

Playing with pills: Students gaming for knowledge

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A specially made computer game, developed at the University of Stavanger (UiS), is set to help Norwegian nursing students pass a vitally important exam.

If you mention the words "drug calculations" to a nursing student, it is likely that you receive a sigh in return. Not only is it a difficult subject, the students also have to master it to perfection. A single mistake in the examination leads to fail, which again bars you from working as a nurse because wrong dosage of medication can be fatal.

At UiS the students have three goes at handing in an exam paper without mistakes. The last few years the percentage of fails has been between 36 and 39 both for the first and second attempt. The nationwide results vary, but some colleges have seen up to 50 per cent of their students fail. The problem has been discussed at several national conferences.

Try something new

Now the University's unit for web-based studies, NettOp, is testing a completely new teaching aid - a computer game to help the students.

"This has been a problem for many years. We think it is high time to try something new," says Atle Løkken, director of NettOp.

Doctoral student Lars Rune Sæterdal teaches medication calculations and

participates in the [computer game](#) project.

"My impression is that many [nursing students](#) do not trust their skills in mathematics and science from high school. That might be one reason why they struggle with this particular subject. Computer games can be a good supplement," Sæterdal says.

Visual learning

Often termed "serious gaming", the idea is to make learning easier and more fun by using methodology from computer games. Project leader Petter Mordt points out that there are many ways of learning.

"Some prefer more visual ways of learning instead of text or mathematical formulas. I can see no reason why the instruction should not be fun," he says.

Exactly how the game will look is still not clear. First, the subject content must be determined. Then the development of the game can begin. Nevertheless, the idea is to make short exercises that have to be solved under time pressure.

In August the games will be released to the students on the online nursing programme. Petter Mordt stresses that the game will replace neither teaching nor curriculum. It will only be an extra aid for those who need it.

More games

NettOp has received development funds from Norway Opening Universities - a governmental agency to promote the development of ICT supported programmes. The project has been accepted as part of the

EU scheme GameIT.

Experienced professionals from the nursing programmes at Agder and Stavanger will help evaluate its academic quality.

The next step is to make a bigger game that deals with drug handling from the prescription in the medicine storage room to the injection on the patient. Atle Løkken has great faith in the game programme.

"The video game World of Warcraft is the world's biggest arena for problem-based learning. Here millions of unknown persons, having different languages and cultures, solve challenges together. That is far beyond what a teacher may achieve in a classroom," the NettOp director says.

Provided by University of Stavanger

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