

## 2008 Flow Conference Position Paper Game Scholars Deserve a Home

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Everyone knows about the Wii and PlayStation is a household word. Most people have a favorite casual game they play when they are writing and just need a break. According to the Entertainment Software Association, 65% of American households play video or computer games and 26% of Americans over the age of 50 play video games.

Video games are ubiquitous. They are available on mobile phones, video game systems are in hotel rooms, and game systems can even be connected to the screens found in the back of mini-vans and SUVs. So many people play the games *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* that the radio stations are responding by playing more of the songs found in these games in regular rotation. Because video games are already such an established part of our culture they warrant study and a program of their own.

Scholars throughout the academy are studying games. Whether universities see game studies as a priority or not, video games already have strong academic interest. There is a current trend for universities to create game design programs that are created as a result of vast student interest and game industry need. These game programs are usually focused on helping students learn to design and build games. They also focus on helping students learn to work in team environments similar to those utilized by the game industry. These programs are necessary and useful for the students, the industry and the universities.

However, there is also a need to study games and the way that they are helping to shape and form our world. Game scholars study games in every discipline and sometimes they are alone in their endeavors. Schools need a way for interdisciplinary scholarship to take place and students who learn how to design games need to know how and why they impact society. In addition scholars who are studying games need ways to talk with other scholars.

The lack of an integrated approach leads to a lack of scholars building upon one another. For example, studies are still conducted that completely ignore the fact that girls play video games. Now this may seem to be a minor mistake and of no real consequence, simply something that can be corrected in another study in the future. The problem with that is that the video game industry pays attention to published work. Women within the game industry and women who play games have been working to correct the perception of women gamers in the game industry for years and they have to fight harder every time a study treats girls and women as an afterthought.

Game scholars need the kind of conversations and cooperation that a game studies program can provide. I think that film schools can be informative in the way that game programs might be developed. When a student attends film school they are grounded in all aspects of film. They are not simply taught how to use the tools of their craft, but they

are also taught how film influences society. Game students should also leave with a solid grasp of how their medium influences society. To simply know how to effectively make games is not enough. Students should leave firmly grounded in the history of video games, societal influences and some understanding of how games and politics are interlinked.

One way to make game studies more visible would be to make the students more visible as well. There should be festivals for the students to show off and explain their games to the public and other scholars. Student film festivals help students in film schools to showcase their skills and they have been successful ways for students to gain valuable feedback and to prepare to enter jury-judged festivals. Game students could also benefit from university sponsored festivals where they can showcase their talent. This type of festival could also include sessions where students who study the societal influence of games could participate on panels. This would also make students more visible to the video game industry.

The video game industry has a deep interest in interacting with game scholars and students and they are involved in an interesting push-pull with scholars who study games. Because of their fear of political backlash, the video game industry carefully watches all scholarship that is picked up by the mainstream media so that they can either embrace a favorable study or distance themselves from a study with whose findings they disagree.

The video game industry could help with raising the prominence of game studies if the industry were seen as actively interested in the scholarship of game studies programs. The game industry would definitely benefit from students who come to studios fully knowledgeable of not only the mechanics of game development but also the historical and societal influences of games.

A game studies program could be built using structures similar to other interdisciplinary programs. A game studies program that fully embraced all areas of scholarship along with game development would enable scholars to work more collaboratively and produce graduates who were well situated to take on the next level of growth and development facing the game industry.