

GAME ON! BADGES MOTIVATE IN AN ONLINE BRANDING COURSE

Course Identifier: (e.g. TLC801) JRN 491

Course Name: Brand You: Public Relations Topics in Journalism

Department: JRN College: Communication Arts & Sciences

Primary contact name, phone number, and email (*normally this will be the lead instructor*)

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Faculty and Staff Involved in Developing and Offering the Course *please list full name, position at MSU, email address, and project role for each person*

NAME	MSU Affiliation	PROJECT ROLE
Joe Grimm	Fixed-term Faculty	Instructional and course design, lead instructor
Emily Brozovic	Staff	Instructional Design, Graphic Design, Development

Which Competition Are You Entering (select one):

FULLY ONLINE COURSE (no required face to face component)

BLENDED/HYBRID OR FLIPPED COURSE (some face to face learning is replaced by online learning)

TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING INNOVATION (one specific technology innovation in a face-to-face, blended, flipped, or online course)

Semester(s) offered in 2013-2014 and number of students enrolled:

SEMESTER	# STUDENTS
Summer 2013	16

I. Course Description

This online course teaches students the principles of digital career branding. It motivates and engages them with achievement badges they earn by creating the necessary assets.

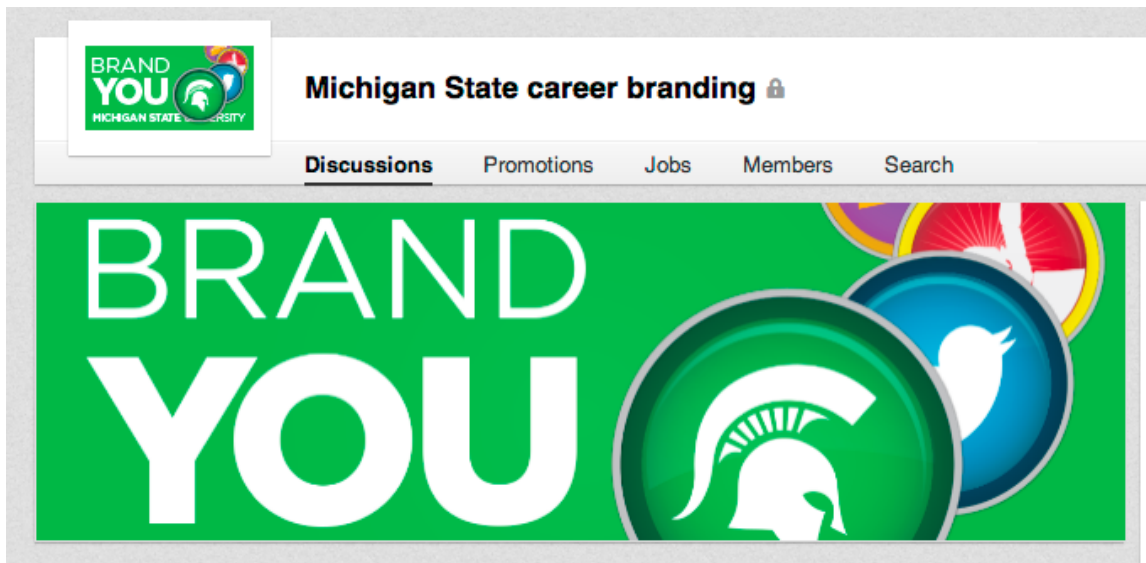
This three-value combination rewards students with strategies that will help them get jobs, tools they need and incentivizing badges that reward them instantly, as in an online games.

The course explores the Big Three of career-related social networks: LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Students learn the theory and practice and create tools for these environments. As they create assets they are doubly rewarded, both by having that asset and by being awarded a badge within the Desire2Learn course environment.

The course uses gaming language. There is a first level, of achievement where properly executed assignments bring badges and points of a basic value. The second level, once students earn the right to play there, offers higher point values for more demanding assignments.

Based on feedback from an earlier iteration of the course, we cut down on procrastination by offering a “bonus badge” as an incentive to hit deadlines sooner.

