ENGAGING ENGLISH MAJORS WITH VIDEO GAMES: IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH-MAJOR IDENTITY FORMATION

Justin Nicholes

Humanities programs in U.S. colleges face recruitment and retention challenges. One of these challenges involves rooted misconceptions that the job outlook remains bleak for students graduating with a humanities degree in spite of contrary evidence (American Academy of Arts & Science). Another challenge, it seems, arises from the dearth of published reports on humanities-specific persistence. The present report focuses on one humanities major, English, to address this second challenge. Here I provide results of a case study suggesting that video games incorporated into our writing pedagogy uniquely promise to engage and support identity formation of English majors, with the ultimate goal being to nurture students' motivations to persist in humanities majors.

Video games have been defined in relation to the terms *digital game*, *serious game*, or *simulation*, and can be defined here as an interactive computer-based program in which players attempt to achieve specific goals (Prensky). What is already known about video games in relation to college-student engagement is that game-enhanced instruction attempts to marry learning with the engagement felt while playing video games (Blessinger and Wankel; Prensky). Students in math classes have reported feeling greater engagement, described as enjoyment and motivation, when playing math-learning games (Chen et al.), and the mere presence of video game-related instruction has been linked to boosts in persistence rates of college students, such as students studying in an undergraduate introductory business course (Case) and in gamified online courses (Krause et al.).

In first-year composition courses, video games have been conceptualized as texts used to engage students and enhance the learning of narrative genres (Jackson). Jonathan Alexander argued for pedagogical transformations through the purposeful incorporation of gaming in the field of composition, indicating gaming as capable of supporting students' reflections on literacies developed and created by gaming as well as "trans-literacies" that students can transfer from gaming experiences to disciplinary and professional literacy/communicative experiences (55). While existing literature presents a convincing picture that video games uniquely support engaging course activities for learning and literacy development, what remains to be explored is how video games become objects of evaluation that, here particularly, English majors select as they construct their disciplinary identities in their majors. James Gee's seminal book has described how video games differ from books and movies, specifically in terms of video games becoming "embodied stories" that allow players, as central characters in the storyline, to make choices that alter how storylines unfold (81). From these descriptions of video game storylines, then, it would be expected that video games increase opportunities for players/readers to find themselves in "a position of relative power in a given literacy event" (Norton, "Identity, Literacy" 10). What remains is research to explore the viability of this assumption as well as what this means for student engagement.

In my discussion here, I argue that one fruitful way of exploring student motivation to persist in a major is by understanding how students construct disciplinary identities. Identity has long been conceived as social performance (Butler; Ochs). In this study, when students evaluate aspects of their curriculum, they can be said to be indexing aspects of their identities in order to perform belonging to, or separation from, a departmental community as they are verbally constructing it. As a social act, then, identity performance is observable in linguistic units (or verbal/textual utterances) that index stances, which simultaneously evaluate objects and the stance-takers who make those evaluating statements; stances, in turn, index aspects of

identity (Du Bois; Ochs). Identity, then, is presented and traceable in people's socially contextualized identity performances.

While identity is always contextual, *disciplinary identity* refers to a specific context where students construct themselves. I argue that an especially useful approach for those of us in the humanities who aim to engage our students is to understand disciplinary identity as mediated by the people, practices, and materials constituting specific programs and departments. This is in line with the theoretical positions of Bonny Norton, who has explained that students' investment in their learner identities can be understood in terms of their investment in the *specific classroom practices and conditions* related to where and how instruction takes place (*Identity*). In distinguishing the concept of investment from motivation, and coming from the perspective of a language instructor, Norton has pointed out that a learner may in fact be motivated to learn but may have little investment in specific classroom or community practices, "which may, for example, be racist, sexist, elitist or homophobic" (*Identity* 7). The point I want to make here in referring to Norton to discuss disciplinary identity is that students may ultimately desire to graduate—to earn a chemistry or computer science or English degree—but not necessarily from our college, our department, our program, or us as instructors. Persistence in a major, then, signals some degree of investment in a disciplinary identity and, simultaneously, some degree of investment in the people, practices, and materials mediating contact with immediate and imagined (Wenger) disciplinary communities.

