

602 Capstone Proposal – “Passport, Please!”

Detailed Design Prospectus

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### **Introduction**

During my time in the communications program, I focused on three main areas: Latinx identity, videogames and online communities, and immigration. For my capstone, I want to work with all of them. My main goal will be to create a videogame experience showcasing a small window on immigration. The experience will focus on the arrival of a person to a new country and the process of going through Customs and Immigration. The interaction will pertain to the conversation with the immigration officer, hence the title “Passport, Please!”

The focus of the experience is to demonstrate the nuances a person needs to keep in check while asking for permission into a new country. Everything matters, from how people present themselves, the words used in the interaction, and the clothes chosen for the day. There will be a brief exploration of the attitudes of immigration officers towards people of their perceived race but not nationality. Implications of economic status will be analyzed as well.

### **Disciplinary Grounding**

This capstone will include many readings. My main inspiration comes from my research for the literature review created during COML 598 and the comments I received while telling the story of immigration processes.

### **Immigration and Stereotyping**

The paper Iyengar et al. (2013) published demonstrates a dichotomy in attitudes towards immigration. Most citizens of industrialized nations are against immigration; however, they are willing to allow specific individuals perceived as beneficial for society. Furthermore, the study

demonstrates how the individual migrant's main evaluation point is the economic rather than the cultural.

Similarly, a study in Ohio by Timberlake, Howell, Bauman Grau, and Williams creates a link between the rhetorical exposition of Latinx migrants in the media and the actual or perceived impact of the migrants in the state as unfavorable. The study's main conclusion is that the primary reaction to immigration depends on the perception of the immigrant group. In conclusion, "who they are matters" (Timberlake et al., 2015, p. 292).

Tajfel and Turner's "Social Identity Theory" (2000) proposes an "in-group" vs an "out-group" set where people "have a natural inclination to perceive their in-group as positive light" (McLeod, 2023, p. 3). Furthermore, the theory suggests that "individuals are motivated to support/oppose policies and politicians that benefit/harm members of their ingroup as a means of protecting their social status" (Hickel et al., 2020, p. 860).

Stewart (2011) presents the idea that "prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination begin with categorizing" (p. 457). While categorizing is presented as a fundamental human cognitive process leveraged to make group associations for both people and material objects, the categorization's elevation with a negative attitude towards a particular group is considered a prejudice (Stewart, 2011). Adding together the Social Identity Theory of the in-group and out-group and the misguided belief of prejudice, there can be a link established for negative attitudes towards a group of people based on race and the negative impact these said groups may or may not have in the influence of the in-group.

Furthermore, the connection established can be understood as Ethnocentrism, or the "tendency to regard our ethnic group, culture, or nation as better or more correct than others" (Stewart, 2011, p. 458).

Stereotypes of economic class and societal class will be leveraged. Stewart (2011) defines a stereotype as “a set of beliefs about the characteristics of the people in a group that is applied to almost all members of the group” (p. 458). According to research by Durante and Fiske (2017), there are many indicators of societal class, including clothing choices, tastes, manners, dialects and accents, and perceived level of attractiveness. The authors elaborate in their paper that “people consistently attribute well-being, health, and intelligence to people with high socioeconomic status (SES), regardless of their own SES” (2017, p. 44). Furthermore, in the interview elaborated by Durante and Fiske, “both Black and White respondents implicitly and explicitly associate Black targets with low-SES jobs and White targets with high-SES jobs” (p. 46). These findings will be leveraged to create the variables of ‘trust indicator’ for the non-playable character of the immigration officer.

Connecting the research of Durante and Fisk on perceived SES and immigration, the article from Olier and Spadavecchia (2022) analyzed the portrayal of migrants in massive media through an AI analysis. The results presented by the authors conclude that “representation of migrants and refugees align with the demographics of low-skilled migrants.” They further elaborate that low-skilled migrants are also connected with a perceived low economic status. To capitalize, Olier and Spadavecchia (2022) conclude their analysis by stating that “migrants are often depicted as crowds in a way that facial features are not recognizable.” It is in this way that the dehumanization of the migrant culminated, supporting the findings published by Iyengar et al., where the person is preferred over the faceless blob considered as immigration.

### **Video Games as a medium for change**

In an analysis of how videogames can help in education, Shliakhovchuk (2018) stipulates that a meticulously crafted video game, featuring a variety of interactive elements, provides players with the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the subject matter, experience personal development through novel learning methods, and derive satisfaction from implementing successful strategies.