Achievement badges are posted on individual badge boards so that students can see their rewards. The digital badges reflect the values they reinforce and to have some MSU spirit. Confidentiality prevents us from displaying badge boards publicly and that would have no utility outside the classroom, so we created a LinkedIn group, with a badge of its own, that students can pin to their LinkedIn accounts as a sign that they successfully completed this course. This is also something they asked for.



[The course LinkedIn group homepage](#)

II. Learning and Interaction Goals of the Course or Technology-enhanced Innovation

Our overriding concerns were about getting the students to create a digital brand in a suite of social networks, “making stuff” they would be able to take with them. We did not want to be just theoretical. If the DO, they will LEARN.

We believe badges are much more than just a trick or a widget. Students are used to earning badges, weapons, skills or protections in the gaming world and badges are an important part of how they interact and judge status on social networks. Our hypothesis was that badges would motivate them to score more than the 90 points that they needed to ace the course (they did) and that badges would INTEGRATE the Desire2Learn academic online environment with the job market’s social networks

Oh, serendipity! We realized badges could brand our branding course as a Spartan adventure, modeling what we were talking about. The badges helped us link all these platforms to each other and to MSU. We hoped to achieve a platform-agnostic state where students felt they were just using different assets in their career toolboxes.

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn provided us with additional forums for interaction. Our strategy was to have Twitter and Facebook link to each other and to LinkedIn, the “front door” for their professional profiles. We did not have LinkedIn backlink to Twitter and Facebook unless the students were running professional accounts.

III. Points of Interest and Innovation

Badging is the core of this entry submission, but it must be evaluated in the context of motivating students and achieving as well as modeling learning objectives.

Our badge manual, borrowed from scouting, shows how we integrated platforms, our hierarchy and a made-at-MSU style. (You're lucky. Students had to earn badges to see them.)

BADGE MANUAL (abridged)

FIRST-SHELF BADGES (12 of them, 5 points each)



Burton Bell-Ringer Badge (5): Announce on your Facebook account that you are taking this MSU online journalism course and mention its name. The post should say that, in this course, you are earning badges by building your brand. The post need not be long, but should cover those details.

- **Lesson:** Collaboration. By mentioning that you are taking an innovative course, you tell people that you are innovative. Your mention of the course also helps affirm the course's identity. We are all judged by the company we keep. Talk up beneficial alliances.
- **Benefit:** We learn to say good things about ourselves indirectly. By talking about the good things we are associated with rather than ourselves, we elevate our visibility and reputation without sounding like blowhards.



Sign on the Line Badge (5) Make your email signer work for you. Use it strategically. Besides your name, it ought to contain a compelling phrase about what you do, a way to contact you and a link to your online resume, profile or LinkedIn page. If you can show a sense of humor or passion and stick to five lines or fewer, throw that in, too.

- **Lesson:** The key to brand communications is consistency. Using your signer, an automatic action, to help further your brand just makes sense and replaces a weak or non-descriptive signer. Links can even make every email you send useful to people who might want to reach you.
- **Benefit:** This is a simple practice that you can do throughout your career.



No Egg on My Facebook Badge (5): Rid Facebook of embarrassing pictures and posts. Maybe something that went on your page a couple years ago does not reflect well on you in the career market. Get rid of that. Earn this badge by reporting on how much you cleared off your wall and why.

- **Lesson:** Needs, interests, values and maturity grow. Facebook and other platforms archive the way we were, sometimes to the detriment of who we are. Check your online reputation regularly, including what you say and what others say about you.
- **Benefit:** Past is past. Keep refocusing on where you are and where you are going. Don't let things you posted in your past be egg on your face today.



Excellent Sparticant Badge (5): Post meaningful content in each chat/forum/discussion through June 10. These take the place of class discussions. Unlike class discussions, which can have rowdy people and quiet ones, we all speak at the same volume when we type. Be

heard. Write what you're thinking. Content counts if you want to earn this badge.

