



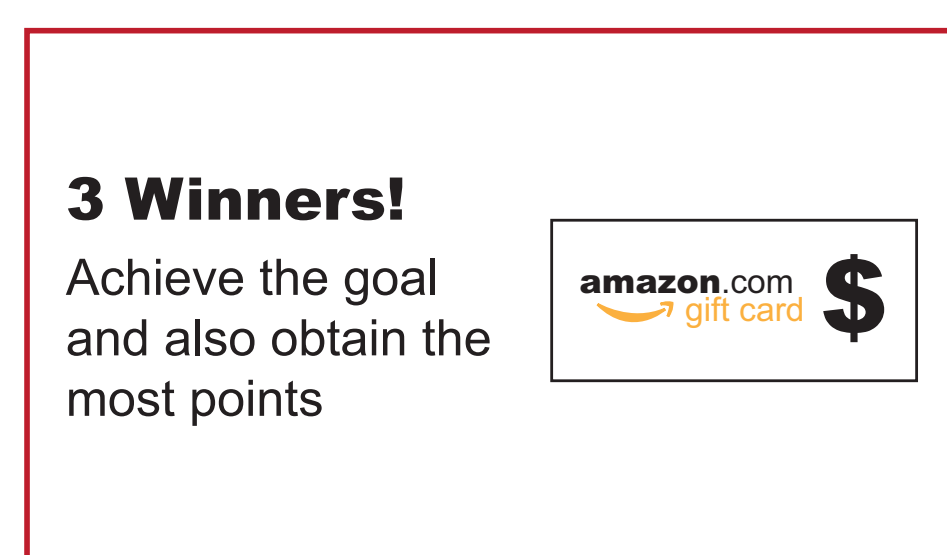
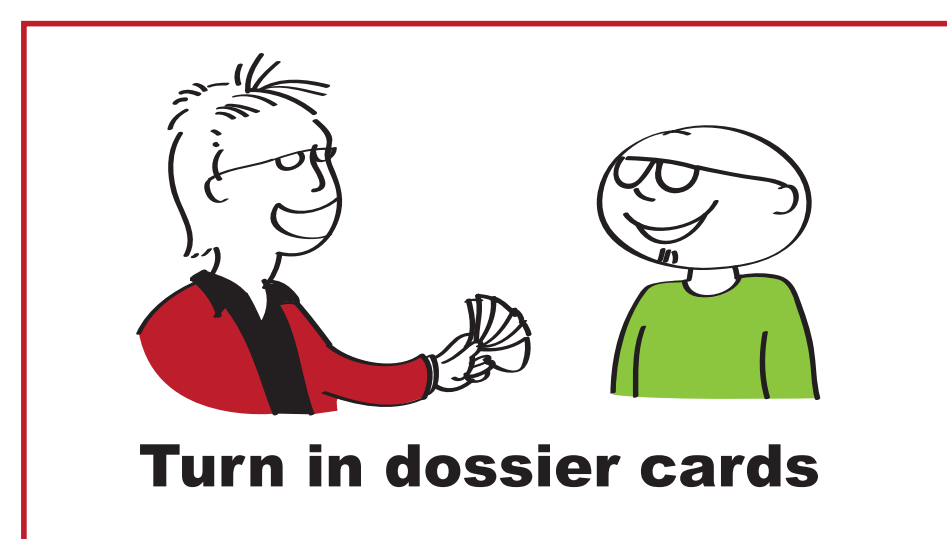
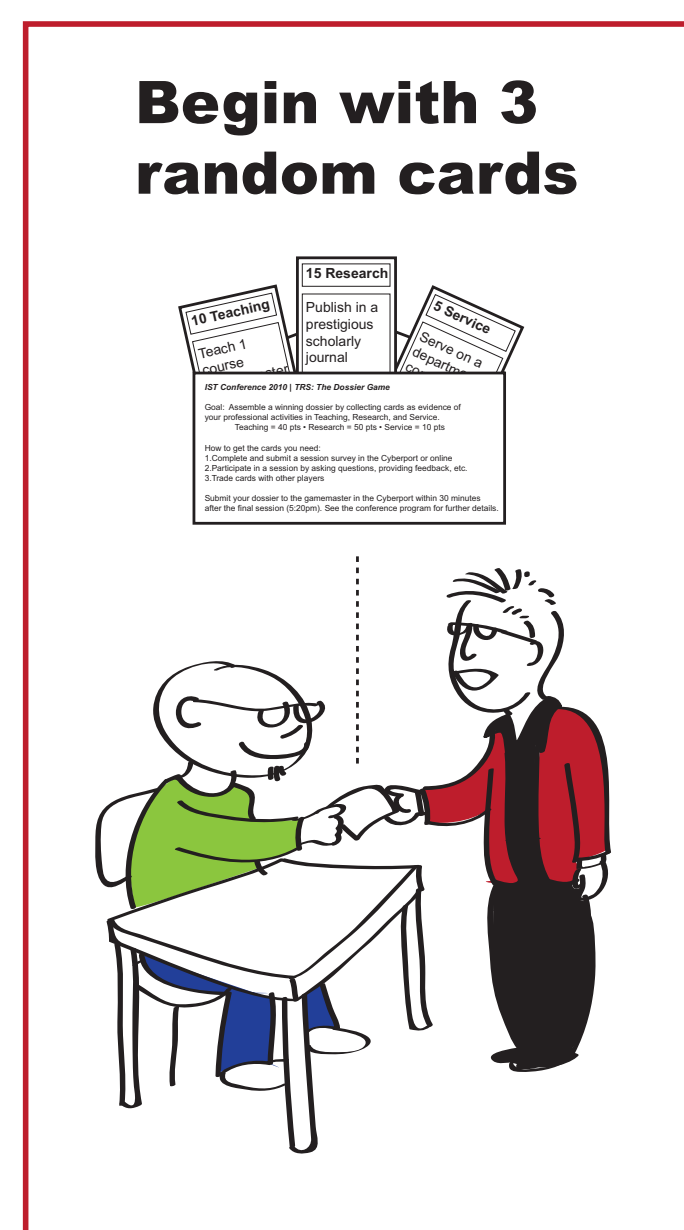
# Exploring the Role of Identity in the Design of a Serious Game



