player ability rather than a commercial market. In the spring 2023 semester, this project will be deployed in

Professor Albuixech's course. The project adapts and expands Professor Albuixech "genial.ly" 2D browser-based escape room created in the spring 2022 semester. We predict that the inclusion of the VR escape room will boost begrudging undergraduate's course engagement by being an intuitive, immersive, and *gamified* learning experience. It is our intention to survey student interest surrounding the escape room to guide further development of the project. As the Graduate head of the Digital Narratives Lab, Gordon has had the opportunity to facilitate many interdepartmental projects such as these. This lab, founded in 2019 and independently funded, is taking on its most ambitious project to date in the development of this game. The collaborative development on this VR escape room by Digital Narrative Lab graduate student staff and Professors Mercer and Albuixech reflects the innovative force a space such as the Digital Narrative Lab can have on an entire institution."

Interdisciplinary Virtual Reality:
Merging Game Design & Language to Facilitate Student Engagement

Meaningful Play
October 14th, 2022

Kevin Mercer, MFA
Asst. Professor of Digital Media Arts & Animation
School of Media Arts
Southern Illinois University

Matthew Gordon
MFA Candidate, Creative Writing & Director, Digital Xpressions Lab
School of Literature, Writing & Digital Humanities
Southern Illinois University
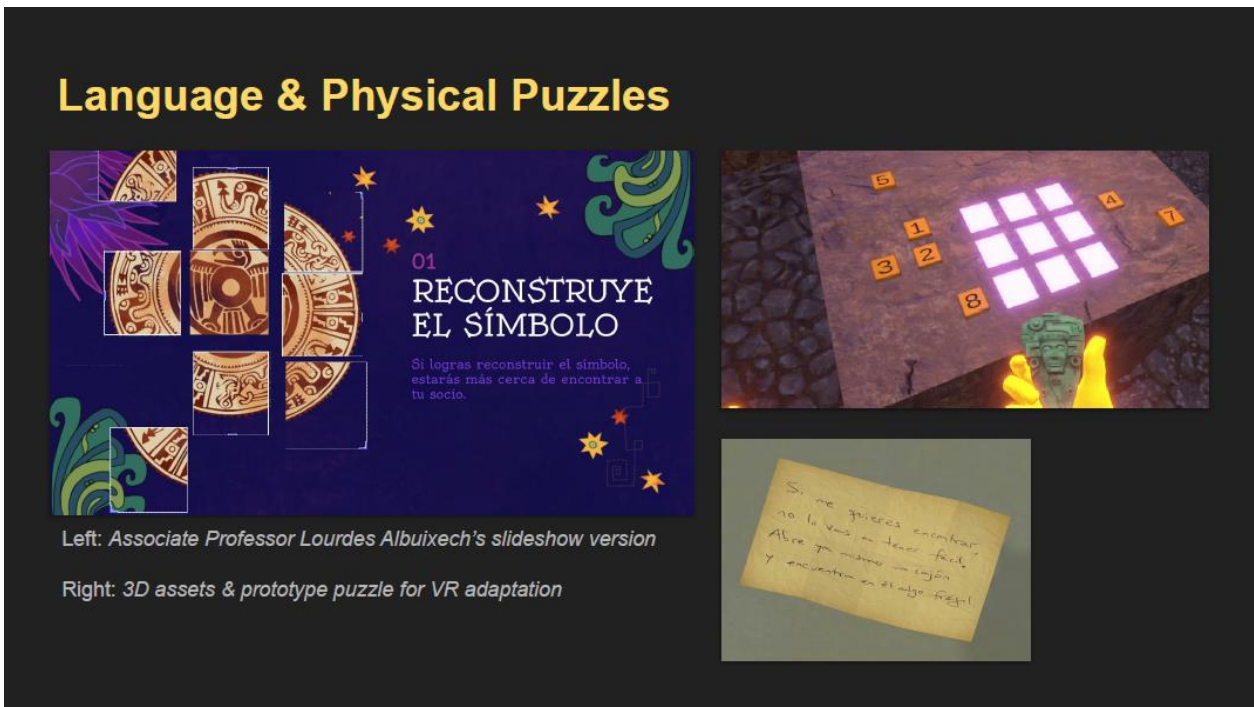
Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Occupying Space

- The user can stand, move & look
- The user can pick up and inspect objects within the space
- The user is simply an observer

Deployment in Space

- The user can *heal* the tree, yielding more energy & light
- The user may use a torch to better navigate the space, inspect objects & solve the maze puzzle
- The user *produces* space through their own agency

Figure 6

Kevin Mercer, MFA
Asst. Professor of Digital Media Arts & Animation
School of Media Arts
Southern Illinois University

kevin.mercer@siu.edu

Matthew Gordon
MFA Candidate, Creative Writing & Director, Digital Xpressions Lab
School of Literature, Writing & Digital Humanities
Southern Illinois University

matthew.gordon@siu.edu

SIU Southern Illinois University
CARBONDALE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
MEANINGFUL PLAY
OCTOBER 12-14, 2022 // EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN, USA

References:
Barnard, Josie. (2019). The Multimodal Writer. Red Globe Press.
Lefebvre, Henri. (1992). The Production of Space. Wiley.
Swink, Steve. (2009). Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation. Elsevier.

Figure 7

QUILL AND INK LITERARY FESTIVAL – April 29th, 2023

> *On the subject of the Quill and Ink Literary Festival, I was unable to publish an issue of Grassroots, SIU's undergraduate literary magazine, during my time as Editor-In-Chief in the spring 2020. I am proud of my successors and thrilled to contribute to their event.*

Though the Digital Xpressions Lab has trended towards avoiding acting as a mobile virtual reality arcade under Matthew's direction, certain events and partners relevant to the objectives of The DXL are considered exceptions. In this case, The DXL will facilitate festival-goer's through short VR narrative experiences.

SIU DAY OF GIVING – March 28th, 2023

Though The Digital Xpressions Lab has had more of a significant impression on SIU's Day of Giving in past years, it is worth noting that, since 2017, the academy's shorthand for innovative work in the College for Liberal Arts is an image of a student in virtual reality in The Digital Xpressions Lab and its previous incarnations. (SIU Foundation)

SIU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE ANNUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING SYMPOSIUM – April 13th, 2023

This symposium will feature three presentations centered around the Virtual Reality learning software, *Sepsis Game*, adapted and developed by Matthew Gordon and The Digital Xpressions Lab. Two talks titled *Medical Education: Creating a Video Game Bridging Basic Science Mechanisms and Clinical Relevance* and *Rendering the Future of*

Medical Education: Creating 3D Avatars to Supplement Gamification of Medical Education and a panel titled *Gamification is a Learning medium Today's Medical Students May Favor* are all scheduled. (SIU School of Medicine)

SUPER SMASH REVOLUTION – October 8th, 2022

Formerly, The Digital Xpressions Lab's role in events more broadly was that of a mobile virtual reality arcade. The ESports Arena offered the DXL's Director, professor Pinckney Benedict, a suitable teaching space for the fiction creative writing program's evolving pedagogy. The DXL acted as technical managers to support the *Beatsaber* tournament. (SIUC ESports)

TECH TALKS AND CREATIVE THOUGHTS – November 1st, 2022

Discussions considering the intersection of artificial intelligence and identity are a crucial juncture for folx from the humanities to enter into conversations about AI more broadly. Matthew Gordon and The Digital Xpressions Lab were thrilled to facilitate and broadcast the inaugural Tech Talks and Creative Thoughts event. This label is intended to be cultivated as The DXL's primer talk series.