- **Lesson:** Being consistently present in work groups—even virtual ones—makes a difference. Someone once said that the future belongs to those who show up. That's who this badge belongs to, too.
- **Benefit:** We benefit from what you have to say. If you don't feel you have something to contribute, think more. You probably already have an inkling of what that is.



Twitter Bio Badge (5): You must have a Twitter account to complete this badge. For the written bio, use as many of the 160 characters as you can to write a sentence or two describing your unique values to potential employers. Use nouns that might pop up in web searches. Avoid adjectives. Feel free to use hashtags. DO include a link (you can look up "link shorteners" and use one to save space) to your LinkedIn profile or a professional hub site or portfolio.

- **Lesson:** The Twitter bio, because it is so short, teaches us to state our [Unique Selling Proposition](#) -- our value to the client customer or employer -- succinctly.
- **Benefit:** A Twitter bio packed with search terms will help people find your profile page whether they are looking inside Twitter or on Google. Favorable content like this builds your brand while pushing other content down the Google results page.



Buddy Badge (5): Suggest a helpful new branding tool or video for the class.
Lesson: The instructor does not have all the answers. "The wisdom of the crowds" holds that all of us know more collectively than any one of us. Help the group (and earn this badge) by sharing what you know. If it is good, new stuff, it will make the course better. But it has to be good and new.

- **Benefit:** Get used to stepping up, raising your hand, sticking your neck out. Find ways to show what you know to help the greater good. Do it humbly, and no one will think you're a know-it-all. Offering help—and gracious acceptance—are wonderful traits.



Rockin' Resume Badge (5): Post your resume in the dropbox and in the discussion forum so that others may see it and peer-edit it. You will need to have a resume by for a later assignment on posting resumes online.

- **Lesson:** This is one of the most basic parts of career building. No one leaves the class without a good resume!
- **Benefit:** Once you have a baseline resume, build on that foundation forever. Keep outdated versions, as well as a full version of everything you do. Some situations call for a one-page resume, others call for an extended one and as you gain experience you will want to tailor your resume to the situation.



Linked-Up Badge (5): Get a free LinkedIn account and:

1. Add contact information (at least an email and Twitter),
2. Change the URL of your profile to include your name (for example, mine is www.linkedin.com/in/joegrimm/)
3. Write a summary that states your Unique Selling Proposition. In other words, tell people why they want you to work with them. Keep sticking with nouns rather than adjectives.

- **Lesson:** A LinkedIn account, while free, is valuable if you use it well. Completing the fields makes your

LinkedIn easy to find, drives it higher on Google search and directs potential employers and clients to where they can find your best professional self. LinkedIn is the house you should be driving people to, from a careers perspective. Make your house easy to find and ready for guests!

- **Benefit:** This improves your overall digital footprint, helps pull people toward you and locks up your name before someone else does.



Three-way Badge (5): Connect your LinkedIn contacts section to your Twitter account. Link your Twitter bio to your LinkedIn account. Have your Facebook About section link to Twitter and LinkedIn. Everything points to LinkedIn and Twitter. Pointing to a less professional online persona such as Facebook is at your option.

- **Lesson:** Be aware of how the impression people get of you. No connecting links? Fail. The ideal is to make a path that leads potential employers and clients to your most professional self, your LinkedIn account. This is why we might link from Facebook to LinkedIn, but not the other way. Each link or connection builds our online footprint. We don't merely want a big one, like sasquatch, we want one that people will track to the best possible picture of us. So, we accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative and we don't mess with Mr. In-between.
- **Benefit:** Connections and flow among platforms are important. Lead people from good to better to best, not in the reverse, as you build. This badge is a good start on that.



Cheese Badge (5): Post the same profile photo on your Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook accounts. (I also use my profile photo on Pinterest, Cover it Live, YouTube, this course, etc.) The photo should be professional. There should not be other people in the photo (say, someone's ear) and it should be in focus and well exposed. Yes, you can be creative, but stay classy.

- **Lesson:** Be deliberate and consistent in how you convey the most visible element of your brand: your face. Do not just use something you have hanging around. You take some time to write a resume; do the same with your image.
- **Benefit:** A consistent image helps people recognize you and draw a connection among all your career tools. Consistent messaging helps people recognize you.



