Day 2, Panel 1: News Games: Videogames have become serious games and started playing an increasingly important role in education and professional training. Can videogames now become a more common tool to help journalists to tell the story?

Moderator/Chair:
Sharon Strover, Chair, Radio-Television-Film Department, University of Texas at Austin

Panelists:
Ian Bogost, Associate Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Founding Partner, Persuasive Games

Howard Finberg, Executive Director, Poynter Institute's NewsU.org

Suzanne Seggerman, President and Co-Founder, Games for Change

Paige West, Interactivity Editor, MSNBC.com

Sharon Strover: … rather early, but I hope you had a good time in Austin last night. I'm Sharon Strover. I chair the Radio-Television-Film Department here at the University of Texas. And I'm pleased to be moderating a panel that I think will be very unusual for a symposium dealing with online journalism. Nevertheless, it's a topic that has already come up repeatedly in some of the talk yesterday. The topic has to do with games and what games have to do with online journalism, and I would argue, with journalism much more broadly. We have a very interesting group of panelists with long-time experience in games. My job as moderator is primarily keep things moving on time. And I have a few questions that we'll get to at the end. And we'll get to your questions at the close as well. First up, we'll have Suzanne Seggerman. Suzanne is with Games for Change, and Suzanne is going to give us an overview of games and give us a little bit of background on what the game space is about right now. Suzanne.

Suzanne Seggerman: Any sound? Yes, great. Okay. I am Suzanne Seggerman, Games for Change's co-founder and president. And I'm going to

start us off today talking about games from a place that a lot of people start from when they thing about games, and that's fear. Parents, educators, even the media often start from this place. Present company, of course, excepted. But a lot of people are afraid of games. They are afraid of the corrupting influence, the violence. A lot of people really respond from a somewhat gut place, I'd say, about games. And in fact, what a lot of people don't recognize is that games are really just a young medium. They don't inherently have any qualities that are particularly corrupting or trivial. They just are young. And what do we have to fear about young media? We're going to look back for a second at some other media who have had -- who were young once too.

I'm just going to let you read these. This is what was said about the written word early on. Books. Novels. In the mission of happiness. Film. So I'm just going to give you a quick overview of some of the early models of these games -- of these media. So this was what many people feel is the first documentary film. It was over an hour long and it was essentially cops and robbers. Bad guys and good guys shooting each other. There was actually– (excuse me)–there was one place where they actually were shooting at birds for a little while, but aside from that, it was a shootout. Here's what a lot of people consider the first television show. And the web. We won't go there. Pornography … still is a big part of what we see today.

So here are some early videogame examples. Very simple, action, sports, war themes. This is another early game. Can anyone name this game besides Ian? Anyone played this game? Anyone recognize it?

Audience Member: [Inaudible.]

Suzanne Seggerman: Thank you. [laughs] Grand Theft Auto. Okay. So what we do know is that games are growing up. They are 30 to 35 years old. I'm talking about digital games of course. They are a young medium and they are coming into their own. Some people have talked about them being at a sort of tipping point. They are incredibly ubiquitous. They are part of mainstream culture now. They are being played by a lot of people, not just boys in basements anymore, but across the board, women as much as men. And the average gamer is getting older every year; over 30 right now. And some people describe games as being at a place much like documentary film was in the late sixties and seventies, or even just film. Games are starting to be collected by museums as a cultural artifact. In New York, there is a museum collecting them and showing them and exhibiting them. There's actually an archive starting here looking at games as a body or research. They are starting an archive here and collecting videogames. Universities are studying them as a serious… Just like film in the sixties and seventies, they are being studied in a serious academic context. And artists are using them for cultural expression.

And some of the new findings. So these are often related to educational research that's going on. A lot of research is being done and supported by the McArthur Foundation through the Media Learning Initiative. The Knight Foundation is also looking at some of these things. So games are great for allowing people to explore new worlds and try on new perspectives and take on new powers that they don't usually have access to. So that means flying an airplane, being the president of a country, all these things that you don't normally get to do. They are really good in that capacity for complex problem solving as well. So if you are looking at a situation that is multi -- has multi variables, they are all interrelated, games are really good for exploring those things. Games and simulations especially. So if you are looking at the environment, you might want to explore a game in the context [of], what happens if we raise the temperature of the world by three degrees? What happens if we all turned our lights down in New York City for ten minutes extra every day? These things and how they relate to each other.

We know they are fun, low-risk failures. So you can try things out in ways that are safe. You can, you know, blow something up. You can create a city. All these things you can't normally do. Let's you try on new behaviors. So also, Henry Jenkins also talks about games allowing you to do something similar to the scientific process, where you have a core set of assumptions. You test those assumptions. You adapt and change those assumptions, which is very similar to the scientific process. Situated learning is another concept that a lot of the scholars are talking about, where actually there is a different cognitive process that happens when you are actually doing something rather than just listening to information.

And agency. Games allow you to have agency. You can affect the outcome of your experience. It's very different in how one processes information that way. So what we are looking at, at Games for Change–(that's my non-profit)–is how we can use this powerful medium. (Six minutes. Great. I have to speed up a little.) So these are our core assumptions. Games for Change wants to intersect and help the non-profit sector in these three areas. So in education, games are great for civic engagement. In culture, games are an evolving and meaningful art or culture form. And social change. We think games are good for positive social change. When it comes to journalism, games really are good for… Journalism affects all three of those areas, and so games, I think, also are a rich area for people to explore the news.

So what we are–(I'll zoom through this)–but we are non-profit. We're sort of the center of this new and emergent field of people using games for real-world issues, especially those looking for impact in the real world. So changing thinking, changing behavior. We've been called an early Sundance of videogames. We have an annual festival every year. I'm also called upon a lot, as I'm sure Ian is and others, to talk about the other side of what

games are for. Not the corrupting, evil, terrible side, but we often help shape the public discourse that's a little more nuanced, a little more informed.

These are just some of the quick–(I'll say this very quickly)–of what we do. So we have a festival this year in our fifth year. And our keynotes are some of the people I've referred to: Jim Gee and Henry Jenkins, and the Honorable Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was our closing keynote. All of these people are working in games and game projects in one way or another. We have a list serve. We have regional chapters growing up around the world. We have a new lab. Again, we talk to the press a lot and a number of people on our staff talk at various conferences around the world.