The original TT&CT group will be presenting an expanded version of their work as a part of EVA London in Summer 2023. (SIU College of Liberal Arts)

Figure 8

THE SHOW MUST GO ON-LINE – December 12th, 2022

The archival of creative finals, showcases, and presentations in the humanities has never been easier since the rise of accessible streaming hardware and platforms. Originally broadcast to *twitch.tv* and archived on the Neophyte Studios YouTube channel by The Digital Xpressions Lab, this Theatre 2020 course final featuring SIU undergraduate students performing scripts written by English 119 students serves as a watershed moment demonstrating the virtues of contemporary interdisciplinary collaboration.
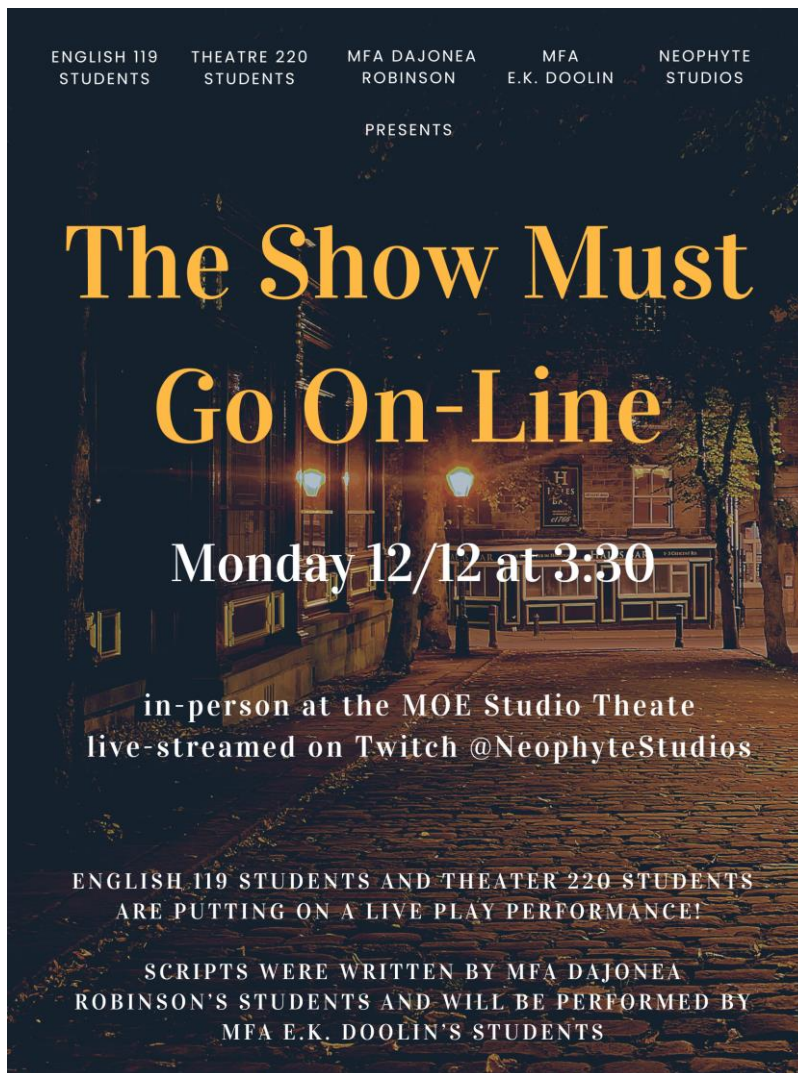

Figure 9

WORLD LANGUAGE DAY – October 3rd, 2022

In service to The College of Liberal Arts, the Digital Xpressions Lab staff organized and

ran a virtual reality feature as a part of SIU's 47th annual World Language Day. Visiting

students were given access to VR equipment and had the opportunity to explore

language-learning as made possible by the software *Mondly* (World Language Day)

SECTION 9

LAB DOCUMENTS

This section contains a selection of documents developed as a function of efforts to streamline and replicate certain areas of work (i.e. preproduction processes with clients, Table Top Role Playing Game Actual Play Series development, etcetera) that rely on the experience of lab staff members who, year over year, will graduate from SIU's Creative Writing MFA program and leave holes in the knowledge base of The Digital Xpressions lab's staff. These documents, along with work undertaken as a part of specific development projects, account for the whole of internal technical writing undertaken by The Digital Xpressions Lab. A vast majority of technical writing generated by the lab tends to be public facing or external. Though accounting for a smaller portion of technical writing, these documents are to be maintained as crucial guides for replicating work or continuing projects in an academic lab that sees a yearly turnover of undergraduate and graduate research assistant.

DXL Project Inquiry, Vision, and Scope

This questionnaire will need to be completed and submitted to the Digital Xpressions Lab (DXL) Director *before* scheduling the pre-production meeting.

☐ Product   ☐ Event   ☐ Other: _____

Who is the lead contact client(s) for this project? Please include full name, email, and phone number.

_____

How many people are involved in this project? _____ Have project roles/responsibilities been assigned? _____

Who are the team members and what is their assigned role/responsibility? _____

_____

What is the timeline for this project/when does it need to be completed or delivered by? _____

_____

Please summarize your project/vision in one-two sentences: _____

_____

What specifically do you need from the Digital Xpressions Lab?

☐ Technology/Software Needs   ☐ Expertise/Tech Staff   ☐ Narrative Design

☐ Scriptwriting or other writing   ☐ Virtual Reality (VR)   ☐ Installation Design

☐ Digital and/or Graphic Design   ☐ Audio Editing/Audio Equip   ☐ Video Editing/Film Equip

☐ Gamification/Educational Product   ☐ Accessibility Needs

☐ Other: _____

What hardware and/or software is required for the completion of your project? _____

_____

What other resources do you think will be needed? _____

_____

What are any costs associated with the development of your project? _____

_____

What else do you think the DXL needs to know about your project? _____

_____

Digital Xpressions Lab at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale (Form Last Updated Nov 2022)

Figure 10

General Character Background Sheet

Player Name:

Character Name:

Character Age:

Class:

Race:

Gender Identification/Pronouns:

Description of your character's appearance, please include style as well as physical

characteristics:

Personality:

What is your character's sexuality?:

Character History (please limit to max ten paragraphs, bulleted lists are also fine):

What does your character do for work?:

Where do they live, and under what conditions?:

Where did they learn their skills?:

Why did they board the ship that was taken by The Roil? (What were they leaving behind/ pursuing?):

Familial Life

Who are your parents? Names, ages, marital status:

What do they do for work?:

Are they both alive? (If not, please say how/when they died):

Do you have siblings? What are their names and ages?:

What is your relationship with your parents?:

What is your relationship with your siblings?:

What is your family's poverty level (ex. rich, poor, middle class, etc):

NPCs:

Besides family, are there any NPCs that are important to your life? Friends? Enemies?

Please name 1-3 with brief descriptions of appearance, in-game race, and

personality/relationship to you:

Do you have a rival?:

Have you had any major love interests? Any current ones?:

Player Sensitivity Questions:

Are there any themes you'd like to explore, but feel they may be sensitive? If so, please enter them
here:

Are there any themes that you are sensitive to, but willing to explore after speaking to the

DM?:

Are there any themes that you are absolutely opposed to in any way?:

Do you have any concerns about being a Player on this show?:

Figure 11

Game Premise Template Sheet

Game Title: (TBD)

Content Quote: "This land is a sphere beyond scrutiny. The mainland is perfectly content to disregard the Southern and Border Elves as exaggerated upstarts betraying The Border Wood's acculturated leadership. So long as business in Easten flows with Sulkardian innovation, the whole peninsula remains a desperate, but not disagreeable, frontier. Meanwhile, an unknowable necromantic sickness continues to spill out from Emissary's Eye threatening this institution and everything beyond it! But do the nations send aid? Of course not. They hide from it. Across the water, they hide from it. Insulating themselves against the impending plague while we lose ground every day."

Premise:

You are travelers adrift. Washed ashore on a strange land. Were you fleeing your past or venturing towards opportunity? Does that matter now? In this new place, the only thing any of you have left is each other.

You remember your voyage. Traveling along the western coast of your homeland your vessel was embroiled in a violent storm crackling with magical energy. Powerful winds tossed your ship high among the peaking waves... then down into the frozen depths of Roil twisted sea.