Joiner Badge (5): Join two LinkedIn groups, one with an MSU connection and one trade or industry group. If you are awaiting approval to join a group, you may submit a screen shot showing that your approval is pending.

- **Lesson:** Good networking is active networking. Adding your name to a list or joining a group in which you do nothing is not networking. Joining moves you a step closer to participating with others, meeting them and news feeds.
- **Benefit:** Your LinkedIn profile page will get a badge from that group, sending another message about your engagement in that field.



Sparty Hero Badge (5): Write recommendations for three people you know on LinkedIn. I love this badge! Recommending others does all this:

1. It makes others look better.
2. It makes you look better because you know such awesome people. LinkedIn will add you to their page and put them on your page if they accept your recommendation.
3. Recommendations mean you're nice.

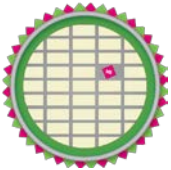
4. LinkedIn will send a note to the other person telling them you have submitted a recommendation and asking if the other person wants to recommend you back. Win, win, win, win!

- **Lesson:** In the new economy, we win by collaborating, not by competing. Helping your network helps you.
- **Benefit:** Recommending strengthens your network and generates good juju among you and people you recommend. I have often recommended people in their times of greatest need -- like when they needed a job. They remember you were there to help when they needed it.



10 by 10 Badge (10 bonus points): Earn 10 successful First-Shelf badges by June 10 to collect this bonus.

TOP-SHELF BADGES (Available June 10-26. Ten points each. These are more involved than First Shelf Badges, so start early.)



Business Card Badge (10): Print business cards using practices we cover. We will look at some unique cards. Don't be plain vanilla. **Order soon enough to get them and your badge before the term ends.**

- **Lesson:** Throughout your career, you will have many business cards. Yes, many people swap information digitally, but there will be times when you feel unprepared or unprofessional if you don't have one of these little babies with you. Try [Vistaprint](#) (the upselling there is annoying but you can opt out) and [Moo Cards](#) (clever, creative). You can even make cards that you print yourself. But make nice ones.
- **Benefit:** You really need these for any sort of networking event. Many people still ask for one or offer you theirs and you will want to reciprocate. Once made, you'll know how to do it and can easily get new ones.



Handshake Badge (10): Collect five business cards from a networking event. Show me a picture.

- **Lesson:** We must move beyond social media and meet people face to face. A networking event need not be specific to your business/industry. It can be a charity event or a social gathering at a gallery, club or opening. Do NOT try to turn a party or a sports event into a business meetup. How gauche. But pay attention to professional associations and events where people will be during or just after work.
- **Benefit:** There will be limited benefit from this unless you follow up with the people you meet by joining them on LinkedIn or sending a followup note or email. Do it!



Hub, Hub, Hooray Badge (10): Build a web hub or online portfolio. This is an excellent thing to do with your url, which can redirect people to any other page you build. There are a variety of ways to build a hub site. It can be as simple as a Tumblr blog. The key to having the portfolio is posting content that SHOWS you're good, rather than you merely

saying so. A good idea for seeing what might be good in a portfolio is to take a look at what people are building on [Kickstarter](#) pages.

- **Lesson:** Show, don't merely tell. Your work is the best evidence of what you can do.
- **Benefit:** This can be another permanent branding home. Once started for our class, this is a place you can keep developing for your whole career. Remember: The portfolio is not just what you put on it, it is also a sample of how you do things.



I'm Clicking Badge (10): Purchase a url ([uniform resource locator](#)) associated with your name (example: [Marketer Seth Godin's website.](#)) This will cost a little money per year. You do not need to build on the site to win this badge, but you need to register the name. This makes your name (or something like it) a good home for your portfolio. It becomes a powerful branding tool. You buy these by using a "domain name registry."

Some are GoDaddy, 1and1, Hostgator and Namecheap.