I want to quickly start here so I can show you some of the games. We give awards, not only to recognize the great games that have been made, but also help shape the field. These are the things games are good at. Great for raising awareness about issues. They are really good for positive transformation. So people can actually start thinking about something new and actually affect a new kind of behavior. They can practice new behaviors by games.

Peacemaker won the… Oh, sorry, those two should be reversed. Awareness Raising Game was won by the Cost of Life, AYITI, and Peacemaker won the Transformation Game. And Ian Bogost's Airport Security won the Best Social Commentary Game.

So here's a quick view of Peacemaker.   Peacemaker is an incredibly interesting project that was done with an incredible team. A lot of these games are interesting because they bring together huge groups of really diverse people on their collaboration. So these are some of the people that were participating in making Peacemaker. And you can play it in Hebrew, Arabic, or English. You can play as either the Palestinian President or the Israeli Prime Minister. Here is, as you may recognize, that area in conflict. And what you have to do is keep abreast of all the different factions. And you actually… It's a little complicated, and I want to show you a lot of different games, but you want to keep both your national approval and worldwide approval. So you are balancing a very complex set of different variables. So it's newsreel footage based from real events. You make decisions on security, political, or construction. You actually can't win the game unless you do some of all of these very strategically. It's really based on a lot of public diplomacy. Again, you can watch videos of the events as they have unfolded.

Let me zoom through to show you some other ones. So it's really a new -- it's a paradigm shift. So AYITI is a game created by Global Kids with, again, a very interesting team. Young people were involved. GameLab, which is a very great studio in New York, Taking It Global, and UNICEF all came together to do certain parts of this game. You are a kid in a family in Haiti and you are trying to manage resources, your health, your happiness, education. Real

Lives, another game based on an interesting combination with UNICEF and other UN statistics. This looks very simple and rough, but it's actually very compelling. Up here, you'll see they actually bring in UN statistics. So... (How much time do I have? One minute! All right.) So I'm going to zoom through this one. Darfur is Dying is a game about that conflict. It was mentioned in a lot of places, got a lot of press. This one is the International Center on Non-Violent Conflict. It's a game to train activists in the field to resist tyranny through non-violent means. It's going across the border in Burma, Iran, North Korea. UN created a game called Food Force about poverty.

And this is us. And we welcome you to join us at our annual festival, June 3rd and 4th. For total newbies, we have a day on June 2nd that will feature Ian and some of the other experts for those really wanting a very basic how-to guide. Thank you very much.

[Audience applause.]

Sharon Strover: Thank you, Suzanne, for that really succinct and excellent overview. I did want to mention, since you brought up the archive that was started here, just to elaborate, it was three game practitioners, three industry kind of beginners, some of the founders of the videogame industry who put together this archive. Starting at one of them taught a course for us in the fall and brought in a lot of the game leaders from around the world. And we actually have long interview with them that are on tape that will be available publicly a little later on. None of those people who have made millions of dollars, of course, have to my knowledge worked in the news industry, [laughs], however. So I think one important aspect of this panel is to kind of profile the part of the game industry, the part of games that you don't often hear about. It's not the big violent games that bring in millions and millions of dollars. And Games for Change has been in the forefront of a lot of the efforts to raise the profile of serious games or educational games.

Austin is one of the game development centers. Depending on who you talk to, it's either the second or the third most significant game development center in the country.

Next, we're going to hear from Ian Bogost. And Ian is a professor at Georgia Tech. And as the bio in your program illustrates, he's also a partner in a gaming company called Persuasive Games. He's been -- he's designed a game that won the award that Suzanne talked about. And he has one of the most fascinating blogs out there, I would say, particularly if you are interested in games. So Ian.

Ian Bogost: All right. So very briefly, I'll just say a couple of things about me. So I live kind of two lives. One as a researcher and a professor, one as a game designer at Persuasive Games, which is the studio I co-founded

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almost five years ago. And in my research, the thing I'm really interested in is the intersection of games and culture. Games as cultural artifacts that are worthy of consideration in the same way that literature and art and film are. My last book was called "Persuasive Games" as well, which was about the way that games make arguments. The ones we do at the studio are sort of very weird, unusual things, not the kind that you would see on the store shelf next to Halo yet. This is a game that PBS funded about the politics of nutrition. This is a game about working at a crappy job at Kinko's. It's called Disaffected. So the influence of documentary and other forms of media are clear here. I just wanted to give you a quick snapshot.

The thing I want to talk about today is this idea of news games. The word news game, this phrase news game was first coined by my friend Gonzalo Frasca, who in 2003 created a game called September 12th, which you see on the upper left here, which was about -- it was kind of a commentary on U.S. foreign policy after September 11th. And the second game that they did on this news gaming site is called Madrid. It was created really within two days after the bombings in Madrid in the following year. And the way that Gonzalo talks about this genre is this way: Simulation meets political cartoons. An intersection of something we already know with something that's somewhat new. And what is the kind of expressive capacity of simulation if we use it for cartooning, for editorial, instead of simply for entertainment, for example?

But the problem is, if you look at some of the examples of games that have been created since then in the genre of responses to news games, a lot of them are really very simple, somewhat trite. There were, I don't know, at least three different Zidane headbutt games that were released within moments after the World Cup. The Mel Gibson drunk driving game. [audience laughter] This one actually wasn't as bad. This is the Dick Chaney shooting people game. Enormous. This is the Rick Santorum game. Enormous numbers of crappy whack-a-mole style games with somebody's head put up in the right place at the right time. And it struck me that these examples weren't cashing out the original concept that Frasca had advanced. Rather, they were sort of trite curiosities that you would look at for a moment. There's no journalistic content. There's no editorial content here. And certainly, there is none of the kind of biting simplicity that we get from political cartoons.

So this, in my mind, was an invitation to think about a kind of broader question, which is that there is some intersection between videogames and journalism of which this idea of editorial is one example, but of which there are also many, many others. And we'll hear some more of those in the course of the panel.