Twisting jagged sandy stalagmites swirl out of a beachhead marked with ruined wood. Off in the eastern sky you see the raging wall of twisting magical storm clouds that swallowed your vessel, its passengers, crew, and cargo. The Roil. You've been through The Roil. Whatever you were heading towards, or escaping from, on your voyage is more distant than you ever imagined it could be.

There are only myths concerning what happens to those swallowed by the eternal mystical storm that borders the eastern edge of your nation. Perhaps if you ever make it home you can set the record straight.

Whether you choose to acclimate to these circumstances or peruse a way home, it's up to you. As survivors in this new land, the right to find meaning in your circumstances is your own.

Themes:

Methods of meaning making

Effects of colonialism

The nature of power

Family and kinship

The nature of belief/ faith

Environmental degradation and industry

Organized religion

Historical/ cultural myth

Scientific ethics

Identity/ coming of age

May be updated as planning continues

Content Warnings:

Violence, potential player death, fantasy body horror, colonialist mindsets, fantasy racism, torture, harm to animals, classism, survival scenario, hunger/starvation, magical plague/ disease

May potentially be updated as planning continues.

Playing/Details:

[This is where you list any details players should know before they start to play. This should contain any variance in your world from the core system, details players should know about the start of the game and set up, expectations of character histories, etc.

For this game:

1. Players will be passengers abord a seafaring ship that is swallowed by the eternal magical storm (The Roil) to your content's west. They boarded this risky coastal voyage to hurriedly make their way to, or to get away from, some incredibly pressing matter.

2. Players all shared the same destination, but may have boarded the vessel at different points.

3. Most 5e content will be allowed for the setting. Some things may need to be reflavored to fit the setting.

4. Little is established about player's home continent. Details established beforehand will be a collaborative effort and there will be room for additional details to develop during the campaign.

5. Survival and substance will play a role in this campaign. In towns or the wilderness, characters will have to eat

6. Players will complete a background sheet that will detail how they became/joined this squad. If a player character wants to play someone forced to join said squad, please check with the GM.

---

7. If a character follows an oath (like a paladin) or deity/ patron (Cleric/ Warlock) they will have their commitment tested and rewarded with a piety system. This ladder of benefits will reward players who take the opportunity to roleplay in a way that is consistent with their characters and will take the place of more material rewards other classes may receive.

Safety Systems: (TBD)

If we approach sensitive topics (Lines and Veils) a form of communication that works midsession will be in place. Feel Free to leave suggestions.

Figure 12

SECTION 10

MARKETING, GRAPHICS, & LOGOS

Marketing and branding account for some proportion of any working writer's cycle of creativity. (Barnard) For better or worse, that proportion has ballooned in recent decades with the seemingly infinite churn of social media platforms and potential audiences to engage with. Potentially lucrative, but certainly unwieldly, the contemporary process of marketing for writers is undoubtedly simplified by access to a research lab full of creative and variably talented minds. This is at least true of marketing for The Digital Xpressions Lab itself.

A selection of graphics, logos, and posters created by The Digital Xpressions Lab under the direction of Matthew Gordon is collected in this section.

SOCIAL MEDIA – Digital Xpressions Lab

Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/siucxpressionslab/)

SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS – Neophyte Studios

Discord Server (https://discord.gg/x6MwdNw8), Facebook

(https://www.facebook.com/NeophyteStudios/), Instagram

(https://www.instagram.com/neophytestudios/), Twitter

(https://twitter.com/neophytestudios?lang=en)

GRAPHICS AND LOGOS

THE NEOPHYTE CHRONICLES

Figure 13
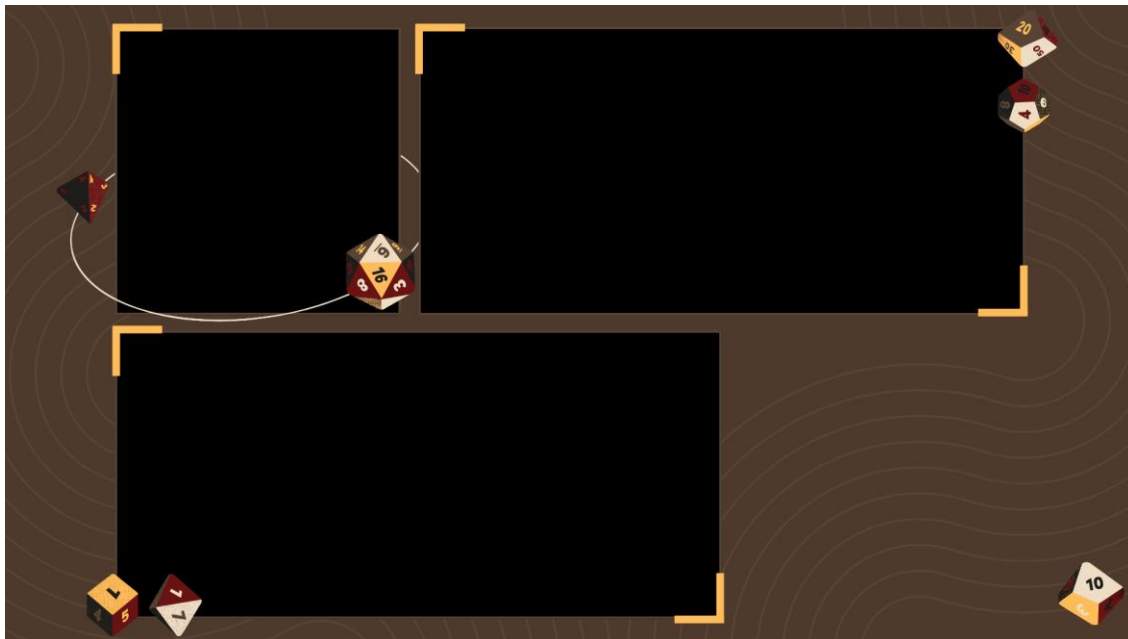
Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

DIGITAL XPRESSIONS LAB LOGO SHEET (UNUSED)

