

Go on a Wild GooseChase: Utilizing Digital Scavenger Hunts for Classroom Engagement and Community Building

Introduction

Online learning continues to rise in popularity and increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee, 2021). In addition to online classes, online coursework is becoming a norm for traditional classes. Although e-learning continues to become normalized, education at large remains reeling from the impacts of decreased student mental health, motivation, and attention spans, as well as a shift in learner preferences. When properly used, online learning provides unique access to education, wherein students can attain information at a distance and progress in their education without geographical barriers. Therefore, it is critical to engage online learning intentionally and incorporate techniques that can improve learning through increasing student motivation, improved connectedness, and engaging tactics. GooseChase (GooseChase Adventures Inc., Toronto, Canada) is a scavenger hunt-inspired online application that uses multiple mediums to engage users in a community-focused approach. This application has been applied to online and face-to-face courses to foster teamwork and a sense of unity among students, whilst also improving knowledge and experience over course-related material.

Application

GooseChase is primarily a smart phone-based application with both free and subscription options. The authors have utilized the free technology option with broad capabilities in various instances. Once the app is downloaded and an account is created, a user can join or set up “missions” within a game. Game modes include individual, with all users completing the missions on their own, or team-mode which allows groups of students to complete missions together and compete against another teams. The creator adds missions to the game which are available for the users to engage with and work toward. Missions in the list can be sorted by point value, alphabetically, or in a custom order determined by the creator. An example of a custom order mission would be for users to align course content or units in the order they will be covered. The creator can determine the length of time the game runs for and can add more missions while the game is active, as well as determine the point value of each mission. As users complete missions, their submissions are posted to an activity feed seen by all users, the point value is assigned to the individual or team, and point values are added to create a leaderboard that is updated instantly and inspires competition among users. An instructor can enhance the game’s capabilities by adding bonus points to any mission for items such as creativity or displays of overt collaboration amongst students or teams.

There are three data input options for each mission: global positioning system (GPS), photo or video, and text. GPS missions involve a physical element, wherein a user must “check in” at the determined geographical location. A GPS mission example in a horticultural course might require users to check in at the university’s greenhouse or a local community garden. This feature is helpful for instructors who would like to verify students have visited particular places. GPS missions may be less useful in distance courses where students may not be centralized to one general geographical area. Photo missions require a photo to be taken following the prompt given by the creator. For example, an entomology course may require a photo of a monarch butterfly, or an agricultural photojournalism course may require a photo that utilizes the “two thirds rule” of photo composition. Similarly, there is an option for a video mission wherein responses require video capture, prompted by the creator. An example a soil science course may request students capture a video of a common action that contributes to soil erosion. Lastly, GooseChase includes text missions where users enter a text responding to a prompt, for example students in an agriculture journalism course may compete for the best headline from story information within the prompt. Creators can choose to show text responses in the activity feed, or keep them for the creators, which may be helpful if the text responses are used to score for the assignment.

Application Assessment

There are a multitude of applications of GooseChase to various agricultural topics in higher education. From additional engagement and team building in face-to-face courses, to community building and competition to engage students at a distance through a unique online tool, GooseChase is a useful and accessible option.

As education evolves, there is a growing emphasis on engaging students in more active, participatory learning environments online. GooseChase can play an important role in this shift. Additionally, gamification has become a popular strategy for enhancing student motivation and engagement (Alsawaier, 2018; Chans & Portuguez Castro, 2021), such as Kahoot! (Kahoot!, Oslo, Norway) or Duolingo (Duolingo, Pittsburgh, PA). GooseChase maximizes the components of gamification by providing opportunities for both collaboration and competition, and integrates multiple forms of learning, combined with long-term possibilities. By creating a competitive and game-like environment, GooseChase fosters a sense of excitement and engagement, particularly for students who may struggle with traditional learning methods, and especially for those craving more entertaining learning options in a post COVID-19 environment; the authors of this paper first utilized GooseChase in the classroom during a study abroad program-pivot during the 2020 pandemic and experienced extremely high engagement from all students. Students voluntarily expressed their appreciation for the application’s use in the course from both the connection with their fellow students, and the competitive nature of the game.

GooseChase is easy to set up, adaptable and customizable, making it a versatile tool for various subjects. Instructors can design missions that align directly with course objectives, whether to reinforce theoretical concepts or encourage hands-on learning. With properly created missions,

this technology can promote collaboration, problem-solving, and active participation—key elements of effective learning. Not only do these aspects heighten the course’s experience and improve the environment, but it hinges upon soft skills that are crucial in both academic and real-world settings, and improved learning retention (Fry Ware, 2024; Mohd et al., 2023). The authors have used GooseChase in multiple courses and with collaborative teams to help assist in engagement, adding unique learning environments, and to add a game-based element to content acquisition. Based on its varied use and applied success in multiple contexts, we highly recommend the use of GooseChase as a unique way to engage learners.

References

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