When it comes to specifically what kinds of *literacy* activities prompt student engagement and investment, it is again helpful to refer to the literacy research of Norton, who explained that literacy practices that involve the producing of various kinds of texts ("oral, written, drawn, or performed") that students are invested in and that they may gravitate toward in non-academic settings "provide students with the opportunity to explore a range of identities, including those of the imagination" ("Identity, Literacy" 10). Norton described literacy as comprising relationships, saying,

> literacy is not only about reading and writing, but also about relationships between text and reader, student and teacher, classroom and community, in local, regional, and transnational sites. As such, when learners engage in literacy practices, they are also engaged in acts of identity. ("Identity, Literacy" 10)

Important for Norton was that educators understand that some literacy experiences, because of these relationship dynamics, may be more engaging to some students than other literacy experiences. For Norton, students should have a feeling of "ownership over meaning-making" since, lacking ownership, any meaning-making becomes "meaningless and ritualized"; further, meaning-making is facilitated when learners are "in a position of relative power in a given literacy event" ("Identity, Literacy" 10). It might also be argued, then, that students' choices over content and form of writing, as well as whether they write inside as well as outside of class in ways they see as connected to their discipline, could shed light on how much ownership students report in relation to disciplinary literacy experiences.

Empirical studies into the kinds of writing experiences that English majors find engaging, however, remain scarce. In an earlier study, I explored the question of what kind of writing experiences English majors expressed feeling ownership for (Nicholes). Statistical analysis revealed a hierarchy of ownership, with undergraduate English majors reporting significantly more ownership over their creative writing than over their persuasive and research-report writing. Undergraduate English majors also reported feeling significantly more ownership over their persuasive writing than over their research-report writing; however, in comparing undergraduate and postgraduate English majors' ownership, analysis suggested that postgraduates felt significantly more ownership over their research-report writing than undergraduates did. What this study suggests is that creative writing may be a common experience for some English majors and may be among the more meaningful writing experiences English majors have while undergraduates. This, I argue, suggests the possibility that English majors report ownership over literacy experiences precisely

when they have control over form and content of their literacy productions, per Norton's research into students' investment into literacy practices and connected academic identities (*Identity*).

Still, the scarcity of published reports on how to engage and support disciplinary identities of English majors is an issue in need of being addressed. One indicator of this need is the dropping number of English majors graduating in the U.S.: According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 41,317 English bachelor's degrees were awarded in the 2016-17 academic year, down 7.7% from 2011-12, just five years earlier, which saw 53,765 degrees conferred. This drop has been popularly attributed to perceptions that English majors fare poorly in the job market compared to students of other majors (Jaschik). Yet wage-earning statistics have suggested that English majors make lifetime earnings equal to business majors (The Hamilton Project), and English majors possess skills that qualify them for a wide range of work (Matz). Employers and entrepreneurs in particular may also prize both the writing skills and the creativity fostered in English-major coursework (Strauss), and, if development of marketable job skills isn't enough, English-major coursework also generally features activities, such as poetry and fiction reading, linked in empirical studies to the ability to understand human diversity (Hanauer) and to exercise empathy (Johnson). More is at stake, then, in assessing how to engage and support English majors than the job security of people like myself. A college program could do worse for society than to populate it with empathetic humans skilled at critical reading, writing, and thinking.

In the present study, then, the following research question was posed: *How do English majors construct disciplinary identities in relation to video game-related instruction?*

Method

Research Site and Sample

This study took place at a northeastern U.S. state public university that describes itself as a comprehensive, doctoral/research university. The university enrolls approximately 14,000 students (approximately

2,250 of them graduate students, 80% identified as White, and 56% identified as female). The department of English where participants were studying had fifty full-time faculty members who taught more than six undergraduate options, including literary analysis, film, and writing tracks. English departments have been described as existing along a sort of continuum, with literary, liberal-arts focuses toward one end and writing studies, rhetoric-and-composition focuses toward the other (Anderson; Balzhiser and McLeod; Leverenz et al.; Miller and Jackson). The present context falls more on the literary-studies, creative-writing end, especially when contrasted with departments where rhetoric and composition exist outside English departments (Anderson).