**Micah Modell**  
Instructional Systems Technology  
School of Education  
Indiana University, Bloomington

**Rod Myers**  
Instructional Systems Technology  
School of Education  
Indiana University, Bloomington

## The Dossier Game



## Context

- The Site:**
- A large, Midwestern University
  - A department preparing for a student-led conference

- The Designer:**
- From a family of game enthusiasts
  - Ph.D. Student of Instructional Systems Technology
  - Holds degrees in English education and Instructional Design
  - Film maker, Web Designer, Cartoonist, Programmer
  - In search of a design challenge

## Goals of the Game

- Increase conference session survey completion
- Increase participant interaction with presenters and other participants
- Increase awareness of the contents of a tenure dossier

## TRS - The Dossier Game

In the game, the players take on the role of research university faculty. The goal is to build their tenure dossier by collecting cards that represent the activities of tenure track professors. These fall into the following categories:

- Teaching
- Research
- Service

Each card describes an activity and specifies a point value (e.g. "Publish a peer-reviewed article in a major journal. Research: 15pts.").

Cards are obtained by turning in session surveys, by engaging with the presenters during sessions to earn one of the presenter's two discretionary cards, or by trading cards with other players.

To win, a player must compile a dossier (a set of cards) that meets or exceeds the required goals for teaching (40pts), research (50pts), and service (10pts). If multiple players meet these goals, the player with the highest point total wins.

## The Study

### Purpose

To explore how one educational game designer at a large Midwestern state university designed a live, multiplayer game to increase participation and interaction at a student-run conference. In particular, it seeks to determine how and to what extent the concepts of role-play and learner identity-shift influenced design decisions.

### Conceptual Framework

This study makes use of Gee's (2001) concept of identity as an analytic lens for research in education to provide a vocabulary for describing the player's role perceptions.

### Research Questions

- What motivated the designer to undertake the activity?
- What actions did the designer take and what guided his design decisions?
- How did role-play figure into the instructional design considerations?
- To what extent does identity as an analytic lens (Gee, 2001) inform an understanding of the design decisions?

### Methods

This study is best characterized as participatory action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) because the designer (second author) is actively involved as a researcher. Our data sources for analysis included:

- Survey data collected at event
- Observations of the event
- Design and development materials
- 3 Recorded and transcribed interviews with the designer (roughly 5hrs)
- Examples of precedent and earlier works by the designer

Transcripts were coded, themed and member-checked (Creswell, 1998). All documents were reviewed and commented upon. A reflective journal was maintained by the principal investigator (Glesne, 2006) to monitor the subjective lens.

## Precedent

## Materials

- Pens
- Notepaper
- Cardstock
- A Windows PC
- Laser Printer
- Paper Cutter

## Preliminary Findings

- Fewer participants than expected. Models were based on forty players but fewer than fifteen began the game and only five finished.
- Increased session attendance and participation.
- Increased survey completion among players.
- Increased interactions between players.

## Discussion

- The lens of identity is facilitating analysis and discussion of our results.
- The game stimulated little thought on the tenure dossier because the materials did not convey the proper role to the players.

## Future

- Advertise early to raise awareness and attract more players.
- Manage the setup of the game so that an optimal distribution of cards is used, given the number of players.
- Make the players' intended identity clearer.
- Explore design options for a second iteration of the game.