This is research I'm working on now. And what I'm really trying to do is identify the different ways that videogames and journalism intersect. In my creative practice, what I chose to do after thinking about some of the values

of political cartoons was to dig down to this news game concept and really clarify it as editorial games, and think about, you know, values like timeliness and really editorializing, rather than just picking something as being other things that I was interested in working on.

So what I'd like to do is share with you three experiences that we have at the studio. Creating and publishing games in three very different organizations. One is a games company, Shockwave.com, which publishes online and downloadable games. One is the New York Times, which you know, and the other is CNN, specifically CNN.com.

So let's start with Shockwave. We did a deal in mid-2006 to do a series of editorial games that were to be published on Shockwave. And the series was called the Arcade Wire. We were going to do a game every month. The way that we structured this deal–(I thought I'd throw in some kind of business model stuff)–was that we took a small advance on the development fees from Shockwave. And they run these rich -- these rich media pre-roll ads, which have relatively high CPMs, and we also have a share of that that we take. So the Arcade Wire was, you know, we even used the newspaper as a kind of almost pallet setting device in the start of the game, and you would see that there was something that was related to the media that you were about to experience.

Some of the games that we did that were published on Shockwave. This is Oil God, which is a game about the dynamics of the global petroleum market. And you have this sort of all-powerful hand of God that you can use to wreak havoc on this small world below. And your goal is to make gas prices rise to a certain level in a certain nation. And you do this by cutting off supply or by creating wars or by disrupting refining and distribution with natural disasters and so forth. The idea that we wanted to get across was the kind of multitude of different problems that arise at the same time, that have to arise at the same time to create large fluctuations in oil prices. And there's a model of the futures market and all that sort of stuff here. So you can… In terms of tying these two actual events, this was in the summer of '06 when we were really experiencing the first large spikes in gas prices, which of course we've gotten completely used to by now.

This is Bacteria Salad about spinach and e-coli. And the idea here was that sort of the more corporate your farms get, the more you have to manage, the less you know about where your crops were coming from. This is where some of those problems start to arise.

This was Extreme Christmas Shopping. This was just to a kind of send-up of the sort of frenzy around the holiday season that we always have with the particular products that were scarce and the crazy things that parents will do to get their kids the right gift.

And this is the Airport Security game that Suzanne mentioned briefly and the one I want to talk about in a little more detail. So this was right after the liquid ban in 2006 that we did this. And the idea is that the rules are constantly changing in the game, so you can't keep up with it. And you've got to kind of figure out what's allowed and what's disallowed. Of course, you can make people take off their pants, which was really the thing I wanted to make in the game more than anything else. Now, when we were working on this, the main problem that arose with Shockwave had to do with kind of their understanding of the medium itself; the idea that we were trying to editorialize and there were certain things we wanted to get across. Some of that went fine. Like the fact that there's pressurized cheese in the game. This is actually taken straight from the TSA's website. If you go there, you will see that pressurized cheese is explicitly prohibited from flights in the states. But other things were kind of more satirical. This is hummus, which of course is sort of gel-like and also Middle Eastern, at least vaguely.

Sort of the use of humor was something that they were very comfortable with, but then when we started kind of touching on more complicated issues, it was very clear that Shockwave wasn't even prepared to deal with some of the issues of speech and the balance between speech and sanity, right, that we have to deal with in the newspaper business. Where this really started to take a nosedive is, we pointed out this wonderful article about this -- there was this guy who, you know, he had this penis pump in his suitcase, and he went through security, and he had an accent, and he sort of seemed like exactly the kind of guy that you would distrust. Someone asked him what it was and they misunderstood him and thought it was a bomb. And it created this very complicated, but also telling story about how embarrassing this process of having all your stuff searched through at the airport was. We thought that this was a wonderful thing to kind of include here in the game, but they weren't comfortable with this at all. [audience laughter] In fact, anything that was even remotely sexual was sort of given the nix. You know, we ended up doing stuff like Preparation H or something as a way of getting around that. This was just one example. There was a lot of negotiation. And at the end of the day, we compromised a lot of the things that we wanted to say in these games, so that they could be more palatable.

But the real problems occurred when we started getting a lot of attention around this. So this is an article by Joe Sharkey in The New York Times who writes this fantastic business travel column every week about this game. It's kind of weird, you know, weird that we've got a business travel column about a game about airport security. And it became very clear after this that Shockwave didn't want to deal with the idea that we would be kind of named creators. This was a huge problem. They wanted to take credit for all the work that people published on their channel. And this quickly resulted in kind of a huge dispute between us, which was compounded by the fact that they were in the process of being acquired by Viacom at the time. And there were

all these kind of power plays. And this eventually kind of made the relationship collapse at the end of our contract.

So to kind of revisit this, the ad sales that they were running were great. It was like $15 to $35 CPMs in these pre-roll ads, and we've done at least 30-million plays on the games, so you can add those up. So some of the problems here. You know, they knew how to do games, but there were problems understanding editorial dealing with corporate politics. The timeliness was okay. We were able to get these games out once a month.

Okay, The Times. (I'm going to try to accelerate this a little bit.) You know, so we did a kind of trial contract with The Times that was something of a lost leader for us. They were basically paying us as columnists, and we were counting on being able to turn this around into something larger. We did two games that got published. One about FDA inspections and one about the Kennedy immigration bill. This was last year. And in the games business, this was a big deal. You know, people noticed the fact that The New York Times were running videogames. This was something we expected. We thought it might draw new readers to the site. But then we quickly ran into a lot of technical problems working between the editorial team and the web team, who weren't really used to working together. But more so, they just got very, very cold feet very fast. We ended up doing a game about steroids and baseball that just got delayed so long that we couldn't really release it. And then as we started doing more concepts—one about campaign finance, one about gun laws, one about the cult of Apple—they were summarily rejected time after time. And eventually, our editor just sort of stopped listening to us and said, "You know what? I'm just not going to spend any time on this anymore." So The Times paid out our contract probably because finance just doesn't talk to editorial and the whole thing just kind of fell apart. So, you know, there was no upside for us in the first place. There weren't any games. And then we were behind a subscription wall. This was when Times Select was still around.

