

This Teaching Tip is one of a five-part series from a Faculty Learning Community at Pennsylvania State University.

Student Adapted Board Games to Facilitate Teaching and Learning in an International Agriculture Course

Introduction

Games are commonly used in educational settings as a way of reinforcing content, as an active learning strategy and as a method to facilitate learning in teams. They can provide a space for exploration and a link between the academic context and the material world.

Most games are constructed by authority figures; few are constructed by students themselves. This Teaching Tip explores the creation of games by students in order to reflect and review the course content in an Introduction to International Agriculture course.

How It Works

The course instructor identifies a suitable commercial board game that students will modify in partners or small groups. In this case, the board game “Sorry” was utilized. Instructors can also provide materials for modification of the surface of the game board such as colored cardstock and rubber cement.

Students work with an assigned partner to modify the board game although student effort is graded individually. Throughout the semester students are guided to create question cards that reflect the material presented in the class session, for an approximate total of 25 cards over the course of the semester.



Figure 1 A pair of students in Introduction to International Agriculture work on board game construction together during a class period.

Each student is assigned a specific color index card, in order to keep their question cards separate from the other group members' cards.

Each question card must include:

1. A question reflecting the course content. Students are free to decide the format of the question – multiple choice, short answer, etc.
2. The correct answer to the question on the back of the card.
3. Directions for what happens in game play if the player answers correctly or incorrectly.
4. A citation of where the information for the answer to the question was obtained.

Students will also be responsible for modifying the game board and the rules of the game in order to reflect the reality of the international agriculture system. Creativity is strongly encouraged!

The final game submission is graded on the question cards, as well as the modification of the board game surface and rules of play to accurately reflect the complexity of international agriculture concepts.

Near the end of the semester students bring their completed board games to class. Student groups play each of the board games, which serves the purpose of reviewing the course content in preparation for the final exam, as well as evaluating each game.

Future Plans and Advice to Others

Students comment that they find the board game assignment enjoyable and useful for reviewing course content and the interaction of major course concepts. The board game assignment is very challenging for students, in particular the modification of the game board and rules to accurately reflect the interaction of international agriculture concepts. Often the reality of game play does not have the outcome students intended, so the revision to the rules, question cards or the game board may be in order. It is important to plan enough structured time for this assignment in order for it to have the intended outcome.

Submitted by:

Melanie Miller Foster
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA