

William Petrie Graduate Student Library Scholarship 2018 Recipient

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Award-winning Essay

Finding Ideas and Making Games in the University of Victoria's Digital Scholarship Commons

The first time I was introduced to the newly constructed Digital Scholarship Commons (DSC) was when I visited the University of Victoria's campus last year. I did not know then how formative the space would be for me.

In the first semester of my Master's program in English literature, I decided to go outside of my comfort zone and take a class in digital studies (Dr. Jentery Sayers's exceptional ENGL 508). For this class, we put ourselves into groups with the plan of developing an idea for a game and then prototyping a short scene of the idea we had come up with. My group immediately decided we wanted to do a video game. About a month into the project, we hit a wall. We did not have an idea for the game and we felt at a loss. Storyboarding was an obstacle. Around this time two significant things happened.

The first was that, as a class, we came to the DSC and set up about three screens around the room, each with a different video game available for playing. While this was meant for just the students in ENGL 508, there were a few observers and DSC staff members who participated. While playing the games was fun, it was more exciting to be able to walk around a room and watch how other people interacted with the games. Seeing what others enjoyed about different types of games and being able to visualize our prototype being played in an open space such as the DSC pushed us to make some decisions:

- 1) Games did not need a goal to be fun and
- 2) Not everyone had to have a sort of point system to feel success or enjoyment of a video game.

We still, however, needed a solid idea for what our game could be. The second crucial moment for me came within the same month. Richard McCue of the DSC held a Twine workshop for my class. Twine identifies as "an open-source tool for telling interactive, nonlinear stories"; in other words, Twine is a software that allows you to write narrative-based video games that do not necessarily have to have an end goal and most certainly do not include the accumulation of points. It was during this Twine workshop, in which Rich encouraged and directed us in how to write interactive stories, that I was struck by the simple and fun idea for our game: a twig, walking around to collect leaves and to make a pile to jump in (which would re-scatter the leaves for a new round to begin). No points, no end-goals, just a simple tale of a character having fun with its environment.

The role of the DSC in the completion of this project did not end there. We continued to use the DSC space throughout the whole semester; it was perfect for our weekly group meetings and staff were always around and available for questions. The DSC was where we ended up

presenting the final product of our game to the wider UVic community, a fitting environment considering the role the shared learning space played in enabling the success of this project.

I have continued to use the DSC and attend other workshops on varied subjects that have aided my academic career in a variety of ways. In fact, it is my usual table closest to the back windows of the DSC at which I write this very essay.

If you would like to view the final product of this assignment and play the game yourself, please visit this link:

<https://english508.itch.io/adventures>