The whole thing was something of a nightmare, and it was really a disappointment not to be able to execute on this promise of doing real games in a real newspaper. So they got the editorial. There was some prestige. We were even having a good experience at first getting feedback, but had no idea how to publish games. Huge timing problems. We can make these games in two weeks, but they weren't getting up fast enough, and then the timeliness was lost. And of course, the commitment wasn't there. And we totally lost our [shirt], got totally screwed on this deal.

CNN is a media company. And if you've ever worked with a media company, you know that basically it's all about hiring out work or making decisions very slowly with as many people as possible. So they identified some fixed budgets and they tried to tie those games to programming. So we did this game around the election. It's sort of this very trite little pawn game with the

candidates that were in the race at the time. You can already intuit kind of how -- what their level of commitment with the idea of expressing something with games was. And here, we are just presenting the candidates. Although, we did work with a cartoonist, which was interesting. But then very quickly, you know, more and more people got involved, and the games got watered down very rapidly. And we ended up having to kind of baby them into some, you know, some state in which we could release them.

This is a great example of how this went wrong. There's a series of shows that CNN ran called Planet in Peril. Really, it's actually quite interesting content. One of them had to do with wildlife trafficking. And so we were trying to do this game about kind of the complexity of wildlife trafficking, which on the one hand you can see as something that's undesirable, but on the other hand, is a kind of economic necessity for people working or trying to provide for their families in certain situations. We can talk about it more later in some detail, but what happened was that the design got just beaten down and down and down and down, and so it ended up being this sort of card-matching game that was, in my mind, almost meaningless. We had these crazy delays. And it was really difficult to do any paid kind of changes around them. So we also sort of lost our shirts here.

Okay. So we had an advocate in house, which was a Turner advocate, someone at R&D who kind of was shepherding the process. That was great. The budgets were okay. At least they published the games we made, but these delays and the kind of committee design created a hug problem.

So, you know, if I had to kind of poll the positive experiences out of these three, these three relationships, and try to assemble them back together into another one as it relates specifically to this idea editorial [game], which is just one kind of game, these would be the main lessons that I would take away from it. So I'll stop there. Thanks.

[Audience applause.]

Sharon Stover: Thank you. Some additional examples of games with Paige West. Paige directs interactive projects for MSNBC, and she, too, has a long record in looking at interactive endeavors in this field. So, Paige.

Paige West: [Inaudible.] Can you hear me now?

Audience Member: Yeah.

Paige West: My... Just a note on my background. I actually have a graduate degree in science, and I was a scientist before I was in journalism, and I actually got into interactivity through science education. One of the first things that I did was a simulation of doctors for a biology class, college biology, about how to diagnose cancer. I did another game that was, again,

more of an exploratory game along the lines of Brain Voyager, where you were miniaturized and inserted into somebody's brain, and you had to go around and solve all these little problems and fix all these little issues with this brain. So games is actually how I got into the whole field of interactivity.

So I'm just going to talk a little bit about a couple of games. I'm actually going to play this one. The thing about these two or three games that I'm going to show you are that they are quite manageable in terms of their production size. I think one of the things that you need to think about when you're going to create a game is it needs to be an evergreen kind of issue. This particular one was created shortly after all of the new TSA regulations went into effect, and so there was this big story about what they were, and trying to explain to people, and there were lots of complaints about the lines. And so this was created to sort of explain what it is that a baggage screener actually does. That's one of the things I think makes a really good news game is a simulation of an environment or a process that lets you experience something that you never would have experienced otherwise. Not something maybe as grand as building a city, but just a very small, different perspective from what your everyday experience is.

So in this game, you are in the role of a baggage screener. [showing the game on screen] Why don't you guys tell me when to flag it as something? Do you want to take a look at any for a longer time? [audience laughter] So basically, it goes on like this. Like she was telling you, you can turn on the color, turn it back, you can zoom in. But essentially, you get to the end, and I'll just—oh—you get to the end and it gives you, basically, a score based on your performance. And so you see how many bags you screened in the two-minute time period, how many actually had threats, how many you identified correctly, and how many false alarms you had, and it gives you a grade. And so this is, I think, a really effective way to, like, understand something that normally you're just aggravated by. And after I played this game, I definitely was sort of in the line kind of watching the scanners and seeing what was going on and feeling bad for the people that were there when I was -- you know, all these people were kind of annoyed. So I thought this was just a really very simple, effective game to give you a different perspective. In terms of what it took to produce this game, it was four people: a designer, a Flash programmer, the reporter or researcher, and the voice talent. But it wasn't all four of those people for all four days. And in terms of the Flash programming skills, it was somebody that had, you know, higher than basic Flash skills, but it wasn't an extremely, you know, extremely high-end programmer with mad skills. In terms of the success of this, it was more highly trafficked than the companion text story. It had lots of user feedback on it. And it still gets traffic to this day, even though you can't find it on our site. There are no links to it on our site anymore.

The next one that I want to show you is, I don't know if you would call this a game so much, but in my mind, it's a little simulation in terms of, how do you

manage electricity, and how do you deal with the provision of that to your -- to your country, as if you were in some sort of governmental role. I actually saw this about a year ago when I was judging in the Malofiej Infographics Contest. I don't know exactly how successful this is, because I haven't met the people that created this. But at the time I was judging infographics, and they were all very much of the type that Alberto mentioned yesterday where it was just instructive, and so you just went screen through screen through screen. And so this one popped up, and it was something that I sat there and I played with for 15 minutes, because it was something that I wanted to kind of understand and beat. And when I realized that I'd spent *way* more time that I was allowed on any one particular infographic, I said, you know, "This is a really effective, effective game."

And I'll just pull it up real fast. So you're just trying to balance fossil fuels, nuclear fuel, renewables, and reduce demand as well. All while maintaining it within a reasonable budget. So it shows you current usage levels. You're trying to get to 2020. It gives you a predicted demand, and we want to meet or reduce this demand. So we have, you know, we can talk about how much fossil fuel we want to use, how much nuclear fuel we want to use, how much renewables we think we'll be able to use, and then how much imported fuel we want to use. If you need more info, you can get more info. And then also reducing demand is part of the equation as well. So you calculate your results and you get a result. So basically, it says I've exceeded my demand, and it's just really an unrealistic solution to the problem. And so you can go back and you can try again.

