

# Representing the Global Game Jam

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Recently, I had the honor of representing the IGDA Global Game Jam team at the Game Education Summit North America. Taking place on the University of Southern California campus June 15-16, the summit featured a diverse set of talks and panels covering topics from curriculum management to video game ethics. Our presentation was called “Learn by Doing: Global Game Jam lessons for the classroom.” In the talk, we outlined 10 aspects of GGJ that can directly benefit university-level game programs. I will briefly share some of these lessons below:

## 1. Rapid prototyping experience:

One of the most difficult aspects of software engineering to teach is the software development cycles of which the spiral model of development is most popular. Most undergraduates will be lucky if they get three or four



realistic projects resulting in tangible products in their higher education careers. GGJ activity is rapid prototyping in its exciting essence. In 48 hours, a brand new team of game developers go from “hello my name is” to “this is the functional game we built.” The experience is valuable far beyond the weekend.

## 2. Opportunity for failure:

In his 1992 book, “To Engineer is Human,” Henri Petroski argues that success in any engineering effort is impossible without experiencing failure. It is the evaluation and modifications made after experiencing failure that lead to better production. GGJ brings this principle home in a direct way. You may go through several failures, or you may not succeed at all in creating what you set out to do, but you will be forced to think about why this was and how you can overcome it.

## 3. Working in diverse teams:

GGJ participants are not just computer science undergrads. At a typical jam, you are likely to encounter people from other disciplines, the industry, indie development and gaming newbies from all walks of life placing their visions on the table. Games are diverse things, requiring expertise not just in coding, but also, for example, in art, writing, music, psychology and humanities. Diverse teams are required to make good games. In addition to teams, GGJ participants in 2010 were part of a global community with individuals from some 40 countries around the world.

## 4. Tools assessment and selection:

Game programs and curricula need to keep up and constantly re-evaluate the latest technologies and tools they use in the classroom. GGJ is a great way to observe in practice what tools are useful and worthy of adoption. Many jams precede their participation with some classes about a particular tool or technology.

## 5. Research and user studies:

GGJ, as the single largest game jam event in the world, offers a unique opportunity for research scientists to get valuable feedback on technologies or social dynamics.

## 6. Promotion:

For school departments, GGJ can be an excellent venue to promote and publicize the school’s curriculum, major or certificate program. If such a program does not yet exist, GGJ offers an exciting and immediate way to showcase the benefits of it to both students and administrators alike. Students can point to GGJ projects in their portfolios when applying for jobs, and industry reps that often appear as judges or sponsors use the event for recruitment.

For more information on GGJ, visit [globalgamejam.org](http://globalgamejam.org). Special thanks to Susan Gold and Ian Schreiber for helping create this presentation. ■