"Course Design for Well-being: Towards a Students' Bill of Rights"

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The Students' Bill of Rights project rests on the insight that some of the design elements that produce a satisfying *game* are analogous to the design elements that make an effective *course*. Our research team began with game designer Graham Nelson's user experience (UX) manifesto, the "Gamers' Bill of Rights."[1] After identifying affective experiences common to both students and game players, we asked undergraduates to tell us about course design elements that they experience as inclusive (or excluding), fair (or unfair), effective (or frustrating), as well as those which produce feelings of confidence (or anxiety), agency (or powerlessness), engagement (or boredom), and resilience (or failure). The resulting Students' Bill of Rights is a meta-rubric intended to increase awareness of the connection between course design and student well-being, and to begin to outline a UX framework for designing courses that aims to keep students *in the game*.

The Students Bill of Rights
(Bolded statements are from Nelson's Gamer's Bill of Rights)

Rights of Inclusion (versus Exclusion)

1. **Not to need to be American.**

    Not to need to be of any particular race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual preference, gender identity, political affiliation, citizenship status, age, or appearance, or to be unburdened by disabilities, work obligations, illness, trauma, or grief.
2. **To be able to win without experience of past lives (or knowledge of future events).**
    To be able to succeed just as well as those who come into a course already knowing the material being taught.

Rights of Fairness (versus Unfairness)

3. **Not to have to do unlikely things (or to depend much on luck).**
    Not to lose points for failing to do unlikely things not listed in the rubric for an assignment.
4. **Not to be killed without warning.**
    Not to be assessed without time to prepare, or without study materials that reasonably resemble the content and format of the test.

Rights of Self-Confidence (versus Anxiety)

5. **To have a decent parser.**
    To have a way to ask for clarification, elaboration, or review of course content without having to feel embarrassed or ashamed.
6. **To know how the game is getting on.**
    To know how a loss of points will affect the outcome of a course, and to receive assignment and assessment grades within a reasonable amount of time.

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[1] Our project used the version cited by Jimmy Maher, 2006. *Let's Tell a Story Together (A History of Interactive Fiction)*, http://maher.filfre.net/if-book/if-10.htm

Rights of Agency (versus Powerlessness)

7. **To have reasonable freedom of action.**
   To have multiple paths for participation, some creative choice in project topic or format, and deadlines that are responsive to life circumstances.

8. **To have a good reason why something is impossible.**
   To receive a respectful explanation for why a reassessment of a grade or a requested change in course policy is impossible.

Rights of Effectiveness (versus Frustration)

9. **Not to be given horribly unclear hints.**
   Not to be given horribly unclear instruction, necessitating reliance on stigmatizing or inadequate help sessions outside the classroom in order to complete assignments.

10. **Not to have to type exactly the right verb (and to be allowed reasonable synonyms).**
    Not to have to be graded through learning technologies or practices that do not allow for reasonable variance in format or wording of responses.

Rights of Engagement (versus Boredom)

11. **Not to be given too many red herrings**.
    Not to be given too many lectures that don't fulfil learning objectives, don't support homework assignments, or don't teach the content that is going to be assessed.

12. **Not to need to do boring things for the sake of it.**
    Not to need to do boring or time-consuming things with no meaningful purpose beyond the accruing of points.

Rights of Resilience (versus Failure)

13. **To be able to understand a problem once it is solved.**
    To be able to understand why an answer was right or wrong, and to have the chance to gain mastery of whatever content was not fully learned.

14. **Not to have the game closed off without warning.**
    To have a balanced distribution of points, opportunities for grade improvement, and a path to success even after significant setback.

In fall 2022, Judith Pintar will be working with the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning to host a series of Students' Bill of Rights working lunches. Faculty participants will share their teaching best practices and collaborate on annotating the Students' Bill of Rights, with specific recommendations for each category of course design that it addresses: course policies, classroom activities, assignments & assessments, and communication &rhetoric.

The Students' Bill of Rights project, and the faculty working lunch series are supported by the Distinguished Teacher Scholar Grant, a program of the Teaching Advancement Board in the Office of the Provost, and by partners at CITL. Faculty interested in participating in a Students' Bill of Rights working lunch may contact Judith Pintar, jpintar@illinois.edu, Ava Wolf, arwolf@illinois.edu, or Cheelan Bo-Linn, cbolinn@illinois.edu.