Figure 20

Figure 21

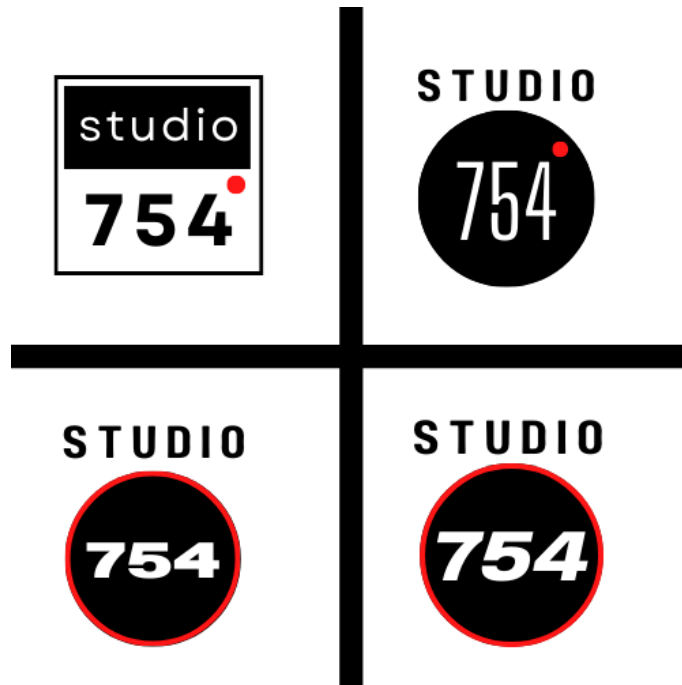Figure 22

Figure 23

STUDIOS 754 LOGO FINALISTS

Figure 24

POSTERS
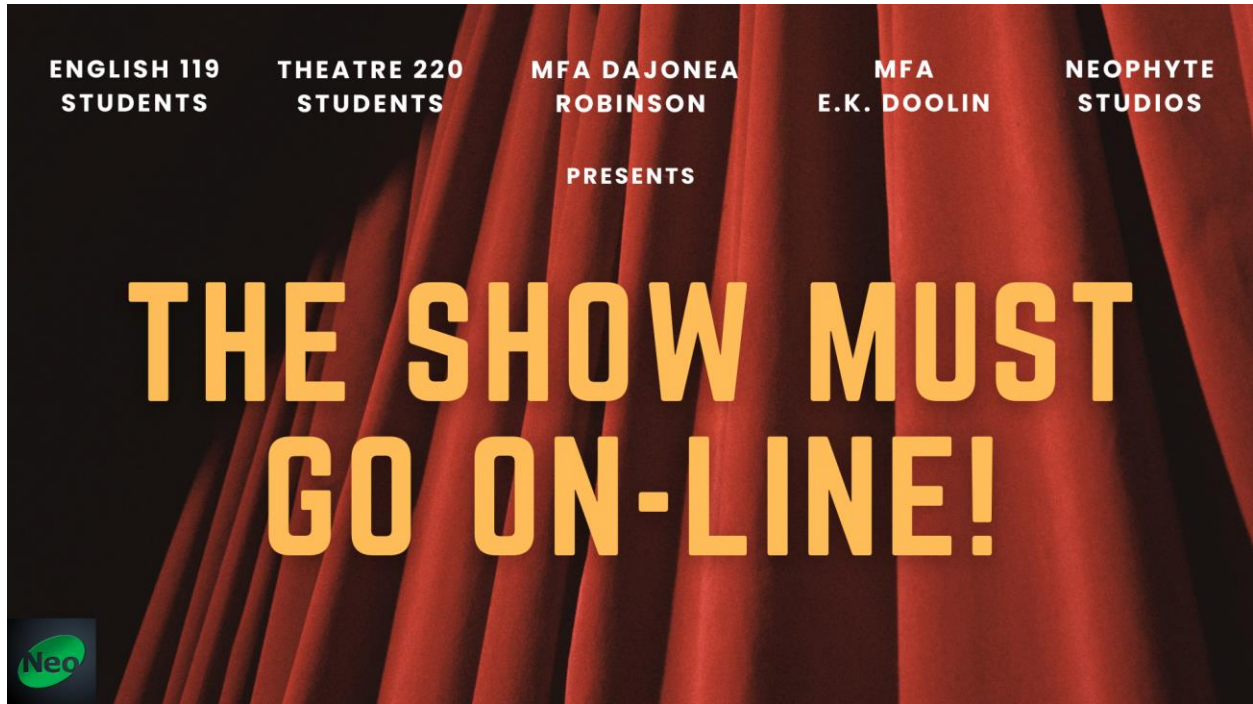
See figs. 2,7, & 8.

Figure 25

SECTION 11

NEOPHYTE STUDIOS

Founded in fall of 2020 by Matthew Gordon, professor Pinckney Benedict, and fellow graduate student Dylan Davis, Neophyte Studios was established to be the label of The Digital Xpressions Lab's digital content publishing arm. With activity across the websites *twitch.tv*, *youtube.com*, and *itch.io*, and a wide social media presence (see Section 10), Neophyte Studios acts as a hub for media produced by SIUC's creative writing program. Creative and academic content has seen consistent development and release over Neophyte Studio's lifespan as creative writing MFA candidates and guests discuss narrative, develop series, play games, host classes and talks, and publish their creative work.

Across the 2022-2023 academic year, under Matthew Gordon's direction, Neophyte Studios developed a flagship table-top role playing game actual play series, *Neophyte Chronicles*, while maintaining previously established content development and publication patterns. Neophyte Studios' YouTube traffic continued to benefit from content published on the topic of ZA/UM's award winning surreal socio-political detective odyssey *Disco Elysium*. (2019) This success has largely been interpreted as an appetite of audiences for academic voices to publish on prestige video games in a form accessible to general audiences, like a narrated YouTube play through or video essay. Overall, across the 2022-2023 academic year, Neophyte Studios' performance continued a consistent trend and, in context with Neophyte Studio's general performance, received substantial attention between October and November 2022. An image containing specific figures reflecting YouTube performance are included in this section as are a series of links to featured clips of Neophyte Studios content archived on *twitch.tv*. A

complete list of previously published media is available on

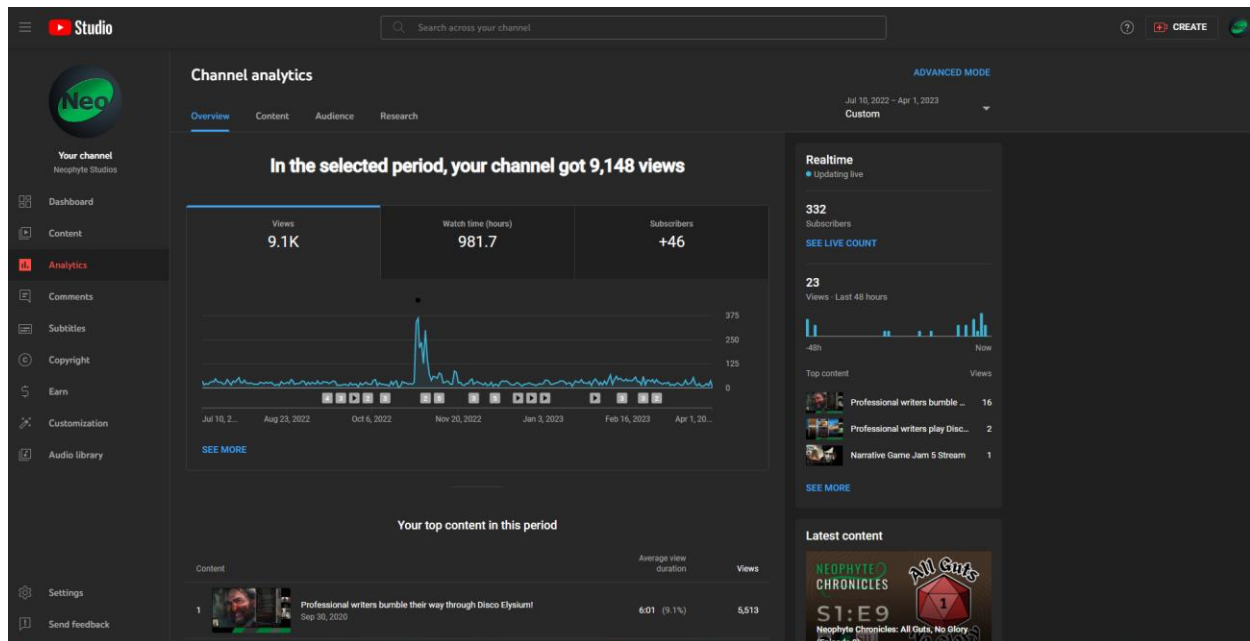https://www.youtube.com/@neophytestudios at the time of publicaiton.

Figure 26

NEOPHYTE STUDIOS *TWITCH.TV* URL - (https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios)

VARIOUS NEOPHYTE STUDIOS CONTENT CLIPS -

(https://www.twitch.tv/videos/1783213653),

(https://www.twitch.tv/videos/1783207697?filter=all&sort=time),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/TriangularGrotesqueLasagnaFunRun-RW1bWoKg4dhkP0zU),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/EnergeticBenevolentGrassSmoocherZ-tZiV339zf1Pd1nwb),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/GloriousOptimisticKangarooHoneyBadger-JJaQW2wHxFFY-KSO),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/CautiousAssiduousLEDNinjaGrumpy-6Vnye-w9wCfcTaNY),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/VivaciousCrypticOilPicoMause-OuuM4GmRrbgYdxnR),

(https://www.twitch.tv/neophytestudios/clip/GoodPlayfulDogeKappaRoss-EQDzUWcMX_4E220V).

