

Wild Goose Chase! Using a Smartphone Application to Boost Engagement and Group Cohesion in Leadership Education

Amy M. González Morales
Oregon State University

Faith Vawter
Oregon State University

Haley Q. Traini
Oregon State University

Jonathan J. Velez
Oregon State University

Amy M. González Morales
118 Strand Agriculture Hall
Corvallis, OR 97331
541-737-2661
amy.gonzalez@oregonsate.edu

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Introduction

The Leadership Academy program in the College of Agricultural Sciences at Oregon State University provides a framework for students to develop leadership skills through coursework, experiential learning, and mentoring (College of Agricultural Sciences Oregon State University, 2019). Students from the College of Agricultural Sciences and Forestry enroll in a year-long, cohort-based leadership program designed to prepare them to be strong leaders. In the fall of 2019, enrollment in the academy was its highest to date at 51 students, a significant increase from the 26-student cohort the year prior. In an effort to create a culture that fosters trust, collaboration, and engagement with such a large group, while getting a sense of how students were conceptualizing leadership, we decided to design and incorporate a technology-based scavenger hunt using the smartphone application GooseChase into one of our first two-hour seminars.

GooseChase is a smartphone application that allows educators to design and administer a team-based online scavenger hunt. Educators design the game by creating missions teams must complete. Missions can be text-based (e.g., answering a multiple choice question), image-based (e.g., submitting a picture of your team standing in front of a monument), or video-based (e.g. submitting a video of you interviewing someone). Each mission is worth a predetermined amount of points assigned by the game designer; the goal for each team is to complete each mission before every other team. Instructors can be creative in the development of the missions, and students engage in inquiry-driven learning by uploading photos, videos, or texts as answers. According to Chen-Tsai (2013), creative teaching techniques provide students with abundant, positive, and sustaining experiences. Furthermore, adding technology and these type of activities in teaching is an opportunity to put into practice the engagement theory, which is based on creating collaboration among students outside the classroom (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Adding in the use of smartphones, a tool found to support college student learning (Smith, Stair, Blackburn, & Easley, 2018), we were able to offer an education experience that allowed students to engage with leadership content in an interactive, creative, and fun way.

How it Works

The GooseChase scavenger hunt took place at the second two-hour seminar in the fall of 2019. The goal for this activity was to not only offer an experience that would build a positive and collaborative culture within the group, but to challenge students to think about how they conceptualize leadership as well as how to initiate and support personal change, the theme for the term. Before our weekly class meeting, the administrative team, randomly divided students into 11 teams of four to five students each. We designed a total of five missions with instructions and posted them on our personalized GooseChase account. At the start of the seminar, we gave instructions to the group about the activity and how to complete the hunt. One member of each group was asked to download the application and join the game via a personalized code assigned by the administration team. As a team, their goal was to complete all five missions in 40 minutes, earning as many points as possible.

The first mission was called *Identifying Leadership* (400 points), where students had to take a photo of someone on campus whom they identify as a leader, and defend their response in front of the other groups. The second mission was called *Up High* (400 points); in this mission, the students would take a video of a team member showcasing an "odd" talent they have. The third

mission was called *Oh My, You're Strong* (500 points); a mission where students had to challenge a stranger to an arm-wrestling contest and take a picture or video of the action. The fourth mission, *What Do You Think?* (600 points), where students had to take a video of a stranger answering the question: What is one small improvement you've made in your life recently and how did you achieve that? The final mission was called *Overcoming Obstacles* (800 points.) To complete this mission, students had to document their answer to the following questions in either picture or video format: What is something you were worried about when you started college and how did you overcome this worry?

After 40 minutes, the group reconvened to unpack the experience. We were able to project the video, image, and text submissions from each team on two large projector screens in the classroom. We spent the next 50 minutes watching/viewing team submissions for each mission and engaging in whole-group discussion. Teams were encouraged to expand upon and share their submissions and the program administrators asked purposeful and probing questions to get students to think more deeply about each of the missions.

Results to Date

As instructors, we are delighted with the results of this activity. The students demonstrated harmony and growing rapport during the missions and many described the activities as being “outside their comfort zone.” Further, when defending their findings, students began to link concepts and skills related to leadership with the missions, something we did not do prior to the activity. These results show us that GooseChase could be used as catalyst for students to think critically about why they were in the Leadership Academy, and what skills they hoped to refine during the year. To ensure that we captured the students' point of view, we distributed an assessment where the students were asked to reflect and offer feedback on the activity. Overall, students enjoyed the activity and noted it helped them reflect on the missions while getting to know their peers. This emerged through statements such as, "I liked working as a team", "This activity helped me get out of my shell more and not let group projects intimidate me", "Helped me to get out of my comfort zone", "I could discover creativity in me" and, "Made me want to improve myself, and helped me recognize we all struggle with something."

Future Plans

Although many of the students said they would not change anything about the activity, others mentioned that they would have liked it to take longer. Because of this feedback, for future activities, more missions and an increased completion time will be implemented. For one hour activity, we recommend eight to 12 missions. We found this to be an excellent resource and tool and recommend the use of this platform for those educators who are interested in engaging students outside the classroom and, at the same time, have the opportunity to evaluate their students in a fun, technological, and quick way. We advise that before using GooseChase with students, conduct two or three test missions to familiarize yourself with the software.

Costs

The one-year GooseChase subscription for the *Premium Educator* option cost \$199. This option allowed us to create multiple teams and games. Students did not incur any expenses as the application is available for free for iOS and Android devices. The total time spent researching, implementing and evaluating this learning tool was approximately eight hours, including meetings to discuss ideas and test the platform.

References

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