Procedures

All interaction with participants was overseen by the appropriate Institutional Review Board. As an instrumental case study, meaning the kind of case study meant to extrapolate from cases to a broader issue (Stake), this study focused on how individual students used language to indirectly index aspects of their disciplinary identities. This focus on disciplinary identity construction meanwhile aimed to provide insight into belonging and persisting in college.

With invitation from professors, I visited English-major classrooms to invite English majors to participate. Regarding inclusion criteria, participants had to be enrolled at the research site, be undergraduates, and be English majors. Students who volunteered completed an informed-consent form, which explained that they would be interviewed two times. During the first of two interviews with each participant, I followed a life-story interview protocol (see Appendix A). In this interview, I invited participants to narrate their lives in relation to their decision to become and remain an English major. Students were free to select any moments or personal qualities they wanted in order to construct themselves in their narratives. The interview questions were intentionally broad to avoid leading students toward topics. After digitally recording participants' responses, I transcribed their narration to put responses in sequential order. Then, generally one week after the first meeting, I invited participants

to return for a second interview. The purpose of the second meeting was for member checking of the academic life story that I created based on the words, phrases, and sentences uttered and recorded in the first interview. I then continued the data-collection phase by asking interview questions specifically related to disciplinary writing (see Appendix A), which I transcribed at an interactional level (see Appendix B).

In analyzing narratives and transcriptions of 10 total participants, I worked with a team of researchers to carry out cooperative coding (Smagorinsky). This process involved me and 1-2 other researchers meeting in a conference room to negotiate how to determine units of analysis in the narratives and which codes might be given to a particular unit. We decided that units of analysis began and ended whenever a participant's narrative focused on a new theme. *Theme*, meanwhile, was defined according to Braun and Clarke, who wrote that "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (82). This meant units could be as small as one word or phrase and as long as individual clauses or entire paragraphs. After a session for developing codes and negotiating the transcription of two of ten academic life narratives and two of ten disciplinary writing interviews (20% of the data), I created a coding test for my coding team using units not cooperatively coded. The result of our process was a very high degree of reliability, with an average measures intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of .99 for both sets of data.

Results and Discussion

Of participants in this study, 100% of seniors majoring in English (2/2) referred to a popular upper-division course in the department on video games as literary narratives. Additionally, two first-year English majors referred to having first-year courses (composition and lower-division English classes) that included video game-related assignments. Although the overall data set included responses about other kinds of assignments, such as literary analysis and creative writing, I focus here on responses about video game instruction because the

excitement students expressed while talking about these experiences struck me as especially informative for our efforts to engage English majors. Data from these four participants are presented in the sections that follow.

Joanne[1] (Female, Senior, Writing Track)

A senior, Joanne edited the university's student-run literary magazine during the time she participated in this study. She entered the English major straight from high school. In her academic life story, she told about her current life in her major and the video game class she was taking:

> Right now I'm in a video games class with Doctor Zhang. I have never touched video games prior to this semester. I kind of considered them a joke, and I kind of considered everyone who played them to just be wasting their time. So I think that I took that class, one, to fulfill a credit requirement and, two, because I was thinking, Here's my mindset, and I want to change it, because it's not a positive outlook on the gaming community. So I took the class not knowing what to expect and being a total noob, and I'm kind of stunned at how much I appreciate it now. I'm not a gamer, and I will not invest money in games, but I love the discourse that we've had so far in this class, and it's just completely blowing my mind how much focus is on text in video games. I haven't really explored the community behind it, but I think it's incredible that this college offers that class. It really reminds me that the world of literature is so large, and I wouldn't have guessed that prior to coming to college. (co-written academic life story)