Via *itch.io*, the independent digital game marketplace and game jam organization hub, Neophyte Studios ran the next instalment in its Narrative Game Jam series. Game jams see entrants participate in bespoke development in a limited and predefined amount of time. These events often have primary themes or requirements and, when held virtually, can span weeks or months rather than the traditional weekend of an in-person event. *Narrative Game Jam #5 | SIU's Digital Xpressions Lab* received nineteen individual game submissions from an international public audience. Across those submissions, sixty-nine votes were cast to determine which entrants would be featured during a live-streamed review of the top entrants by Digital Xpressions Lab research assistants. This was The Digital Xpressions Lab's highest performing game jam in three years.
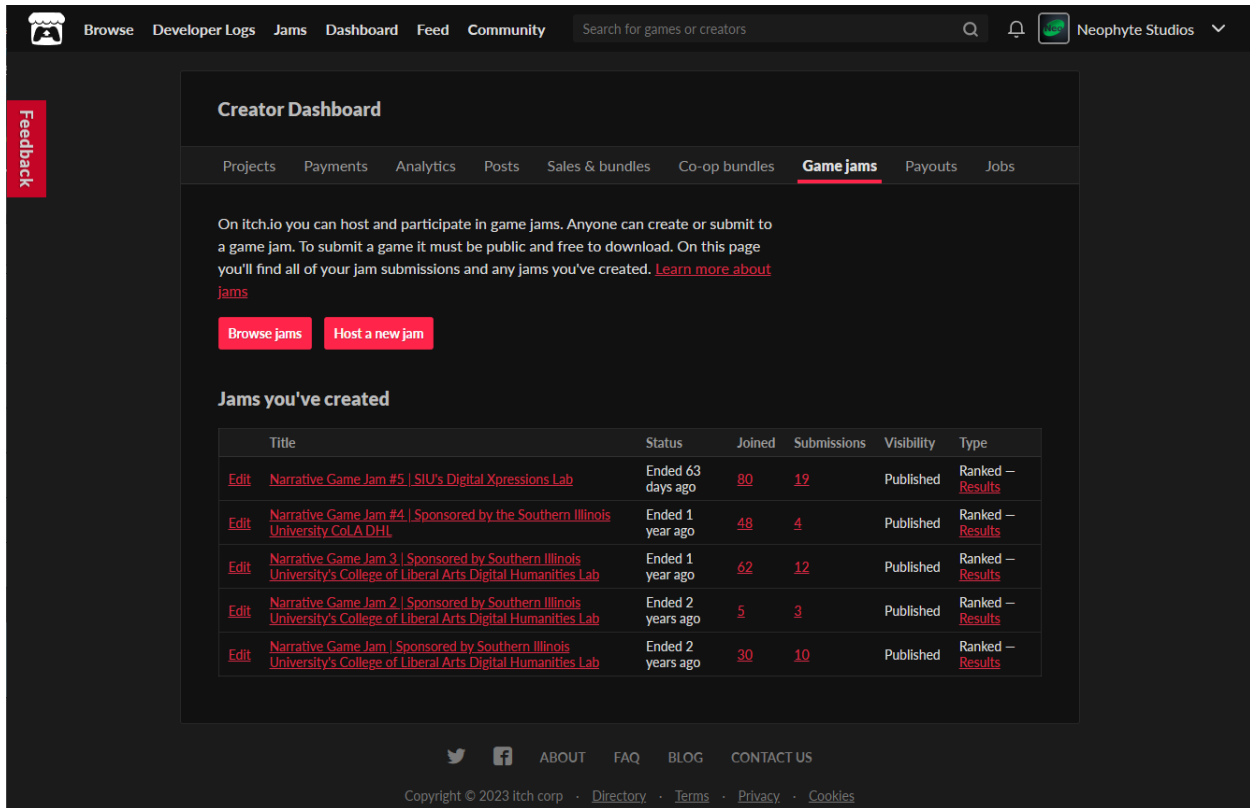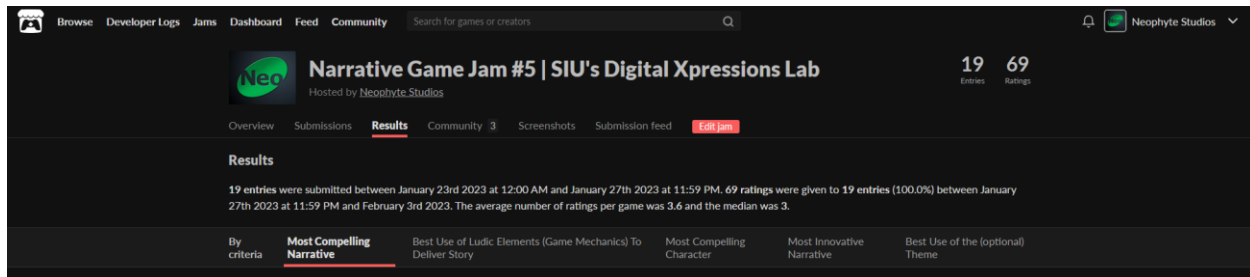
Figure 27

Figure 28

NARRATIVE GAME JAM #5 | SIU'S DIGITAL XPRESSIONS LAB URL:

(https://itch.io/jam/narrative-game-jam-5)

SECTION 12

SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Three major software development projects directed by Matthew Gordon and produced by The Digital Xpressions Lab began their life during the 2022-2023 academic year. Two of those projects, *Mayan Virtual Reality Escape Room* and *Sepsis Game*, entered into full development with *Sepsis Game* completing production in April of 2023. Resources were pulled from *Tunnel of Oppression* during the preproduction process and all that exist of this project are a set of early design and planning documents.

TUNNEL OF OPPRESSION

This project was opened after Matthew held a series of meetings with clients from SIU's Psychology department. An objective was set to develop an immersive virtual reality Tunnel of Oppression experience. (Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis) This software would, through animation or the filming of a 360 video, immerse participants in a Tunnel of Oppression scenario. In this case, that scenario would be a scene to do with the topic of 'driving while black', and allow an event to be ran without the required resources a physical version of the event would require.

Both, a design document and a development roadmap were created for *Tunnel of Oppression*.

Tunnel of Oppression: Driving While Black Event and VR Experience Development Document

Statement of Purpose

The Digital Xpressions Lab of Southern Illinois University intends on collaborating with the College of Health and Human Sciences to bring a Tunnel of Oppression event to SIUC's campus featuring an immersive virtual reality animation. This animation takes the place of a physical simulation typical of Tunnel of Oppression events.

The VR animation has a planned length of 3-8 minutes and will focus on the intersectional issue "Driving While Black." The precise intersectional identity featured in the animation will be developed as a part of the storyboarding process. This animation will be completed through the narrative design and animation expertise of staff and associated domain experts working with The DXL. This VR simulation will be developed for implementation in a tunnel of oppression event jointly designed by The DXL and CHHS domain experts. The event is intended to be held on SIUC's campus in February 2023. The event itself will incorporate three distinct phases for participants: 1) Briefing, 2) Simulation, 3) Debriefing. These three phases will be designed by The DXL in conjunction with the project's clients and relevant domain experts with the intent to provide a safe and supportive environment for participants.

Required Resources for Development and Deployment (TO BE REVISED DURING DEVELOPMENT)

Phase 1

Development: Design Software- Event Briefing Material (TBD), Narrative Designer(s), Social Work and CAPS consultant(s)

Deployment: Event Facilitator(s), Event Briefing Material(s) (Pamphlet, Video, Speech, Etc.), Event Space

Phase 2

Development: Actors, Audio Recording Equipment, Design Software- 3D Animation (Unity or Unreal Engine 5), Design Software- 3D Assets (TBD), Design Software- Audio (TBD), Intersectional Domain Experts, Narrative Designer(s), Social Work and CAPS consultant(s)

Deployment: Event Space, Oculus Quest 2s, PCs

Phase 3

Development: Design Software- Event Debriefing Material (TBD), Narrative Designer(s), Social Work and CAPS Consultant(s)

Deployment: Event Debriefing Material(s) (Questionnaire, Survey, "Further Reading" Suggestions, Etc.), Event Facilitator(s), Event Space

Plan for Revision

Learning Goals: At the initial establishment of contact with relevant domain experts, the development team will establish lines of communication for a timely and effective review process. Timely feedback will be vital for the effective integration of learning goals into materials across phase 1-3.