And so this is just a game that really exemplifies that if you have a number of variables that you need to balance, and it's a complex kind of algorithm, it's not something that's particularly interesting to explain in text, but if you let somebody actually experience what it takes to balance those variables to get to a particular outcome, it's an extremely engaging element to your coverage.

Going back. Okay. I'll just get through these real fast. And the next game I want to show you is from Minnesota Public Radio. This was produced by a person who is now at MSNBC. This was in 2007 based on the budget that the governor had proposed. So what they are trying to do is to get you to understand what it takes to get to a place where you can propose a budget, and all of the different tradeoffs that you have to deal with, and all of the contingencies or people that you have to deal with. So you have on the left-hand side, over here, we have all of your spending categories on the right-hand side. You have all of your income categories. I'm not going to pull this up, because it actually asks for a registration. You can click on any of the spending categories and you get more information about them. Anytime you click on a particular spending amount, it gives you kind of an implication for that. So if you start to spend more, it tells you kind of what you've done, what you've accomplished. If you start to spend less, it's going to tell you what you're sacrificing. And then you -- so you go through this whole thing

and you balance everything, and you get to the end and you come out with a balanced budget [inaudible]. And it lets you com–, oh, it lets you compare. It lets you compare what you came up with, with what the actual governor's budget is. And it's to some extent a little bit simplified, but it's getting into a very complex topic that most people would not dig into. And certainly if you're trying to cover this in a text story, it's going to be rather dull. [laughs]

So again, these are just a few examples of simulations that I think really let you experience something from a different perspective, and I think that's where news games can really make an impact.

[Audience applause.]

I think I'm even ahead of time.

Sharon Strover: You have a few more minutes.

Paige West: I'm good. [laughs] Oh, well, actually, I can say that it took a few people two months, but not fulltime, and it was very successful. And it's now a template for further [use]. Two months, but again not everyone, not fulltime.

Sharon Strover: Thank you very much. The last speaker on the panel is Howard Finberg. Howard is the Poynter's Director of Interactive Learning, and he directs the News University. And Paige, you work with Howard at News University.

Howard Finberg: More than just work. She was one of the founders of News University.

Sharon Strover: Perfect. And Howard will be talking a little bit about games as training for journalists, as I understand it.

Howard Finberg: Yes. I am sort of the odd duck out, but I've tried to look at this issue of games and journalists from two perspectives and share some of the lessons that we have learned. We do a lot of games. And I'm going to tell you exactly why we do them, because if I were to write this out and give you my presentation, I got maybe 20% chance that you will know what I'm talking about. A retention rate of 20% for written material is generally what is the norm. If I show you something on the screen and I tell you it at the same time, I have 50% chance that you'll retain -- you'll retain 50% of the information. I'm sorry. So 20% retention at the textual level, 50% at the combination of text and some sort of audio/visual, this kind of presentation, and 70-80% when you are actually doing something. The retention rate goes up that much. And it's not just because it's fun, because you're actually engaging your brain in a different way. So in that respect NewsU was built on that premise that we would -- that we would engage people who are training

by making sure that they do something. If you're not familiar with NewsU, it is an e-learning site for journalism training. It is funded by the Knight Foundation and run by the Poynter Institute. We have... You know, this is the fifth year of a five-year grant. And it is mostly free. And it's not just for journalists. It's anybody who wants to come and register at NewU.org. We do require you to register. You know, because...

We started this because the need for training is great and the opportunities for training [are] fairly limited and getting even tighter given the demands of the industry. And unfortunately, right after marketing dollars are being cut, training dollars go. What we wanted to do was to create something that would be not Poynter training, but training for anybody who wants to get to an audience. So we work with 20 partnerships in the U.S. and around the world. We are Switzerland when it comes to training. Love to work with everybody. And if you want to work with us, come see me.

We started in 2005. We now have 68,000 registered users. We're in 207 countries. And we mostly deal with -- we deal with all groups in terms of training. 65 modules of training all around different kinds of training. So this is what -- this is who we are. And I give you that background as we talk about the kinds of games that we do.

So it is trying to understand the link between e-learning games and news and journalism. And my background is news and journalism, and frankly, in graphics. I mean, I started at The Chicago Tribune with the Graphics Desk in the seventies, so when Alberto is talking about graphics, I *know* what he is talking about in that linear, when we're on paper, perspective.

So we want our participants to be engaged all the time, because we only have them for an hour to three hours. We make no games longer -- I mean, no training module longer than that, because we know that journalists and journalism students are very busy.

So can this translate to a news site? The concepts, I believe, absolutely. It's about keeping the audience involved. And it is about informing people, you know, by getting them to do something. So all the examples that you've seen today and examples that you saw yesterday, I think the ones that intrigued us the most were the ones where I am in control and do something, whether I can make a decision about rent versus buy, or whether I make a decision about being an airport screener, or whether I, you know, make a choice. So it is about doing. And, you know, it's a key to enjoyment, engagement, and return visits. Because if we are a business, ultimately, in terms of our news sites, we believe games and e-learning training is the key.

So we... I'm going to show you types of games that we do. These are a list of the kinds of games that are out there defined by the E-Learning Gild. We do variations of them. Most of our games are all done in house. They are

Flash based. We have all sorts of different kinds of games, all available to explore on your own. Five steps to multimedia storytelling. We wanted to get people to understand what were the concepts involved. So we developed a very simple match game as one of many activities, but it's basically drag-and-drop. And because we're trying to stay on time, I won't play any of these games. But it is a drag-and-drop kind of game and you have to match squares. It's a fairly simple thing, and it doesn't take a lot.

One of the things we have learned that I will pass onto you is to make sure you get your programmers, your Flash developers to document their code, put it in a code library, [and] make sure you can reuse the material that you have. Basically, re-skinning the game becomes incredibly profitable in the sense that you can take the concepts and say, "I'll take that one and redo it."

