



GET A LIFE RESEARCH DOCUMENT

Introduction

Get a Life is a game-based learning application for middle school students that aims to enhance college and career awareness. Realistic and humorous life events introduce students to common challenges and opportunities they may encounter after high school. By interacting with authentic, in-game scenarios and consequences, students broaden their understanding of college and careers, which they can apply to the decisions they make in their own lives.

College and Career Awareness

Research indicates that college and career awareness contributes to students' future success. In fact, some researchers stress that college preparation should be a priority throughout the K-12 years (Mattern et al., 2016). The benefits of a college education are numerous: Compared with a high school graduate, a college graduate can expect a higher annual income, longer life expectancy, and greater overall satisfaction with their job and marriage (Le et al., 2016). However, not all students are prepared for life after high school. That is why it is important for students to have early conversations about their college and career options, so they understand their own goals and how to achieve them (K20 Center for Educational and Community Renewal, 2018).

College and career awareness has become increasingly important in the K-12 curriculum. For example, the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center outlines specific ways for school personnel to aid middle and high school students in the college and career exploration process. It explains that middle school and high school are optimal periods during which students can gain awareness of their interests and connect those to specific courses and career paths later in life (Bussell et al., 2021).

Game-Based Learning

Game-Based Learning (GBL) has been shown to be an effective tool for increasing student engagement and motivation (Jabbar & Felicia, 2015). GBL provides an immersive learning environment that helps meet the needs of contemporary students (Anastasiadis et al., 2018). By providing clear goals, direct and immediate feedback, a balance between ability level and challenge, and a sense of control, GBL supports many of the components associated with student achievement.

GBL has been used effectively to teach STEM, non-cognitive, and life skills (Adame et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2016; McDonald, 2017). This indicates GBL is a useful tool that can be applied to various domains and objectives.

Objectives

By the time students complete *Get a Life*, they will be able to:

- connect the concepts of college, career, and income.
- understand how salary affects various aspects of life.
- consider their comfort level and civic involvement when evaluating potential future careers.

Additional Topics

Get a Life may lead to questions and conversations about additional topics for students to explore:

- Student loan debt and repayment plans
- Tuition cost
- FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), scholarships, and grants
- Salary and income



- Cost of living and medical insurance
- The military and how it can affect the cost of education
- Social security

Gameplay

In *Get a Life*, the student guides a character from high school graduation to retirement. The student makes decisions on the character's behalf, such as what interest the character will pursue and whether they will attend college. Along the way, the student is presented with both opportunities and obstacles related to education, career, and life. The student

must balance the character's income, comfort level, and civic involvement so they can lead a fulfilling life and retire comfortably.

Get a Life presents limitless storylines and outcomes, reflective of life. The game includes 10 unique characters with various interests, test scores, and levels of financial assistance. There are 16 different career clusters for the student to explore, with a total of 96 different careers. Through exposure to real-life scenarios and the consequences of their choices, the student will expand their college and career awareness and deepen their understanding of the responsibilities of adult life.

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