Animation: Relevant domain experts can review the VR animation at the The Digital Xpressions Lab. It is also possible to load the experience onto Oculus Quest 2s and meet domain experts or clients outside the lab. In-development builds of the animation may not be playable on Oculus Quest 2s and domain experts and clients will be encouraged to visit the lab for review. The DXL's central location on campus is expected to accommodate the involvement of domain experts for review and feedback.

Other Materials: Materials deployed in Phases 1 and 3 of the event will be distributed digitally to relevant domain experts for review. It is expected that this will facilitate timely feedback for revision.

Event: The tunnel of oppression event will largely be based off of a previously implemented model. Relevant domain experts will be consulted at various stages about the smooth integration of VR simulation for phase 2. This includes the training for relevant event facilitators to run and troubleshoot the VR experience and determining accessibility plans for the VR experience. Other materials developed for phases 1 and 3 will be subject to similar review.

Proposal for Future Development

The Digital Xpressions Lab proposes a continued partnership for development on this intersectional tunnel of oppression experience to refine the event and, ultimately, release a fully digital public version. This version would make further use of VR simulation to bring the totality of the experience into a single application or be made available on a preexisting public platform (YouTube and/or emerging metaverse networks). This would lay the groundwork for a series of iterative intersectional experiences to be developed and released utilizing this framework.

This project's continued development for digital release would provide significant opportunities for innovative interdepartmental scholarship and grant development across the Southern Illinois University system. Each entity intersecting with this project will have groundbreaking experience in the emerging fields of VR simulation for social impact and empathetic metaverse development. This is a tremendous opportunity for any looking to lead in the deployment of innovative opportunities.
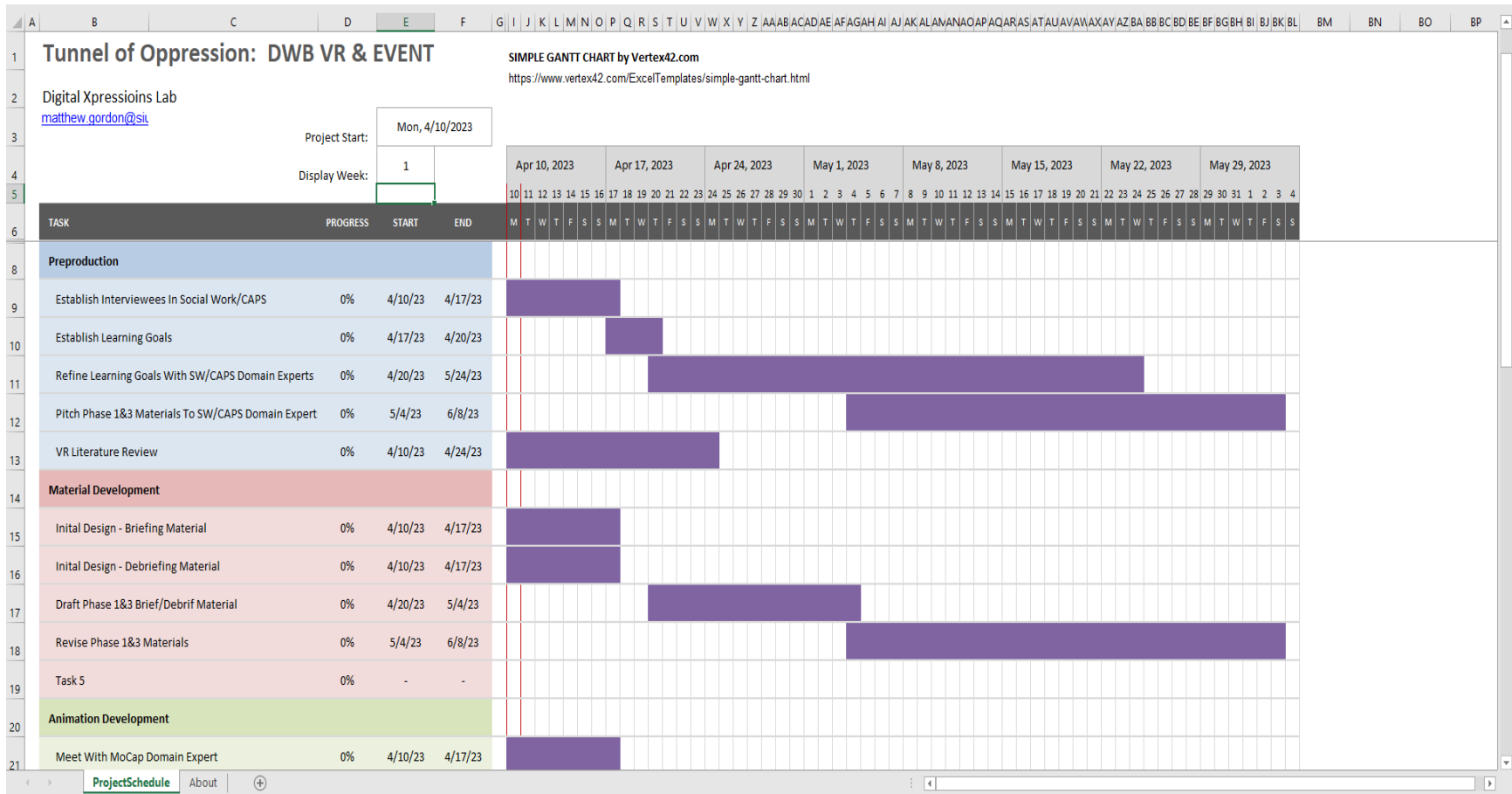
Figure 29

66

Figure 30

MAYAN VIRTUAL REALITY ESCAPE ROOM

This virtual reality escape room was adapted by Assistant Professor of Digital Media Arts & Animation Kevin Mercer and Matthew Gordon from a 2D learning game developed by Associate Languages & Linguistics Professor Lourdes Albuixech. The original design incorporated Spanish language puzzles into a narrative that facilitated the mastery of learning objectives for Spanish 101 students. As Graduate Director of The Digital Xpressions Lab, Matthew coordinated an evolution of this original design, secured a Lead Developer in Assistant Professor Mercer, acted as Project Director and Lead Writer, and went on to jointly present the project at Michigan State University's 2022 Meaningful Play Conference.

The adapted version of the escape room would see Spanish undergraduate students engage in various tactile puzzles after receiving a mysterious note handwritten in Spanish and being transported to a surreal Mayan landscape. Once there, students would receive further instruction in Spanish to solve individual puzzles and magically restore a great tree in the center of the play arena.

Matthew and The Digital Xpressions Lab's involvement in the project ended in November 2022.