We also developed a game for the newly named news directors in television stations. We wanted–(these were our objectives)–to get them to rethink the process of going into a new environment. So how do you do that? Well, you get them to think of places where they can meet new staff members and think about the difference between time, how much time I'm spending doing different activities, and engagement. So we developed our little PacMan game; although, we don't call it PacMan, like, because there are copyright issues. But it's basically gobble up, spend time, and you're rewarded if you go into different rooms to engage your staff members. It's not the only thing we have in the course, but it is one of those activities that gets people engaged. And then you're balancing time and effectiveness, and just like other games, where you want to come out at the end where you've got a good balance between those two. If you go one way or the other, you basically lose the game.

We also created something that is more like a Jeopardy game or a Lifeline game where you go out and you answer certain questions and you can use different lifelines. Again, timed. One of the things we have learned is that if you can develop these games that are familiar in terms of cultural icons, Who Wants to be a Millionaire? Not that we'd ever call this. This is a familiar icon -- iconic kind of environment. So if you're thinking about development of games for news sites, put them in context that people understand. Telling stories with sound, which was basically a collection game where you went through and you gathered up various pieces of sound throughout the whole course. It's a somewhat linear course. You gathered up sound, and then you were able to reward. The game reward was the ability to mix your own audio product, and by dragging and dropping.

One of the things that we do like a lot is scenario games, because I think they are very effective. We have several of them. The Be a Reporter Game, it's a way of making sure people who may not be familiar with journalism understand the concepts of going out and reporting a story and doing it under deadline. So the Be a Reporter Game, what started out as a kiosk at the

museum was converted into a Flash game. You have a story. You use video. You can do some interviews. You gather stuff on your notepad.

Another one, a much more complicated one, and one of those that you say on one hand was very successful, on the other hand was like Ian pointed out, "I will never do this ever again," was a game that we wanted to help healthcare journalists understand hospitals. So it is really taking them through a scenario that makes them interact with various coworkers and have a deadline and gather up information based on using real databases. The problem with us was, frankly, the client: the unrealistic expectations and the inability to lock it down and the constant dinking. A six-month project turned into a more than a year project. But you have deadlines and you have activities that you need to go through. At the end of this, you'll understand how to cover a hospital.

We also like [what is] sometimes referred to as branching scenario, where if you answer one question, you're given other options. And we are starting to do this with a course about building local audiences online with a new partner's SNA, and using this kind of branching scenario where you respond to this actor in a newsroom, who [is] trying to get you to sort of think about the fear factors of resisting change when you want to build something. We used some software to do that. And it's become now quite effective to get some concepts across.

But as you can see, we do lots of different things, and we do them in lots of different ways. And we try to measure success not in an economic manner, but with whether we are successful in terms of the people who come to NewsU. And in that sense, we have a very high success rate. Not a dollar success rate, unfortunately. I wish we had more dollars. But in terms of usefulness, in terms of the course material. And since games are really part of this, this is very important to us. But even more important is, how much is it useful to their job? And, you know, as you can see, almost 80% find this useful to their job or to their classroom. We are now starting to ask that question for students. And are you going to tell your colleagues or friends about this? Again, recommend, and then go back and review the course. Very high evaluations. So we believe games work. And, you know, will they ever come back to NewsU? That's the bottom-line question for us. And if you've got 85% satisfaction rate, I think we can say that they seem to be fairly happy.

So in conclusion, games [are] really important. Okay. One message, games [are] really important. But it's not just about NewsU. You know, it's not just about crafting skills, but values and technical information as well. So I think games can play a major role at news sites. Information can be fun, and focused information. The best games in my mind are the ones that are very focused on one specific thing.

With that, here are my coordinates. And thank you.

[Audience applause.]

Sharon Strover: We have some time for questions. Okay. We do have some time for questions, just if you want to go to the microphone.

Christina: Hi. My name is Christina Viazo[?] with the Wall Street Journal. I'm actually curious to know, how much does it cost to develop a game like that for a newspaper? And also, do you have data that proves that the readers stick to the site because of the game? I know for fantasy soccer and football people really are crazy, but do they go beyond the games actually? Thanks.

Ian Bogost: Okay. I'm sure each of us has a different answer. You know, it costs a lot of money to make interactive software, right? You know, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars. For me, from my perspective, a lot of that can be offset by doing really creative things around the way that the stuff gets monetized. So the story I told about Shockwave where we had a very small initial investment, like, in the low thousands of dollars, but then there was the potential for a large upside for them and for us, based on the way that the advertising was monetized. That was like much more attractive to me. I'm willing to work on that stuff at very low costs up front if there is some way of making it cash out later. And then it also means that I'm more invested, because the quality or the performance, if we are measuring it in that way, is something that I care about more.

Sharon Strover: Is low thousands under ten?

Ian Bogost: Yeah, under ten, but again, that's, I mean, you know, if you have people on staff, then you can kind of amortize these costs across their salaries and things. Depends on how you are doing it. So I don't know that there is a simple answer. Every time anyone asks me this question, which is really every time that I give a talk like this, my answer is, it costs however much you want it to. I mean, you can do something within any budget. You can do something worthwhile within any budget, but you have to apply constraints, and you have to have experts who know what they are doing working on this.

Suzanne Seggerman: I just want to add, too, that some of these games that I showed, Darfur is Dying, for instance, Food Force, those are, you know, had two million players, some of those, so they are really getting out there. I mean, they are free, and that's part of why they work so well, but they are really reaching a lot of people.

Audience Member: [Inaudible.]

Suzanne Seggerman: Well, in Darfur is Dying, I think the number at last count was somewhere between 25 and 1,000 or 50,000 of them, you know, sent it on to other people. They wrote letters to Congress. They, you know... You can measure how much...

Ian Bogost: It wasn't really designed for that, you know, so if that is a goal of yours, then that has to be -- that's a design consideration. That's not -- that's not typically a goal of mine when I'm making games like this. It's about... Well, actually, with The New York Times stuff, we tried to do it through these sort of related links things, but I have never been able to get any data back, so I don't know the answer.

