

# College research papers not always dry and dull

**Students address  
video games, uses  
of humor and more**

by Jenn Young  
*STAFF WRITER*

MORGANTOWN — In another year, almost every West Virginia University freshman will know what part of Joseph Lewis' thesis dissertation looks like, because many will have played a version of it in their freshman orientation class.

For his graduate thesis, Lewis took the Interactive Career Information Web Resource tool, designed initially by NASA and the Maryland Business Roundtable, and reworked it into an interactive video game for learning more about WVU and career resources.

He's one of many students in nearby colleges putting a fresh or contemporary spin on semester projects or graduate dissertations — many of which, like that of Lewis, are

being turned into models for real-world application.

Largely inspired by Lewis' concepts, WVU is currently working on a proposal for an optional one-credit course component for freshman orientation to be anchored by a video game. It's something that thesis chair Frances VanScoy said will make more topics accessible to students since most have grown up in a gaming-oriented and personal computer-oriented culture.

Laura Runkle, now a senior at West Virginia Wesleyan College, came up with the idea for a research paper proposal for her communications class after a conversation with her fiancée.

The 22-page proposal — "Humor as a remedial strategy: The functions of humor in embarrassing situations" — initially was written for her communication research methods class, but since also has provided her ample opportunity to travel.

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# PAPERS

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"I thought this would be a research proposal worth being done, because using humor to cope with embarrassment is something a lot of people do. It came to me when I was talking to my fiancée, who makes jokes all the time, especially if he's in an uncomfortable situation. So I called him out on it one day," she said. "Then I started thinking there probably wasn't a lot of relevant research in existence tying humor and embarrassment together. There's a lot on both topics separately, but nothing that looked at the two together and how they interact."

After winning "Top Student Paper" within the school's communications department, she also presented her findings at the National Communication Association conference and later the Eastern Communications Association conference.

James Miltenberger was the doctoral chair to Tretip Kamosiri when she defended her dissertation in 2002. And he said that body of work, "Even a Small Star Shines in the Darkness: Overcoming Challenges Faced by Pianists with Small Hands," has made her an internationally recogniza-

ble name in her field.

While pursuing her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from WVU, Kamosiri included video clips, with her written dissertation, of piano-playing exercises, and performance strategies, for small-handed pianists.

"Her thesis has been requested by pianists from all over the world," Miltenberger said. "It was a unique topic and very helpful to pianists with small hands and to teachers who teach pianists with small hands."

Currently she has a successful career in piano education in Thailand.

Hilary Attfield, currently the journals manager for the WVU Press, didn't incorporate video games into her thesis, but she did tie much of her dissertation into an electronic editing demonstration by developing her own Web site.

In "The Future of Electronic Editing: Theory and Practice," her Web-page like dissertation is centered on the journalistic commentary and drawings of West Virginia artist-journalist David Hunter Strother, who attended the well-publicized John Brown trial in Harpers Ferry.

Attfield earned an Innovative ETD Award for her dissertation. The WVU graduate received the award from the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, an

international consortium.

"Coming from a background in English literature and having picked up some elementary programming skills in the '80s and early '90s, I approached a dissertation topic with the idea of showing how even smaller pieces of literary material, which could not in the past have gained publication, might now be presented to the world in electronic fashion," Attfield said.

She added that this occurred while the Web was still in its infancy.

"I decided that I wanted to present a work edited to provide the maximum amount of information to readers, and to have it stored in such a form that if technologies and programming techniques changed, then the material would still be readable," Attfield said.

After poring through the WVU library's West Virginia and Local History Collection, she found a lecture given by David Hunter Strother on John Brown, which no one knew was there since the description was incomplete.

After reporting on the John Brown case, Strother, who Attfield said was "arguably the first writer and artist in West Virginia," turned his writings into lectures held in lyceums around the country. It was much of that rare material Attfield brought to life.