- **Lesson:** Hanging out your sign or declaring to the world that you have an address on the internet reflects your professionalism and sense of purpose. When you do it, you emulate every big company. You'll be in the big leagues.
- **Benefit:** This is your home base, it keeps others from grabbing your name and, the longer you own and use a url, the higher it comes up in Google search.



Thumbs-up Badge (10): Obtain three new, original LinkedIn recommendations, but not from other students. You have to ask for LinkedIn recommendations, just as you have to ask for.

- **Lesson:** Your brand and your network will help your career more than almost anything you do. Have you ever noticed how companies form alliances or pay for product placements in environments that reflect well on them? You'll be practicing the same kind of branding-by-association.
- **Benefit:** This will strengthen your LinkedIn profile and will put a link to you on the LinkedIn pages of the people who recommend you. They will promote your brand.



Ready Resume Badge (10): Post a .pdf of your resume in a public place online. LinkedIn is not the same thing. A LinkedIn profile does not translate well to print. To earn this page, you need to make it easy for people to download and print a professional copy of your resume. It could reside on a portfolio site or as part of a blog. Check out [Scribd.com](#) as a place where you can post .pdfs. Also look at free resume-building templates on

[Prezi.](#)

- **Lesson:** Offer material to others in all the ways they could want it.
- **Benefit:** Once you have an online resume that is truly a resume, use that space and updated versions of your resume forever. Keep the outdated versions, as well as a full lifelong version of everything you do, on your computer or a hard drive. Some situations call for a one-page resume, others call for an extended one and as you gain experience you will want to tailor your resume to the situation.

Delivery: Innovation in using D2L as a delivery mechanism

The way in which badges were delivered to students was another point of innovation. At the time, MSU did not have a badging platform available. A section was created in the course table of contents called My Badges, which was available to each student.

Each badge and reward was created on its own HTML page, denoting the name of the badge, the badge itself, point value and a short statement of encouragement or congratulations related to the assignment completed. Pages were stored under My Badges, but hidden until they had been earned. As students earned their badges, each badge page appeared to them under My Badges.

To keep badges hidden from students until they were earned, we created a Group for each badge in the course, labeling it with the appropriate badge name.

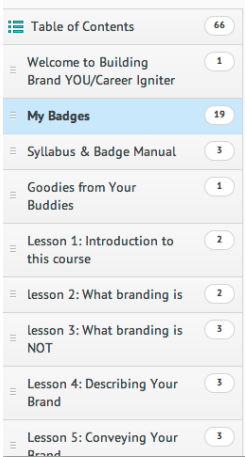
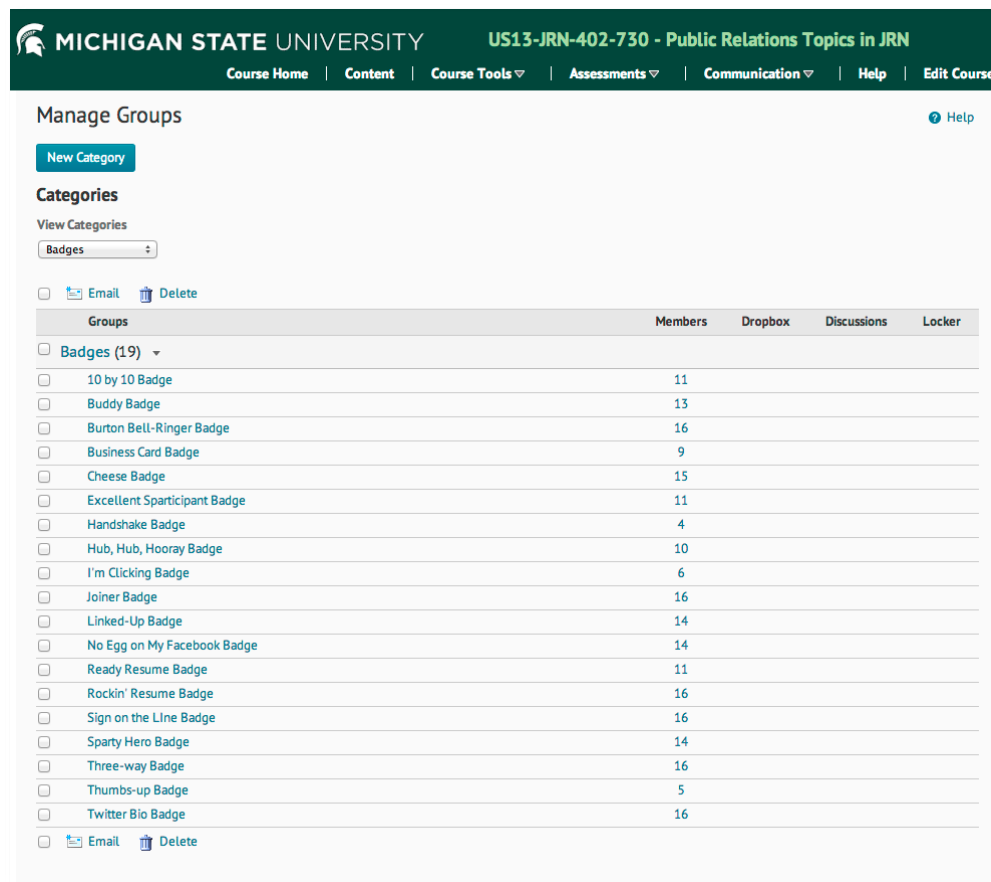


