



Digital Excellence Impact Case Studies

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Hybrid Comic Jam as a
Community Building Activity

by Julian Lawrence

Planning
Your
Module



Introducing
Your Module
to Students



Structuring
Your
Content



Design,
Collaboration
and
Construction
of Knowledge



Formative:
Putting Your
Learning into
Application



Designing Your
Summative
Assessment



Concluding
Your
Module





Julian Lawrence

Senior Lecturer in Comics,
Graphic Novels &
Sequential Arts
SCEDT
j.lawrence@tees.ac.uk

Julian Lawrence, Senior Lecturer in Comics and Graphic Novels, regularly attends comic jams and has been a part of the comics community since the early 2000s. A comic jam is one way of creating a community art project. The idea of a community art project goes back thousands of years and is a great way to bring people together to produce something amazing. The aim is that people come together to work on a project and build something from the ground up. In the 1960s, groups of comic book artists would organise underground parties where artists would sit in a room and create comics together, and thus the 'comic jam' was created. The concept was that one artist would create the first panel of the comic, and then the next would create another panel and aim to carry on the narrative.

However, due to the pandemic, the comic jams have had to move online. Whilst attending the Vancouver Comic Jam in 2020, Julian was introduced to a range of different apps that were used to facilitate the jam. To run an online comic jam, all that is required is Blackboard or Teams, some form of social media and an app called Aggie.io. To use Aggie.io, a link is set up that can be shared with anyone you would like to participate in the jam. Participants then create their own 'layer' where they can contribute their ideas to the pre-set comic strip. The interface is very similar to Photoshop, therefore making it an app that is instantly familiar with the majority of people who use it. Using social media, the participants of the comic jam were able to spread messages and share links with each other. Julian found that with an online comic jam, it gives an opportunity to rebuild community. Groups of comic fans and creators around the world are able to come together to share ideas and discover new people and new approaches to comic art. It also gives the opportunity for people to learn from each other.

When Julian introduced this concept to his third year students, it became almost like a drawing party, with different students contributing to others' ideas. Therefore, he decided to continue using this concept of a comic jam throughout his online teaching with his students and found that the students really responded well to this. As a whole, Julian found that using online comic jams are a benefit to the curriculum. They help to bring students together in a collaborative way and encourage them to share ideas and drawing styles. He also found that they are a necessity during lockdowns, when students cannot come together in their usual settings. They contribute to a rewarding form of social learning, where students are more likely to communicate with each other in the online setting and are becoming part of the online teaching when it comes to comics and art across the university. In comparison with other courses where it was found that students were not fond of working in groups when studying online, through student surveys and reflective reports, students said that they preferred working in groups more using this collaborative tool during lockdown as it helped them to communicate with their fellow students within the course.



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Julian Lawrence 2021



It is clear to see that Julian's way of teaching and encouraging collaboration is a cause for success within the classroom, and will be something that he considers to use in the future. This tool can also be used in other disciplines, for example, for working on Mathematical equations together, annotating a poem in English Literature or drawing a diagram in Engineering and could be something that can be considered for use across the wider university.

When Julian was asked what digital excellence means to him, he said “When I reflect on what digital excellence means to me, I must be honest: digital excellence means digital sobriety. Our civilization has become drunk with the power of digital tools. As Drucker & Bishop (2019) point out, ‘why don’t we address the ecological costs of all digital technology?’ The internet is the world’s largest fossil-fuel-burning machine, and the digital domain’s increasing demand for energy to run devices, servers, the web, etc. is unsustainable. Therefore, digital excellence means maintaining a sound and ecological balance between digital and analog tools. This is a contentious stance, but it is a necessary one in this Anthropogenic era of climate change and environmental destruction.”

