

Project Name

Eternal France: An Interactive Historical Simulation for College History Classes

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Campus Old Westbury, State University College at

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Tier Tier One

Overview Summary

Creation of a gamification prototype for use in Western Civilization and European history courses in which students will guide the development of France from the time of Clovis to the present day with students making decisions reflective of the government's expanding purpose and power over time.

Outcomes Summary

All [resources](#) available to download the game and incorporate in classes.

Project Abstract

Many students find Western Civilization and European History surveys boring. Because they involve long time scales, diverse foreign peoples, and a wide range of historical processes, these courses often come across as a succession of disjointed details or abstracted long-term processes students have difficulty relating to. Yet, at the same time, there is a highly popular genre of computer games that simulate long time scales involving diverse foreign peoples and a wide range of historical processes, games like Civilization, The Age of Empires, and The Rise of Nations. Their lofty historical perspective does not turn players off; instead it excites a fascination with the ability to steer the destiny of multitudes over generations.

These games clearly have the potential to stimulate student engagement and promote learning about the broad sweep of Western history, but there are several obstacles to their use in college courses. First, they are designed for hobbyists willing to master a steep learning curve while expecting hundreds of hours of gameplay, making them impractical for use in a course. Second, while they have a veneer of historicity, their underlying mechanics are generally oversimplified, anachronistic, or plain wrong. Third, connecting their

counterfactual course to a class already crowded with actual history is problematic. Consequently, their potential has gone largely unrealized.

Eternal France is designed to overcome these obstacles and both achieve and model the potential that historical computer simulations have to enrich college-level history surveys. Starting in 481, when Clovis became King of the Franks, the game will proceed through turns representing the reigns of kings or, more recently, emperors, presidents, and parliamentary regimes, down to the present. In each turn, the student will make decisions appropriate to the power and purpose of government at the time, from the military and judicial role of Medieval kings through the bureaucratic mercantilism of the absolutist state to the succession of governments that ruled the modern nation. The student will have to contend with external threats like the Vikings, English, and Germans, as well as the changing nature of French society: the rise of aristocratic cavalry based in castles; the development of commerce and towns; heresy and Protestantism; overseas exploration and empire; and the revolutionary forces of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution.

Various design elements will be employed to keep the game manageable for undergraduates while involving them in the large-scale processes of the "longue durée." First, because the arc of change led from the simpler situation of early Medieval kings to the complexities of governing a modern state, the learning curve will occur naturally during play. Second, students will make decisions that set broad policies, not engage in the intricate micro-management typical of these games. Third, the game will be structured so that the student cannot lose. If a computer controlled portion of France takes over the student's, he or she will simply assume control of the computer's realm; if relations with the external world lead to a too-divergent path from history, the situation will be logged for the end-of-game evaluation and the game reset to historical conditions at the next "historical reset" point. Students' relative success will not be measured by whether they "conquer the world," but by how effectively they manage France's affairs over the course of history.

While the internal design of Eternal France will thus make the game appropriate in scope and mechanics for a college survey, additional, non-game educational exercises will be built into program so that students will periodically be called on to reflect on what the game reveals about the actual history. These will include both automated activities and more open topics for short essays or class discussions, which the instructor can utilize or not as best suits his or her needs. The goal will be to make it possible to integrate the game into a course in a variety of ways, from a "turnkey" class component which the students play on their own and which automatically collects data about their activities, assesses their learning, and generates reports for the professor, to a centerpiece of class activity, discussion, and written work. In addition, shorter scenarios set to the parameters of typical courses will be offered, so it can end in 1517, 1648, or 1715 for a Western Civ I class, while a more modern course can begin at any of these dates or 1789 or 1815.

Since the full project envisioned here will require more than a year to complete, the current request is for Tier 1, "proof of concept" funding. The goal will be to produce and test a working prototype of the game and ancillary activities. In the following year, if assessment results justify it, a second round of funding will be sought so the game mechanics can be refined, the interface enhanced with graphics and slick controls, the instructional activities perfected, advanced features like automatic report generation and the course coordinated scenarios developed, an instructor's manual written, and extra elements like music and animated cut scenes added.

This project's innovative nature and potential to foster student engagement and learning should be clear. It will be scalable across SUNY for it can easily be made available for use by other campuses, and the design and source code will also be disseminated. Phase 2 will broaden the project's scope to include the expertise of artists, programmers, musicians, and perhaps video producers at Old Westbury and possibly other campuses. The project includes a multi-faceted assessment plan. Eternal France will capitalize on the PI's unique expertise, needs only modest level of support to start, and seems to be precisely the kind of pioneering project the IIT Grants are designed for.

Reports and Resources

- [Project overview](#)
- [Overview demo and assessment data](#)
- [Clovis scenario](#)
- [High medieval scenario](#)
- [Project source code](#)

Instructional Design

- Gamification (Design)