In the meta-analysis conducted by Wouters et al. (2013), ‘serious games’ are found to be more effective in terms of learning and retention. The authors define a serious game as one in which the objective of the video game is not to entertain the player but to use the entertaining quality for training, education, health, public policy, and strategic communication objectives (Zyda, 2005).

In theory, games may influence learning by changing cognitive processes and affecting motivation (Wouters et al., 2013). In studies sponsored by StackUp, an organization that supports veterans through video games, the findings show that veterans have an easier way of connecting to civilian life with the support of online communities through gaming. In addition to building communities, and perhaps more counterintuitively, veterans claim that games—even violent FPSs—can serve as a proxy for therapy (Hirst, 2021; Carras et al., 2021). Carras et al. (2021) also created a support group for suicide prevention through online communities on the Discord platform. Their research supports the idea of videogames as therapy and group support.

### **Design Prospectus/Description**

**Passport, Please! An immigration experience.**

The videogame experience will present many points of view of different types of migrants, not only Latinx. Furthermore, subsequent readings from Interpersonal communication will be employed to enhance and construct the dialogue of the interlocutors.

Initially, the game to be created with this project would be named “Papers, Please!” However, there is an existing game with the same name. In 2013, Lucas Pope released a video game with said name to explore the life of an immigration officer. The game punishes the player for taking bribes or violating the rules of immigration (Pope, 2013). To contrast the experience of Pope’s game with this work, the “Passport, Please!” game intends to explore the side of the migrant, showing the player that the choices in how they answer an immigration officer have direct consequences in the acceptance to the new country.

While reading ‘Bridges Not Walls’ by John Stewart (2011), it is proposed that “All communication involves choices, some of which people actively consider and others that seemed almost automatic” (p. 23). With this premise, the dialogues in the videogame will be constructed. There will be instances in the game where the outcome is predisposed in the dialogue, giving the player no multiple-choice to select from. Stewart (2011) writes that “No one person can completely control a communication event, and no single person or action causes – or can be blamed for – a communication outcome” (p. 22). The dialogues will be constructed to predispose the outcomes, giving the player the illusion of control.

Ethics readings suggest that moral implications will be implied in the consequences of the player's choices. Choose wisely, and you will be granted access to the new country. Be careless with your answers, and you may be deported. Ethics will influence the responses of the immigration officer to an extent.

**Medium, methodology, and delivery**

The goal is to host the videogame experience on a webpage for accessibility. The game will be accessible through the itch.io platform and playable on browsers on desktops and mobile devices. A downloadable version of the game will be available for installation on personal desktops.

The game will be coded in Python, leveraging the Ren'py 8 engine as a visual novel. Ren'py allows images, words, and sounds to tell interactive stories. The player will take the role of the migrant, walking down from the airplane and towards the immigration booth at the airport. An officer will interact with the player; the goal is to have a conversation between 5 and 10 levels deep, with variations in answers.

A “trust points” system will be created to assess the player’s character based on the answers provided. At the end of the interaction, the immigration officer – the game engine, in this case – will decide if the player is allowed entrance to the country. A rule will be set to either allow or deny access based on a predefined required level of “trust” according to each immigration officer. Variables will be included for clothing, personality in answers, type of papers presented, race, gender, and economic appearance. Ultimately, the game will NOT tell the player why they were rejected, just as in real life.

The interaction of the NPC with the immigration officer may contain some of the following questions (Johnson, 2022):

- Why are you visiting (country name)?
- Where will you be staying? Do you have a hotel reservation?
- Who will you be visiting?
- How long will you be staying?

- How much money do you have available for this trip? Who is paying for this trip?
- Have you visited (country name) before? And if so, how long did you stay?
- How often do you come to (country name)?
- Do you have a return plane ticket?

Each of the playable characters will have a brief biography. The player will choose to read it or start playing without that information. The answer provided to the immigration officer must match the existing information available to the immigration officer or risk a chance of deportation or further questioning. A question may be asked in different ways multiple times to see if the player is being caught in a lie.

