

# Video Gaming 101

UGA doctoral students  
Michael Barbour (L),  
and Mark Evans.

*Two UGA doctoral students develop a course to prepare future teachers to integrate video games and computer simulations into the classroom*

BY JULIE SARTOR

**V**ideo games and computer simulations have been a large part of popular culture since their appearance three decades ago. But in recent years, educators, scholars and scientists have been speaking out on just how effective a learning tool video gaming can be.

Scientists across the nation have called for the federal government to spend millions of dollars on developing video-game applications for schools. They believe that video games teach students the skills that employers want: analytical thinking, team building, multitasking and problem-solving under duress. Video games also might allow students to learn at their own pace, scientists say – and they have the potential to engage students more closely in their studies.

That is exactly why two University of Georgia graduate students developed an undergraduate course for future teachers that focuses on the instructional uses of role playing, computer simulations and video games.

Mark Evans and Michael Barbour developed the special projects course in the College of Education titled, “Simulations and Gaming in Social Studies.” They offered the class for the first time in spring 2007.

“The course is not about trying to promote the use of video games in the classroom. It is just another way to speak [the students’] language because that’s what they’re familiar with,” said Barbour, a doctoral student in educational psychology and instructional technology.

Evans, a doctoral student in elementary and social studies education, had been successfully using video-game examples in his classes to relate to students when he approached department head Ronald VanSickle and social studies program coordinator Todd Dinkelman in the fall of 2006 with the idea for the class.

A similar course had previously been offered on the master’s level, but Evans thought it would be perfect for preservice teachers at the undergraduate level. He also wanted to open it up campus-wide and use the medium of the video game to reach students who would never before have thought about teaching.

Most of the department’s classes are closed because elementary education is such a high-demand major, so opening the course gives other majors an opportunity to