Howard Finberg: Yeah, I think that's a key issue, what your design is. I mean, if it's integrated in the content, then it doesn't really matter if they are going through other pages. If you want to use the game to drive them to other traffic, you could develop a game that way. And the question on cost, I mean, you can -- it is about anywhere from 5 to 50 to 500,000 depending on how much time, energy, and how fast you want the game.

Suzanne Seggerman: One of the games I showed you, too, was a $3-million budget, so they can go all the way up.

Sharon Strover: Next question.

Roberto: Sure. My name is Roberto Viapondo[sp?]. I produce interactive graphics at the Statesman. I actually met Paige at the boot camp at UNC back last [inaudible]. Question is about the newsroom reaction or the newsroom response to pitching the idea of a news game or an editorial game. The most common form of resistance I get when I pitch these things is something to the effect of, "Don't you think we are trivializing these issues by making them entertaining?" And how do you, basically, how do you disentangle that perception between a game, which everybody recognizes as entertainment, versus a simulation, which people can sort of wrap their heads around as more along the lines of training? I wonder if you all could speak to that.

Paige West: Well, I would -- when you pitch a story that involves that, I just wouldn't use the term 'game.'

Ian Bogost: Yeah, that's right.

Howard Finberg: That was my... No, we have an interactive -- we have interactive element or something.

Paige West: And then in terms of the baggage screener game, it did. The idea was about resistance and "No, don't do that," and the editor, the interactive editor went ahead and did it anyway. And it, you know, it did

better than the text story and it still receives traffic, and so it was a proven concept that, you know, you have to have one that's successful for people to see.

Sharon Strover: Doesn't that dodge the question a little bit though? Can you get to the fundamental question of whether use should be fun?

Ian Bogost: Well, you know, I mean, you could say the same thing of that three-inch story about the same topic. Doesn't it trivialize the complicated issue that didn't get the attention it deserves? You know, so there's a framing. There's a lot of framing work that has to be done here, certainly, and there's a media literacy problem in all industries including this one, where you have to sell the idea of games as a medium. And that takes work. You know, the--the--this sort of fun question I would just avoid entirely, you know, and I would look for examples that are meaningful instead of trivial, and use those as a lever, and then, you know, kind of reframe the question. It's more of an exercise in rhetoric, I think, than a question about the nature of the medium.

Denis: Hi. I'm Denis Burgieman I'm from Brazil. I'm the editor of this relatively new[?] magazine in Brazil called [inaudible]. And I would like to very quickly share an experience we had there and ask the people in the table if they know about any similar experience in the United States. For the last two years, we've been experimenting there with ARGs. ARGs are Alternate Reality Games. Basically, I won't be able to explain what ARGs are here. That would take like an hour. [audience laughter] But basically, it's a videogame that is played outside the computer, or another way of explaining, it's like a feature film where the audience can play a role. People can actually take part in the solution of the problem. It's like a complex problem and they take part in the solution. And we've been creating very complex ones. We actually created a separated team from the magazine, and this team is as big as the magazine's team. And some of these games demand the audience to interact with the magazine in a very profound way, like the solution to the mystery is in the archive of the magazine, for example. It's not about news, and our magazine isn't about news. It's more about explaining things. But I guess we found a way to create very profound relations of part of our audience with the magazine and with these fiction stories we create. I'd like to know, I know that there are lots of ARGs being made here in United States. I know that even Wired Magazine did some things, some small things with this. But I'd like to know if you know about any similar experience with ARGs here.

Suzanne Seggerman: I know Ian's going to talk about it. He's actually made one. We're having a panel at our festival about ARGs. They are incredibly interesting, especially some of the new ones coming up about oil and other serious issues. It's… There's a lot of potential there. Love to hear more about your experience, but Ian made one.

Ian Bogost: I mean, the challenge with this genre is that the attention they get, the publicity that these games get is very large. The actual participation is still relatively small. There's a chasm. Maybe this is just in the states. It seems to me much more popular...

Dennis: Same thing then.

Ian Bogost: Yeah. So that's the -- you know, that's the question, how do you close that gap? It's one thing to get publicity about an idea. And this is why a lot of ARGs are used as marketing, because they are kind of great stunts that get -- that get -- that get attention. That's a big design problem, and it may be a cultural problem. And then there's the whole sort of police state thing that we've got going on. You know, when you go out and you send people into the world and you're sort of endorsing activities that are unusual, which typically they are, I think a lot of organizations are uncomfortable with that. I haven't really thought about the sort of news/ARG connection directly, but it's a really interesting one. And getting people out into their local communities, for example, could be really powerful. But there are some pretty big challenges, I think, as well.

Sandra: Hello. My name is Sandra Crucianelli from Argentina. I have a question for Howard. You said that your courses are for all the world, but all the world that speak isn't in Spanish and English, and relative people in Latin America that don't read in Spanish, don't read in English, only in Spanish. So the question is... I'm sorry for my English. The question is, did you think to give your courses in Latin America, to put them in Spanish? How do you think that it works in those countries?

Howard Finberg: We are actually starting a process called NewsUGlobal, which is not to translate, but to transform our training into different languages. And I say transform deliberately, because local examples, local idioms, processes are very important to any transformation. Spanish is key to that project. And we are looking for a funding partner and for content partners to make that happen. Next year... This year, we'll sort of start, you know, that due diligence process. Long answer that should have been shorted to, yes, we will be global and we will be Spanish first probably.

Celine Guedes: I'm Celine Guedes from O Global Newspaper and website from Brazil. We've seen many interesting multimedia features, and you've shown games that are astonishing. I'd like to have some of them in our website. But I didn't understand yet when you use a game and when you use some other multimedia feature that can be rich also. Is this [inaudible] your only difference? And does it help engage people, just the fact that you have a reward by the end? Is it that powerful?

Suzanne Seggerman: Well, I think a really well designed game. A lot of people define a game simply as an interactive experience that has a win condition of some kind.

Ian Bogost: But they're wrong.

[Audience laughter.]

Suzanne Seggerman: Okay. Never mind.

Ian Bogost: This is… In the kind of game research community, there's this huge argument about, what is it? Because everyone, once you start researching something, you have to ask what it is and argue about it interminably. But anyway, I didn't mean to interrupt.

[Audience laughter.]