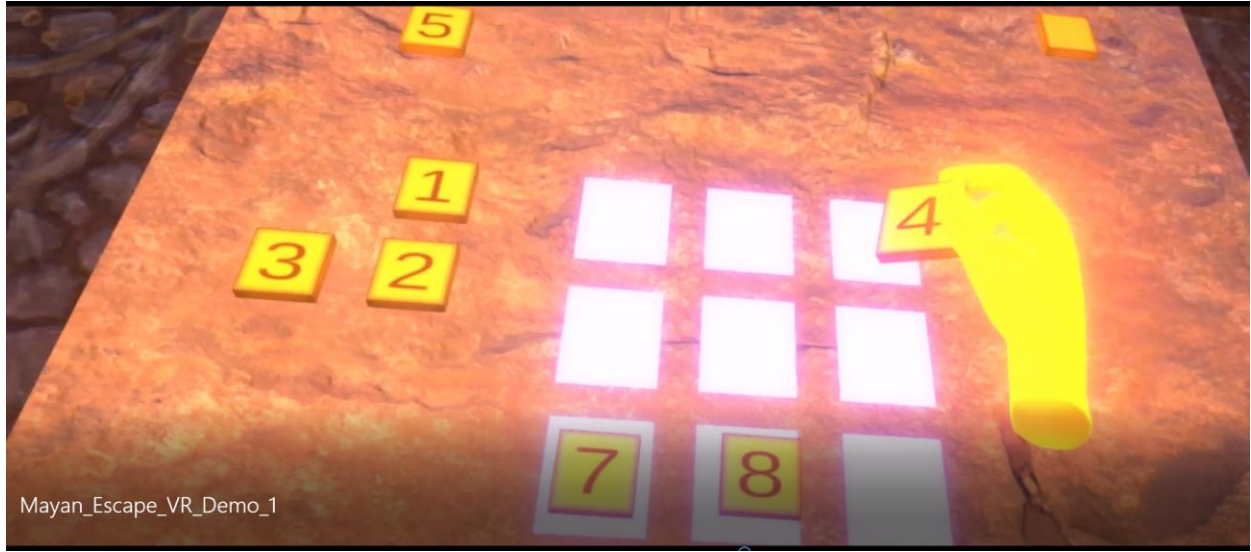Figure 31

Figure 32

Figure 33

Figure 34

Figure 35

SEPSIS GAME

This piece of virtual reality software was designed in partnership with SIU School of Medicine. Intended as a self-assessment tool for first year medical students, the game places players in an immersive emergency room setting where, with an attending physician, they are quizzed on the treatment of sepsis. The game's scoring tracks correct responses and is expressed as content mastery evaluated by the scene's attending physician character and social impact as demonstrated by the stress level of the scene's patient character increasing with each incorrect answer given. Together, these modes of player feedback provide a system of assessment that goes beyond content mastery and introduces an empathetic contextualization to the value of that mastery.

The scene The Digital Xpressions Lab constructed for this game is designed to be a simulacrum of early residency where medical students accompany attending physicians past a variety of patients. The game itself is adapted from a Twine text-based quiz provided by SIU School of Medicine students. As a piece of adapted software, it integrates the learning goals of the Twine game while expanding in the key areas of ludo-narrative harmony and fidelity.

Digital Xpressions Lab staff were divided into Art, Development, and Narrative teams with Matthew Gordon acting as Project Director, Project Manager, and the key point of contact with clients at The SIU Medical School.

Three presentations at SIU Medical School's 13th Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium are scheduled to feature topics centered around the classroom implementation of this software (see Section 8).
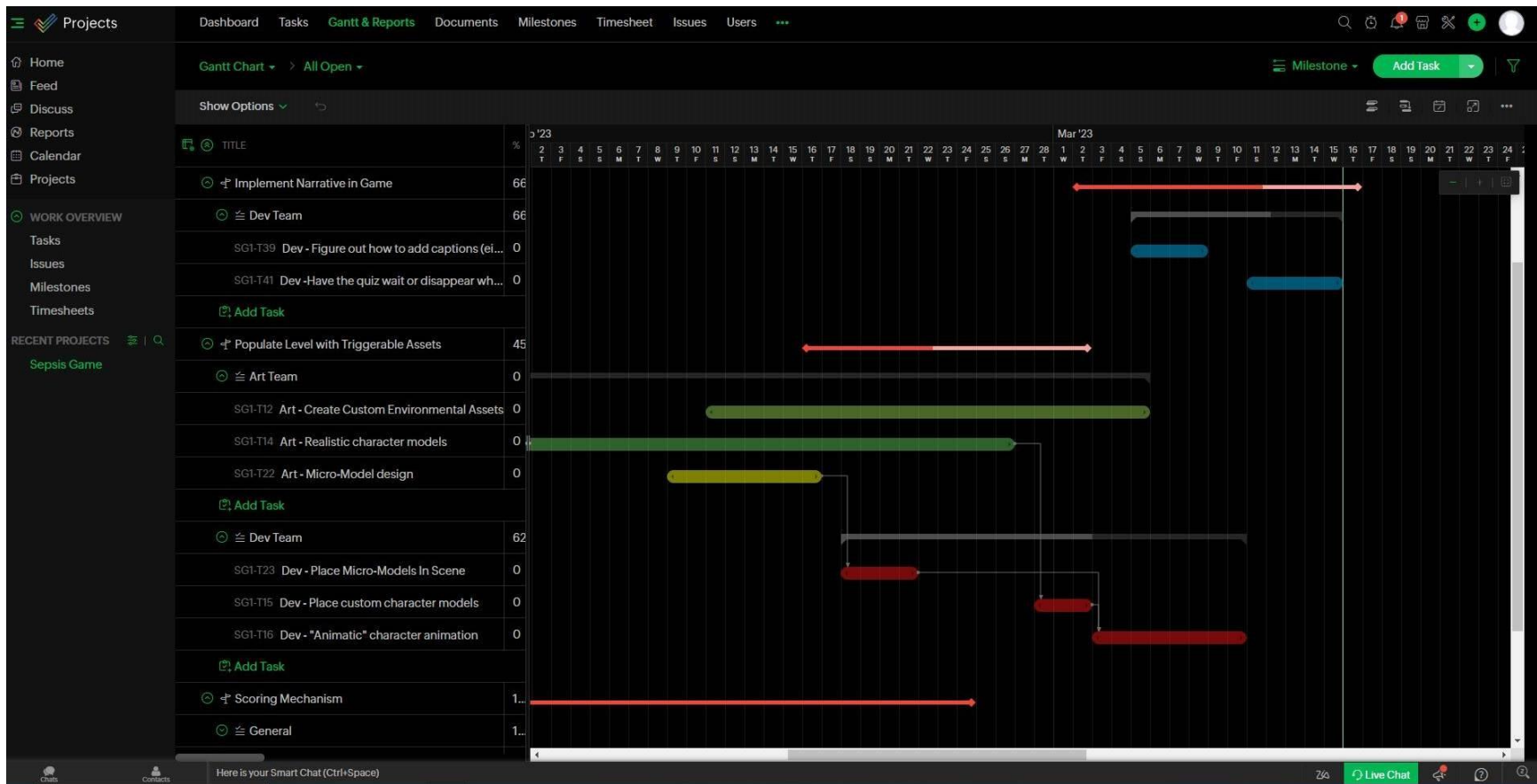
ORIGIANL TWINE URL: https://siu-gamification.itch.io/sepsis-gamification

Figure 36

<u>SCENARIO 2</u>

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    Now, we should consider the immune
    response. Each of the three
    complement pathways are activated
    by distinct mechanisms, and
    therefore should be activated in a
    distinct order. In Rosa's case—
    which sequential order should the
    complement cascade be activated?

*Quiz UI Appears

*Med student chooses answer option from quiz UI

*Quiz UI Disappears

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    Correct, the alternative pathway
    would be activated first, then MBL,
    and finally classical.

Player consents to advance:

<u>SCENARIO 3</u>

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    Moving on... we know that excessive
    activation of the complement
    cascade has the potential to
    contribute to septic shock. If we
    could create a medication that
    could act as a sponge that absorbs
    excessive proteins, we could
    decrease Rosa's risk of sepsis. Of
    the following complement proteins,
    which would we want to reduce?

*Quiz UI Appears

*Med student chooses answer option from quiz UI

*Quiz UI Disappears

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    Correct, if you are able to control
    the levels of these anaphylatoxins
    that would decrease the over-
    activation of endothelial cells.
    Improving and perhaps even
    preventing shock commonly
    associated with sepsis.

Player consents to advance:

<u>SCENARIO 4</u>

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    Knowing that certain immune cells
    help contain the infection, which
    of these cells would you wan to
    interact with C3b?

<u>SCENARIO 5</u>

          ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
    The main cause of sepsis is a
    systemic over-activation resulting
    in high pro-inflammatory cytokine
    levels. If you could reduce the
    levels of a cytokine produced by

Figure 37

*You are prompted with the possible answers.

*(Choice: Classic; MBL; Alternative)

*Patient grows more sickly.