Joanne narrates here about entering Dr. Zhang's popular video games-as-literature class with what she describes as skepticism of gaming and gamers' use of time but also openness to learn more about a group of people joined by gaming. An interesting turn happens in this section of Joanne's narration in which she presents herself as being

on the outside of a gaming community and first looking at it with disdain ("a joke") but then, in a shift, she presents herself almost derogatorily and humbly as a newcomer ("noob") to the gaming community. This shift in self-presentation in relation to a gaming community leads to Joanne's overall wonder and praise for the community and its central, gaming activity. While Joanne's experience in the video game course is not described as having changed her mind on her own non-gaming habits, the class is described as engaging ("blowing my mind") and as expanding Joanne's understanding of her major ("the world of literature") and her surprise and maybe appreciation for her university ("it's incredible that this college offers that class").

Joanne's comment that having an engaging video games class impacted her perception of the university has implications for the issue of persistence and disciplinary identity construction. Attitudes that students hold toward their institution have been linked in retention studies to students' intentions to persist, with negative institutional attitudes predicting early voluntary drop out (Campbell and Mislevy; Schreiner and Nelson; Strahan and Credé). While signaling *interest* in her course, which itself is a variable with bearing on college-student persistence (Harvey and Luckman), Joanne's positive evaluation of the video game class also establishes a stance from which she constructs herself as a person open to an expanded interpretation of literary studies. She presents herself as open to changing her attitudes toward video games when those games are framed in a literary-analysis context. In her identity performance, Joanne invests (Norton, *Identity*) in both the learning activity in her major and simultaneously in her disciplinary identity that aligns with, and therefore belongs in, a department where such activities happen.

Joanne's data are also unique in that she describes her engagement with video games as surprising. For other participants, video game coursework entails on outside-of-class passion.

Sylvester (Male, Senior, Pre-Law Track)

A senior at the time of this study, Sylvester switched majors his sophomore year from business to English pre-law. He was a member

and leader of numerous associations on campus and worked with the Salvation Army as a financial literacy tutor in the university town. Whereas Joanne discussed an unanticipated appreciation and even awe for video gaming in the previous section, Sylvester describes himself in his academic life story as someone who has always enjoyed video games: "Personally, I've always liked video games. Video games are a lot like books for me: It's telling a story" (co-written academic life story). Here Sylvester, in expressing how video games relate to books, can be said to be making two main moves: He is expressing the similarity between video games as kinds of narratives as discussed in Gee while also presenting his joy of video games as not being distinct from his joy of stories, narratives, and the material of the English major he joined. This congruence is important for identity construction as presented in narratives. As Charlotte Linde explained, one property of the self that is constructed in narrative is a self that is "continuous" through time (101). What Sylvester constructs here, then, is a disciplinary identity that enjoys stories, whether those stories come in the form of games or more traditional literary texts focused on English-major coursework.

In another passage from his academic life story, Sylvester refers to the video-games-as-literature class that Joanne also referred to. In narrating about life events that explain how he became and why he remains an English major, Sylvester narrates the following:

> I think one of my greatest memories is taking a Special Topics in English class with Doctor Zhang. It was on video games as literature. It was amazing to put some academic merit behind playing video games, which has always been one of my favorite hobbies. With Doctor Zhang, it was such a new kind of field, and he told us that we were working with him to generate some research on this topic that he would later publish in the field. As an undergrad student, being told that you are at least contributing in some way through his class to a research project made me think *Wow, this is incredible at this level to be given that opportunity*. (co-written academic life story)

Sylvester's narration here suggests engagement with video games resulting when he can frame his video game passion within academic discussions. Yet Sylvester is also narrating here about research activity with potential to extend outside of the classroom. Undergraduate research or inquiry has long represented a high-impact educational practice, or HIP, which holds special potential to engage and retain students (Kuh).

