



# Support of **Social Motivation** in an **Educational Game** for **Acquiring Intercultural Skills**

April 1, 2009 @ 2:00pm, NSH 1507



**Amy Ogan**

Human Computer Interaction Institute

## Thesis Proposal

Games are increasingly being adapted for use as educational tools. One relatively new use of games is to facilitate learning social or interpersonal skills such as conflict resolution by simulating human behavior with virtual characters. My work investigates students' social goals to understand how they help motivate students to acquire cultural understanding, in one such system designed to teach cross-cultural negotiation skills.

In previous work, I hypothesized that students who were given explicit social goals (e.g. "Come to understand your partner's point of view") would be more successful learning from the game than students who were given task-only goals. The results did not confirm our hypothesis – the group without the social goal learned more according to most measures. However, on further investigation, students who reported having social goals in a manipulation check, regardless of condition, seemed to learn the most. These results combined with my other preliminary work suggest that social goals and interactions are important in learning cultural negotiation, but that setting explicit social goals may not be the right scaffold.

In this proposal, I outline a program of research to understand the role of integrative and self-assertive social goals in learning and how to promote them. First, I will implicitly manipulate students' goals in a culturally-situated game to determine how social goals affect learning. Second, I will develop a model of how they are influenced by and interact with learner characteristics such as social intelligence and personality traits. Additionally, I will develop an intervention that will be built into a virtual educational environment to implicitly scaffold social goals. This work will contribute to the literature on learning sciences, virtual environments, and intercultural competence to provide a better understanding of how people interact with virtual humans in a cultural learning context.

## Thesis Committee

**Vincent Alevan**  
*co-chair*

Human Computer Interaction Institute



**Christopher Jones**  
*co-chair*

Modern Languages, HCII



**Sara Kiesler**  
*member*

Human Computer Interaction Institute



**Randall Hill**  
*external member*

Institute for Creative Technologies, USC