> NURSE
> Interesting Choice, because we chose to activate classical first. The delay of the MBL and Alternative will likely be delayed. This will obviously increase stay time, and unfortunately will increase the risk as mortality as well..

*Unlock screen

> NURSE
> Moving on... we know that excessive activation of the complement cascade has the potential to contribute to septic shock. The goal is to create a medication that can act as a sponge that absorbs excessive protein.

*Lock Screen

> NURSE
> Of the following complement proteins. Which would be most effective of acting as the sponge that will target the development of septic shock.

*Prompted with the answers

*(Choice: C3b, C5b)

*Patient grows more sickly

> NURSE
> Interesting choice doctor. Allow me to again brief you. In sepsis, the systemic over activation of the immune system is what leads to hypotension, vascular permeability and shock. This being said, reducing the levels of C3b and C5b would decrease the production of opsonins.
> (MORE)

> NURSE (CONT'D)
> This makes it easier for phagocytes to eat invading pathogens. It would overall dampen the immunes systems innate response of killing invading pathogens.

*Unlock Screen

> NURSE
> Now that the over production of complement proteins is controlled. Now lets find a way to help the immune cells of these proteins turn to opsonins to phagocytose the bacteria. Knowing that certain cells, induce transcription of critical cytokines that enhance containment of the infection...

*Lock Screen

> NURSE
> Which of these immune cells would you choose to affect with C3b to have the greatest beneficial effect in controlling this infection?

(Choice: Th1 Cells)

*Patient grows more sickly

> NURSE
> Close! Those are T cells activated to similar a cellular immune response. The issue is that they are apart of the adaptive immune response and cannot activate at this part of the immune response. These are helper T cells and do not phagocytose pathogens themselves. At this stag, macrophage would benefit Rosa more than anything.

*Unlock Screen

> NURSE
> What leads to sepsis is less of the immune response as it is a systemic over-activation resulting in high pro inflammatory cytokine levels which impacts vascular function and fever.

*Lock Screen

*Show choices

> NURSE
> If you could reduce the levels of the cytokine produced by macrophages that is most likely responsible for this clinical picture of sepsis, which one would you choose?

> NURSE (CONT'D)
> This leaves a lot of potential that the bacteria will go unrecognized. Raising the mortality risk. The phagolysosom is created. Now the neutrophil must utilize several key enzymes in order to kill the bacterium inside.

*Unlock Screen
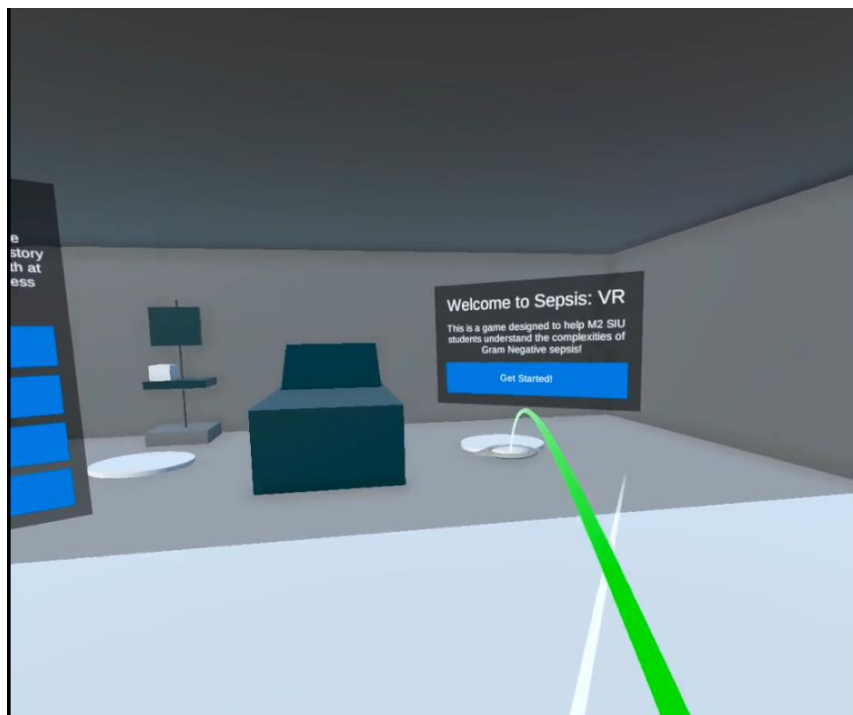
Figure 38

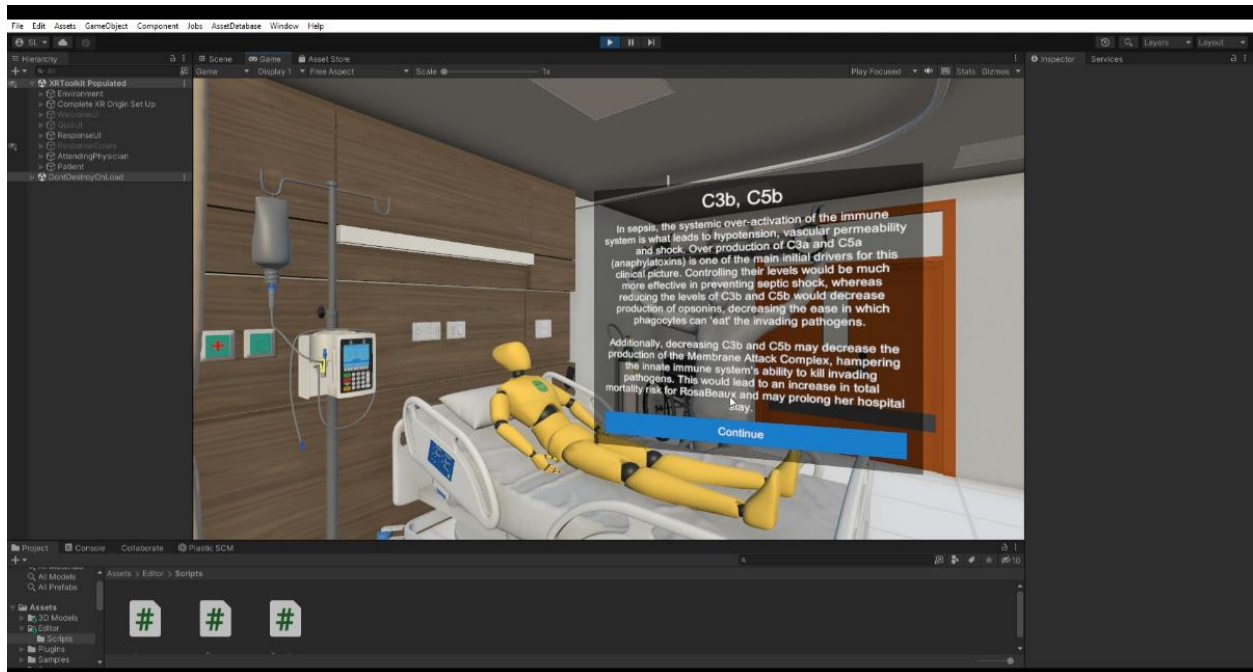75

Figure 39

Figure 40

Figure 41

SECTION 13

STUDIO 754

Studio 754 is the culmination of The Digital Xpressions Lab's successful partnership with Morris Library and The DXL's increased demand for more ambitious productions. Studio 754, housed in Morris Library room 754, was granted to The DXL during the course of Matthew's appointment as Graduate Director. Obtained originally to house the round-table style *Neophyte Chronicles* set, the space has since been used to hold traditional creative writing MFA workshop courses as well as hybrid undergraduate courses. As of April 2023, Studio 754 has also been used to hold and stream creative writing MFA thesis defenses including Matthew's own. Both, *Neophyte Chronicles* and a selection of Spring 2023's creative writing thesis defenses are available for viewing on Neophyte Studios' YouTube page.

More about the impacts of Studio 754 development and function can be read about in John Politz's Collaborator Statement.

Figure 42

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