In addition to Sylvester's narrating that being able to frame video games in academic discussion was engaging, Sylvester also presented evidence for this engagement by describing how easy it was to write numerous pages on the topic. In his disciplinary-writing interview, in which I asked Sylvester to talk about meaningful writing experiences he has had in his English major, Sylvester said the following:

108[2] SYLVESTER: [05:14] Wow there's um (.) plenty to pick from that's- that's for sure.
109 Well I- (.) I guess I'll speak to some of the ones that really helped me enjoy the writing aspect.
110 Of course Doctor Zhang's class like I mentioned.
111 Um the writing about video games (.) that just (.) you know I was churning out fifteen twenty pages on that no problem just because I was like "This is awesome.
112 "I love writing about this.
113 "I could do this all day.
114 "If this was my assignment in class no problem with that."
115 You know I (.) tru:ly enjoyed that kind of writing.

Sylvester's description is suggestive of definitions of engagement related to the concept of *flow* or the feeling and experience of seemingly losing oneself in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi). In positively evaluating video game coursework in his English major, Sylvester constructs himself as invested in this learning activity and in the English major itself. He performs his disciplinary identity in a way illustrating alignment with and belonging in the department.

Warlock (Male, First Year, English Education Track)

A first-year student at the time of his participation in this study, Warlock nearly majored in archeology, then flirted with the idea of joining the Air Force, but finally settled on being an English major. In his academic life story, Warlock pointed to the role a video game played in the inciting incident putting him on the road to be an English major:

> What set in motion my path on the English major happened when I was about eight years old. My stepfather brought home a pack of video games, and one of those games was *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle* Earth. That moment and that game set in motion a lifelong love of fantasy. (co-written academic life story)

Here, like Sylvester, Warlock seems to suggest that video games and stories go hand in hand. In presenting fantasy as a genre of literature deliverable through various modalities, Warlock constructs himself as a person whose being in the English major is congruent with interests established early in his life—when he was eight years old.

Yet, for Warlock, video game and English-class content are presented in his disciplinary-writing interview as separate activities and interests. In the following excerpt from our second interview, when I asked Warlock about meaningful pre-college writing experiences in English coursework, he said the following:

54 WARLOCK: [02:42] All right. Uh but yeah and all throughout high school,
55 Um writing in general's (.) kind of it almost felt like it was lacking.
56 Uh a lot of my teachers (.) would just give kind of bland assignments that were "Oh a page,
57 "Or (.) two pages."
58 And I could write that in ten minutes.
59 There was- there was no point of--

60 I just felt like it needed to be more,
61 And I always got excited when it would be like "Oh a research project,
62 "Ten pages."
63 I'm like "Oh finally something."
64 Because I- I wrote so much it's weird to think that I would split my time between that and playing a lot of video games,
65 And still having a social life somehow and (.) most of the time having a lady friend.
66 But uh I- I- I honestly felt like I needed to be challenged more almost.
67 And that's why I kept writing on my own time,

Here, Warlock negatively evaluates some of his pre-college writing experiences as not being challenging enough while also noting that writing is something he can do effortlessly. Yet he also speaks here of writing and video game-playing as separate activities that split up his time. They are both engaging activities for Warlock, just as video game-playing was for Sylvester. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Warlock positively evaluates being able to write about video games. Later in his disciplinary-writing interview, when we came to meaningful writing experiences he has had in his English major in college, Warlock said the following:

199 WARLOCK [09:10] The third [assignment in Composition 1] though I felt like was really the one that (.) let me be creative.
200 It was uh--
201 we had to choose the article.
201 We had to pair up in groups and (.) it was uh how video games relate to learning.
202 And how (.) and I just went off the wall.
203 I think the page limit was supposed to be three or four pages,
204 And mine ended up being almost thirteen,

205 She wasn't happy. @@
206 She wasn't happy with it. @

Here Warlock presents himself as uniquely invested in writing assignments that gave him the chance to be creative (line 199). For Warlock, as he indicated elsewhere in his academic life story and disciplinary-writing interview, *being creative* meant, in part, *having freedom over form and content* of writing assignments:

158 WARLOCK: [7:00] And I think that's why I'm enjoying now in college there's so much--
159 you're not bound as much.
[…]
167 So (.) uh I think that's why I really enjoy the English Department here.
168 And in particular it's because I have been given freedom.
169 A lot.

