

**Author(s):** Paul Conway, PhD, 2010

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## **SI 410 Ethics and Information Technology**

### **Gaining Advantage Scenario**

**[15% of total grade]**

According to Mia Consalvo [*Cheating*, 2007] “cheating gives you unfair advantage” in video gameplay. Along with others who analyze individual and group behavior in virtual environments, including games, Consalvo argues that efforts to gain advantage are fundamental components of virtual environments but that people take widely divergent views on why and how they gain advantage. This exercise is an experiment in exploring how an undeveloped virtual environment may be utilized to create scenarios for gaining or losing advantage. The principal outcome of the assignment is a document that describes a scenario for using a gaming environment for purposes of educating students on ethical dilemmas of gaining advantage in virtual environments.

The major steps of the assignment are:

1. Form team and establish roles
  - a. Agree on team leader; choose recorder who will take notes
  - b. Agree to meeting time and place
2. Play a console or online game as a team
  - a. Agree on a single game that can be played in individual or multiplayer mode
  - b. An ideal game is one that is popular involves role playing in some fashion
  - c. All members of the team should play; team members should teach each other
  - d. One hour of game play should be sufficient, more as needed
3. Manipulate avatars in a new, but undeveloped gamespace
  - a. One member of the team must download the game application
  - b. Follow instructions on setup and configuration
  - c. Play in single player and multiplayer mode
  - d. Explore the capabilities (and limitations) of the game space
4. Create scenario for using the gamespace to learn about the ethical dilemmas of gaining advantage.
  - a. The scenario is a story line or a game (not necessarily wildly innovative)
  - b. The scenario engages multiple characters simultaneously.
  - c. The scenario may utilize elements of a built environment (objects and scenes), and specific activities and functions.
  - d. The scenario may specify physical properties of characters
  - e. The scenario may specify hidden, magical, and other “unrealistic” properties of objects and characters in order to advance the story line.
  - f. The scenario may take advantage of any of the categories of cheating discussed in class or illustrated in the PowerPoint presentation for Week 12a.

The deliverable of this exercise is a brief document (no more than 1,000 words) that describes a scenario in which up to eight characters interact and where at least one of the four characters has properties or traits that endow the character with an unfair advantage in the scenario or activity. The document will set the stage for a game or activity that could be contained within the virtual environment. The document will specify the traits or capabilities of the avatars and establish the outcome.

The two avatar characters created by each student in the “Avatars and Identity” module will be imported into a virtual environments created for the course using the UDK’s Unreal Engine 3, one of the more popular game creation tools. The assignment will provide an opportunity to manipulate avatars in a game space and to create, rearrange, and otherwise manipulate the space. Students working in teams of four persons will collaborate to imagine and document a scenario that, if fully developed, would challenge users to deal with the advantages and pitfalls of gaining or losing advantage in a game.

Each team of students will construct a scenario that uses the avatars and the environment to test assumptions about fair and unfairly acquired advantage. Examples of a scenario include, but are certainly not limited to scavenger hunts, capture the flag, hide and seek, search and destroy missions, etc. The purpose of the assignment is to propose/model an exercise in a virtual environment, in which people who interact within the environment may or may not be on equal footing for any number of reasons – appearance, physical capabilities, prior knowledge, strength in numbers, etc. The assignment encourages students to understand the dilemma of unfair advantage in and out of virtual worlds and to think of creative ways to explore the implications of this dilemma using a fairly undeveloped technology space that has the potential to be a powerful learning tool.

Because the Unreal Engine 3 runs only on Windows operating systems (or Linux running windows emulator), this final assignment will require collaboration across the team and the sharing of technology tools. In a separate handout, instructions are provided for downloading an application that contains the game code and associated data. Each PC should be able to host two avatars simultaneously in split screen mode.

Because of the experimental nature of this assignment, grading is limited to 15 percent of the total grade for the course. All members of a team will receive the same grade for the assignment. Top grades will be assigned to teams that show a creative engagement with the core dilemma of gaining advantage and the level of effort expended in learning and manipulating the virtual environment.

Consalvo, M. (2007). *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 83-128.