### **Purpose of the project**

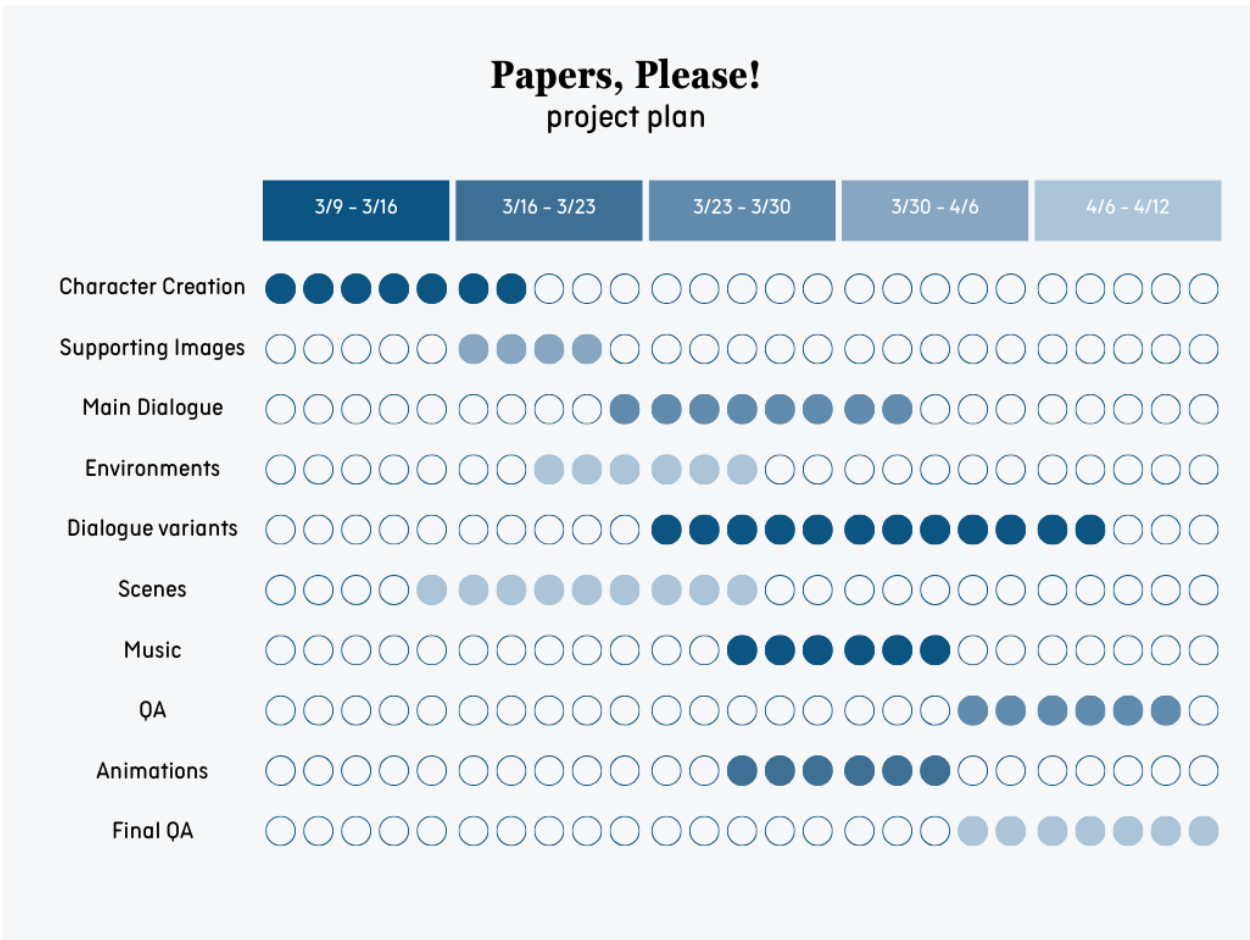
"Passport, Please!" is an informative initiative to educate individuals about the intricacies of entering foreign countries. It is essential to note that holding a passport and visa does not automatically guarantee admittance, as immigration officers retain the discretion to grant or deny entry. This undertaking aims to enlighten individuals on the procedures involved, frequently asked questions, the perils of providing false information, and the consequences of deception when dealing with immigration officers.

### **Project Timeline**

The project is currently being developed using Agile Methodology. The basics of Agile are to create minimal increments of deliverable code. After testing and evaluation, the team creates a new increment in the next sprint or time box (Scaled Agile, Inc., 2024).



**Figure 1**  
Papers, Please! Project Plan.



**Limitations**

**Only one person is** doing the programming, music, dialogue, characters, research, and everything else that needs to be done. The main goal is to have at least three different migrants and three different immigration officers with various experiences. There will also be at least three options for presenting papers, as each visa and passport from other countries have different levels of “trust” in the real world.

Each experience, or run-through, is estimated to last between 3 to 7 minutes, depending on the player's level of commitment to the character – reading speed, thinking process, conversational choices, and pondering of possible outcomes.

All assets will be leveraged from free domains and internet availability. The game's hosting depends on the final product's size, which may limit image and sound quality.

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