Warlock also offers evidence of his engagement by, as Sylvester did, noting that he was able to write numerous pages when his passion overlapped with the assignment requirements. When the literacy activity incorporates genres previously outside of academia, Warlock can be said to be exercising ownership over that literacy event (Norton, "Identity, Literacy"). Overall, he constructs himself as skilled in writing, and especially so when writing complements his video game passion.

Zaphod (Male, First-Year, Writing Track)

Zaphod was a sophomore college student who had spent his first year of college majoring in computer science and minoring in math. He was in his second semester as an English major at the time he participated in this study, and he was considering adding a computer-science minor as well. Zaphod is unique among the four English majors in this study in that he was taking two classes that simultaneously involved video game activities, one of them being Composition 2 (the second course in a two-semester, first-year composition sequence)

and a lower-division English class for his major. In his academic life story, Zaphod refers to the lower-division English class, which had just started the week before, in the following passage:

> In one of my other English classes, we're studying video game narratives. My professor emailed me over the winter break to give me the book list for the class, and they were all video games. We had to play them, and we are analyzing them, and it is really fun. We're studying *Don't Starve* and comparing it to an article about what a video game is and how this is or isn't a game in some ways.

Zaphod's passage here highlights a trend among the four participants who referred to video game instruction as engaging: The instruction is framed or presented in expected genres (which, here, is in the informative genre of the book list). The newness of video game instruction, however, comes from the content of the instruction being video game-related. The activity of moving through a "book list" of video games also seems to suggest a kind of validation of video game-course content by, as Sylvester put it earlier, adding some academic merit or organization to video gaming.

While Zaphod describes the prescribed activity of following a list of games as being engaging, he also narrates about a Composition 2 course in which he has the power to bring in a video game he plays outside of class, entitled *Bloodborne*, into the writing classroom:

> And in my Composition 2 class, we're doing New Weird as a genre of writing to write about. At first I chose steampunk because I had read steampunk novels like the *Leviathan* trilogy, and those are awesome. But then I thought about it more and I recently chose gothic, and I'm super excited about it because I'm going to be able to talk about *Bloodborne*, and I love *Bloodborne*. It is a reverse or corrupted version of the hero's journey, with the narrative style is very low key and you have to read into things and to really understand the video game to understand what is going on. In *Bloodborne*, the hero's narrative

is flipped upside down. It's a gothic horror with a lot of H. P. Lovecraftian elements. You know, in a lot of books and video games with H. P. Lovecraft stuff, you fight Cthulhu, and that's so dumb. You can't fight Cthulhu. (co-written academic life story)

Whereas Zaphod refers to the prescribed booklist of games as "really fun," he evaluates the writing activity described here, in which he can bring video gaming to the center of his academic life, as something he is "super excited about." As Zaphod puts it, "I love *Bloodborne*." As was the case for both Sylvester and Warlock, Zaphod presents himself as especially invested in bringing previously outside-of-class passions related to gaming into the classroom.

In our interview about his disciplinary writing experiences, Zaphod reiterated his excitement about this assignment. When I asked him to talk about meaningful or memorable writing experiences he was currently having in the English major, he said the following:

125 ZAPHOD: [05:12] You know.
126 Like I had to (.) do a topic discussion.
127 Like I had to do a topic search and discuss the topic I was doing for my Composition 2 class.
128 And that was just I was doing uh (.) doing (.) uh Gothic.
129 AUTHOR: [05:33] Yeah. *Bloodborne*?
130 ZAPHOD: [05:35] Uh yeah.
131 I'm gonna tie it into *Bloodborne* later.
132 I can't do that right away.
133 I have to do- I have to get a historical,
134 I have to do a topic assess and a topic search.
135 And historical then contemporary.
136 And then I can do (.) that one.
137 Which (.) I'm excited about that.