Suzanne Seggerman: Anyway, I'm in the other camp. [audience laughter] I think, you know, a really well designed game has that, well, perfect balance of challenge and reward.

Ian Bogost: I think Paige got this right in her talk. You know, the idea of simulating and taking part in an experience that's different from the one that you normally have and having that sense of empathy with a situation that's not yours. You don't get that when you're moving sliders, you know? Numbers around may give you some intellectual, rational explanation for whether you should, you know, buy or rent a house, but what's the experience of living that other life like? That's what you get with a game. And I've got a very kind of broad understanding of this word 'game' that really just includes, you know, being a part of the logic of some other life that isn't yours.

Suzanne Seggerman: So it's empathy, not the win?

Ian Bogost: Yeah, it's empathy. The win thing can sometimes be motivating, but not for all people. And what does it mean to win? I mean, you know, we're just really all trying to get by to the next day or the next week and, you know, having some sense of someone else's challenges is what I'm interested in.

Howard Finberg: But I don't think -- I don't think it's just about the win, but I also don't think it's just about empathy. Sometimes people need to understand concepts that are best taught be bringing them to explore situations. And that's not an empathetic situation. That's an exploration issue. And it's… That's why trying to say that, "Here's a game," well, there are all kinds of things that… You know, here's an activity that helps me learn. Is that a game or…? I don't know.

Ian Bogost: Yeah, I mean, one of the reasons that the word 'game' or the word 'videogame' is worth keeping around is just that it has very strong cultural currency, and you can talk to anyone on the street and you can use the word and they'll at least know what you're talking about. You know, so as a frame, it's a good starting point, and then you kind of do whatever you want. You know, this representation of complexity, the different rules involved in a particular situation, tradeoffs, empathy, all those things come into place. I totally agree.

Paige West: That being said, I think competition is a big motivator. I think a very successful example of this is The New York Times news quiz on Facebook. And they, you know, they made it a Facebook application and so you can keep track of your score, you can keep track of your score relative to all your friends' scores, so you know how much smarter you are versus your friends, versus the whole Facebook world. And, you know, I think just a general news quiz every day, you might lose interest after a couple of days, but maintaining your score and maintaining that status in that world is an important sort of ego thing.

Ian Bogost: Yeah, there's this new game called… What's Austin and Eric's thing called?

Suzanne Seggerman: Play the News.

Ian Bogost: Playing the News. PlayingTheNewsGame.com, I think, is where it is. They've just released the kind of public beta, where it's you go every day and you try to -- you read a little bit about some news story and you try to make predictions about what's going to happen next. It's something like a kind of marketplace or fantasy sports sort of model applied to the news. So that's another example.

Howard Finberg: And I would say don't underestimate this competition aspect. We borrowed the concept from The New York Times ranking of yourself versus your friends versus … and used it in a new game, First Amendment for High School Students, and so you can see your score, your score in your school and other students, and then in the state. And it is a way of motivating people to try again, because you always want to give them the opportunity to try again.

Sharon Strover: One final question from me then. I'm curious for those of you who are in the news organizations and work directly with the news organizations, when the games are on the site and people are playing them, are the news organizations actually tracking the extent to which people are playing the game? And this kind of echoes an earlier question, are [they] actually going back and reading anything on the newspaper? Or is, indeed,

the marketing group simply very happy that people are there and seeing ads as they play games?

Paige West: Well, honestly, the one that I could speak to would be the MSNBC example, and that one was several years ago before we had really good tracking. I know that the Facebook quiz for The New York Times has significantly, you know, they have a significant proportion of people coming to The Times from that quiz every day, so I think it is -- it does have the potential to drive traffic.

Howard Finberg: It is an open book quiz.

Ian Bogost: I don't really know how to answer that question, because in my experience, and I don't work at these organizations, but in my experience they are just a nightmare mess of people running around not working together anyway. [audience laughter] So I don't know where the -- I don't know where the data even lives in some cases, let alone whether it's being tracked. It seems to me that there's certainly a lot more measurement that could be done. Nowadays, we can build a ton of granularity into these things, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we're doing it yet. So I don't have a great answer. I'm also not sure that the goals are clear. And you know, there was a question we had near the beginning about, you know, this exact thing. If the goal is really to get people from here to there, then that's a design consideration. Again, it's sort of the same thing we said before. If the goal is to get them to stare at an advertisement, then that may be a different goal. It may be a conflicting one.

Sharon Strover: Rosental has asked for a final [question].

Audience Member: A final, final. Do you believe that...? You know, there are some cognitive abilities and some brain development in kids that have been, you know, educated and lived on videogames for their whole lives, and that it somehow becomes an inevitable influence on journalism narrative that we have to absorb some of those things and use it in storytelling of journalists. Do you think...? In other words, can we escape from it?

Ian Bogost: No. I mean, it's--it's -- you're absolutely right. This is a -- this is a medium that, well, not kids, but really young adults even at this point. Some people say that anyone under 35 has grown up with some experience with games. But, you know, when you're talking about anyone under 25, you're probably looking at a large majority of young people for whom this medium has been foundational in some way. And that's going to -- that's going to be an influence of some kind.

Paige West: I read an interesting book a long -- a while ago when I was in science education, and it's called Growing Up Digital, and it's about exactly that. I mean, all of these -- all of the young people today have grown up with

computers, and they just interact with the world in a completely different way. They are not satisfied to sit there and just receive information from some sort of mass medium. So we have to adapt.

Howard Finberg: It is just one more piece of that self-exploration that I want to be in control of my learning or my understanding of the situation. And that's, you know… I mean, Ian, I think you said this when we were at a conference in Boston that gaming is nothing more -- is not a stupid activity. It's incredibly complex learning, where I've got to figure out something. We take that principle and then sort of say, well, how does that link to what we want to do in terms of explaining the news? Give people the tools to figure out something. That, to me, is the future.

Suzanne Seggerman: And also, what we saw a lot of yesterday, too, where people are used to making their own things, so they get the content, and they want to make it and customize it and have it be their own. That's something that you get a lot of in games, too, modding and kids affecting all their games that way. So they are very interrelated.

Sharon Strover: Okay. Thank you very much.

[Audience applause.]