

The Spread of Gaming Education

Editor's Note: Gaming education, whether a single course, or subject major, minor or degree program is a growing phenomenon. An informal count by this Editor showed 128 courses taught in 20 states at 33 colleges, universities and community colleges. Gaming courses fall under various departments, such as Hotel Management, Tourism, or Hospitality.

The report below by Dr. Thomas E. Merz, Professor of Economics, School of Business & Economics at Michigan Technological University shows gaming's acceptance in yet another type of program in a sci-tech setting. This report also serves as an excellent example of creative teaching for present or potential gaming instructors.

Gaming: Introduction and Perspectives

University Gaming Course Features
Guest Speakers, Field Trips
And Student Projects

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One three-credit course required of all first-year students in Michigan Technological University's general education curriculum is titled *Perspectives on Inquiry* (hereafter referred to as *Perspectives*). Its objective is to incorporate perspectives from different disciplines in order to engage students in active inquiry surrounding a particular topic. Faculty members submit topics of their choosing, and as one would expect, these topics cover a wide range—from the history of ice hockey, the first amendment of the Constitution, spinning and the media, to polar expeditions and world religions.

During fall semester 2003, I taught *Gaming: Introduction and Perspectives*. My interest in the course material was three-fold: (1) the gaming industry has been, and is likely to continue to be, one of the fastest growing industries worldwide; (2) one frequently encounters gaming establishments (e.g., casinos, racetracks and establishments offering state-sponsored inter-active games of chance and lottery tickets) as one travels through the Midwest, and (3) my professional interest is game theory, which studies strategic games, of which some are played in gaming establishments (e.g., poker).

The course's objective was to examine the gaming industry as a component of the entertainment industry, thereby encompassing a wide-range of activities while conjuring up business, economic, political and social issues. Students were told at the outset that the business aspects of gaming including accounting, auditing, marketing, security, and public policy (regulation and taxation) are sometimes lost among the elements of excitement and risk.

Twenty-two students enrolled in the course, including only one female (the enrollment cap in all *Perspectives* courses was 22). The course had no prerequisites and since students were not well versed in statistics, the course provided limited discussion on gambling odds and strategies. Since examinations are not permitted in *Perspectives* courses, evaluation of students consisted of two oral presentations, six short (3 page

limit) typed papers, a final paper (7 -10 typed pages) and class participation. Topics for short papers were based on the assigned readings. Oral presentations and final paper topics were chosen by students. Assigned textbooks were:

- Peter Collins. 2003. *Gambling and the Public Interest*.
- Denis Rudd and Lincoln Marshall. 1996. *Casino & Gaming Operations*.
- Gerda Reith. 2002. *The Age of Chance: Gambling and Western Culture*.

The Age of Chance proved to be challenging for students, but nevertheless insightful reading. *The National Gambling Impact Study Commission Final Report* (<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/ngisc/reports/fullrpt.html>) was required reading along with numerous other Internet gaming pieces and gaming articles from *Forbes*, *Fortune* and *Time*. Several videos (e.g., "Top Ten Gambling Sites in the World") from *The Travel Channel* were shown.

The course had two guest speakers. A psychologist spoke on problem gambling and a Native American and former casino card dealer addressed cultural differences and Native American gaming. Prior to each guest's appearance, students wrote a short paper on the presenter's topic and then rewrote the paper incorporating how their perspective of the topic was altered after hearing the speaker. During the 13th week of the semester, the class traveled to the local Native American owned casino where various casino managers described their duties and responsibilities. Approximately 2 hours were spent at the casino. Students especially enjoyed seeing and learning about the inner workings of a slot machine.

Students were interested in gaming from the outset. And, of course, interest in a topic is a wonderful motivating and learning tool. Many spoke openly about their own gaming experiences as well as those of friends and relatives. Final paper topics were diverse, including jai alai, high rollers, impact of gaming on local economies and tax revenues, the individual and social costs of problem gambling and Internet and sports gaming.

Student evaluations of the course organization, material and instructor were gratifying and encouraging. Gaming excites students. Whenever possible, incorporating facets of gaming into any course is likely to be a good strategy for engaging students. During the fall of 2004, I will teach another *Perspectives* course with a topic of major league baseball covering, in part, gaming surrounding "America's past time."