



# CASE study



## Students develop the wisdom to make good business decisions



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### North Shore Community College

An Interview with Jim Stone  
Sessional Instructor  
North Shore Community College, Danvers, MA

“I’m going to kill this,” says a dedicated gamer in Jim Stone’s Small Business and Entrepreneurship course at North Shore Community College (NSCC). NSCC grants 2-year degrees and a wide variety of trade certificates from their campus in Danvers, MA, just north of Boston.

Stone, a software entrepreneur and instructional designer turned college instructor, is halfway through the course and he has just discarded the long-standing US\$240 textbook. He has opted instead for a paperback textbook and a copy of the GoVenture Micro Business simulation. Total cost: US\$60.

It’s the Micro Business simulation that has captured the attention of Stone’s gamer-student. “I think emotional engagement with the material is really important to learning,” says Stone, who remembers his own engagement with GoVenture.

**“The interaction is surprisingly complex and student engagement was immediately evident”**



“One of my students approached me and asked if I had ever heard of the GoVenture.net website. I am a research junkie, so that recommendation was all it really took,” says Stone. “When I found the site I went totally nuts. I crawled all over it looking at everything, spent hours comparing one simulation to another. I wanted to marry this company.”

“For my class, I settled on Micro Business,” says Stone. In the GoVenture Micro Business simulation, students are proprietors of a mobile cart business. They make all the daily business decisions a real mobile cart operator would have to make.

“At first I thought it might be too simple for my class,” says Stone, “almost a bit hokey. And it does have an easy learning curve. But the interaction is surprisingly complex and student engagement was immediately evident.”

● *“I would share stats with students. I didn’t give them names, but I let them know what the best and worst scores were for various metrics”*

● *“Each team had 10-minutes to consider strategy. Then they had 20-minutes of play time in the simulation”*

● *“Part of running a business is developing the wisdom to make good decisions ...”*

Stone’s class of 20 students meets once a week for three hours. “I started out very structured,” says Stone. “I standardized on a single simulation for the classwork, and created specific milestones that the students needed to achieve.”

But soon, the students started taking charge of their own learning. The gamer-student ran into an obstacle with food inventory that expired, leaving him without product to sell.

“Another student was talking about how she had hired the least-experienced employee to save money,” says Stone. “But [the junior employee] kept messing up. So she let him go and hired the most experienced employee instead.”

During the individual-play portion of the course, students were required to meet three milestones: 28, 56, and 84 virtual days of game play.

“I would share stats with the students,” says Stone. “I didn’t give them names, but I would let them know what the best and worst scores were for various metrics. The winner got a \$5 Dunkin’ Donuts card.”

“I also tried team-based learning, which I called Shootouts,” says Stone. “Each team had 10-minutes to consider their strategy. Then they had 20-minutes of play time in the simulation.”

“One team tried to run as many virtual days of business as possible since that would generate the most [virtual] days of revenue. They didn’t win, but it was an interesting experiment.”

The simulation play in class accounted for 12.5% of the students’ overall grade. “5% of their final grade came from the individual play,” Says Stone. “And 7.5% of their final grade came from the two shootouts. There was enough there that a student could miss an A in the course if they messed up.”

The online simulation automatically feeds individual performance data back to the instructor, so Stone was able to offer both formative feedback during the gameplay, and quickly provide students assessment at the end of the competition. Stone thinks the feedback tools are a lot like the feedback you get running a real business.

“You know,” says Stone, “Part of running a business is developing the wisdom to make good decisions with the things you can control and learning how to steer clear of the things you cannot. It’s almost uncanny how realistic GoVenture Micro Business feels in this regard.”



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