In addition to stressing his excitement about this assignment, in which he seems to find himself in a relative position of power (Norton, "Identity, Literacy"), Zaphod also presents himself as invested in a

writing sequence that ends with his chance to bring video games into the assignment. The suggestion here is that such an assignment, which allows Zaphod to incorporate gaming as a final step, motivates several earlier steps and writing processes. Overall, in presenting himself as invested in such activities, Zaphod also presents himself as invested in his disciplinary identity as an English major. He constructs himself as belonging in the major in part by referring to such writing activities in which he can readily draw on his personal interests with video game literacy and video game playing.

Conclusion

Guba and Lincoln's concept of "transferability" is useful here, in which the question of external validity or generalizability—concepts befitting larger-scale quantitative projects—is replaced with the question of how "the findings of a particular inquiry may have applicability in other contexts or with others subjects" (10). With that in mind, conclusions based on the case study data presented here can be stated as follows:

1. Video game assignments and courses seem to hold potential to engage English majors in first-year composition courses and both lower- and upper-division English major coursework, and this engagement can occur for gamers and non-gamers alike. 100% (4/4) of the English majors in this study positively evaluated the inclusion of video games in English major-related or writing-related coursework.
2. Video game instruction has the potential to engage English majors when that instruction is discussed in terms a student can understand as congruent with other activities or ideas in the major in which a student has invested, such as narrative genres or literary canons. 75% (3/4) of the English majors in this study commented on video games as related somehow to aspects of the English major they are invested, such as literature in general (Joanne) or stories in particular (Sylvester, Warlock).

3. Video game instruction has the potential to affirm students' outside-of-class literacy practices in academic settings, thus altering students' perceptions of writing, their English major program, and the university itself. 75% (3/4) of the English majors in this study discussed their appreciation of, surprise, or excitement at having video games framed in academic discussions (Sylvester, Zaphod, Warlock).
4. The engagement English majors may feel while completing video game-related assignments is such that students feel it is relatively effortless to produce numerous pages about video games. 50% (2/4) of the English majors in this study specifically mentioned being able to write numerous pages as evidence of the engagement and excitement they felt about video game-related instruction (Sylvester, Warlock).

Indeed, video game instruction seems especially suitable for inclusion in English departments and digital humanities programs. The appreciation and evaluation of narrative and fiction seem to cover the usual terrain of English studies and English major programs. Henry Jenkins' point that video games do not so much create narrative worlds as provide spaces for individuals to construct uniquely tailored experiences seems of importance to engaging English major pedagogy. Although not all video games tell stories, they all, as Jesper Juul has argued, require players to construct fictional worlds. In this way, video game content in writing classes seems uniquely capable of engaging students on individual, personally meaningful levels: Video games prompt ownership and agency over and through self-constructed video game fictions and worlds. English majors seem also to be uniquely capable of applying literary theory, and of contextualizing games into historical contexts.

As such, English departments should explore the "transferability" of the case study findings here in their own departments and programs (Guba and Lincoln 10) by assessing the incorporation of video games into composition coursework and both lower- and upper-division English major coursework. Based on preliminary results here, it

also seems to be most engaging when students are placed in relative positions of power in relation to literacy activities (Norton, "Identity, Literacy"), which means not only prescribing games and activities for students to play and to analyze but also giving students ownership of their writing assignments by allowing them the choice over some of the content and form of written products.

Pedagogically speaking, specific aspects of video game teaching activities were mentioned by participants in this study as noteworthy. These aspects, and teaching ideas, are listed here:

- *Reading, analyzing, and discussing articles about video games, then playing games that illustrate concepts and points featured in that reading.* Writing instructors may ask students to select articles or reviews of games to discuss in class. Games may then be played in class, and reflected upon in writing or speaking activities, as illustrating or reflecting points from a reading.
- *Presenting video games as part of a reading list in the syllabus.* For writing instructors more comfortable with gaming, or who allow students to negotiate reading lists, making games part of the syllabus and specific reading list may be engaging.
- *Allowing time for students to enjoy the fictions constructed through video game play.* Reflection on the phenomenon of building and experiencing fictive worlds of video games may take many forms—from in-class discussion to formal reflective compositions. Empirical approaches may also be taken to prompt students to create research questions about video game experiences. Quantitative, qualitative, and arts-based research methodologies may be introduced to address research questions.
- *Discussing the classroom as a site of ongoing research on video game instruction*. Related to the point above, English majors may engage in the high-impact practice of undergraduate research through the exploration of the phenomenon of game playing or building.

- *Allowing students to select games to analyze, play, and present to others*. Finally, and related to above points, assignments that ask students to select games they find personally meaningful, to reflect on why those games are meaningful, to analyze elements of those games, and then finally to play and report on those games are worthy of exploration in teaching writing.

More systematic approaches, ultimately, are still needed to understand departments as systems that include video game instruction. Activity-system theories (Engeström), for instance, may aid in descriptive analyses of how video game instruction fits in the overall system of a department's curriculum. Is there a level, one may ask, at which video game instruction loses some of its engaging qualities or students begin to express less intense investment in those activities and, concurrently, their disciplinary identities in a video game-incorporating program and university? Further, analysis exploring the degree to which students exposed to video game instruction alter or enhance persistence intentions or motivations to remain in a major is called for to get a broader view of trends and correlates of the issue of games and persistence in programs of study. The impact of engaging professors, as well, cannot be dismissed, making it important to realize that video game instruction alone may fail to engage English majors as expected if not complemented by a professor's excitement or support.

Ultimately, video game instruction seems to hold promise for prompting students' investment in those activities, the department, and disciplinary identities as English majors. These identities, I have argued, can be said to signal enacted belonging in a program and university. These identities may also signal intentions of persisting in college toward graduation. While more empirical work is needed to understand video game instruction as a dependent variable in analysis as well as an element of wider departmental systems of instruction, the findings here present preliminary evidence that video game-as-literature instruction is an especially effective avenue worth additional pedagogical and empirical attention.

Notes

[1]Pseudonyms are used for all participants and any faculty member participants named.

[2]Transcription conventions are adopted mainly from Bucholtz (see Appendix B).

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Meeting 1

1. Take a minute and reflect on experiences you had before coming to this college. Then, tell me, how did you come to be an English major? What experiences do you think made you choose to be an English major?
2. What were your experiences like with the topic of English before coming to college?
    a. What else can you tell me about your past experiences with English that led you to being here?
3. Could you tell me about some experiences you are having now in the English Department?
    a. What else can you tell me about your experiences in the English Department or in your English classes?

Meeting 2

1. **Narrative Summary Member Checking**
2. **Interview Questions**
    1. What were your experiences like with writing in English classes before majoring in English at this college?
        a. What kind of writing tasks or activities—in or outside of class—did you encounter?
        b. What were your experiences with those writing tasks or activities?
    2. Could you tell me about some writing experiences you have had in your English major here at this college?
        a. What kind of writing tasks or activities—in or outside of class—did you encounter?
        b. What were your experiences with those writing tasks or activities?

APPENDIX B

Transcription Conventions

Transcription conventions are adopted mainly from Bucholtz :

.	end of intonation unit; falling intonation
,	end of intonation unit; fall-rise intonation
?	end of intonation unit; rising intonation
--	self-interruption; break in the intonational unit
-	self-interruption; break in the word, sound abruptly cut off
<u>underline</u>	emphatic stress or increased amplitude
(.)	pause of 0.5 seconds or less
(n.n)	pause of greater than 0.5 seconds
@	laughter; each token marks one pulse
[ ]	overlap beginning and end
=	latching (no pause between speaker turns) (1447)