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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY US13-JRN-402-730 - Public Relations Topics in JRN

Course Home | Content | Course Tools | Assessments | Communication | Help | Edit Course

Manage Groups

New Category

Categories

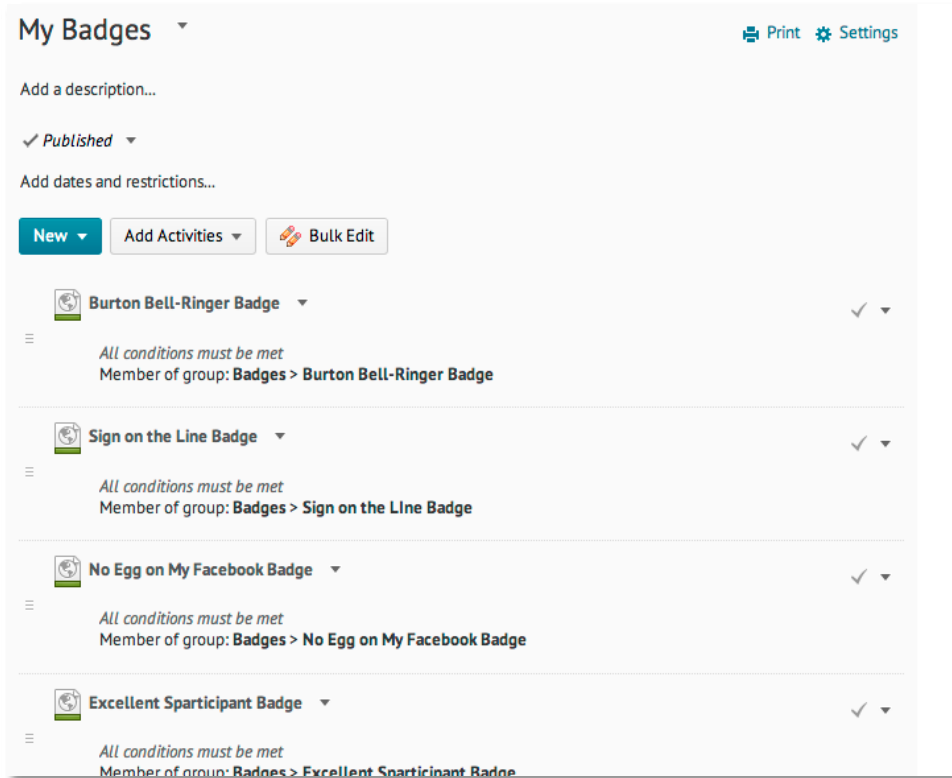
View Categories

Badges

Groups	Members	Dropbox	Discussions	Locker
Badges (19)				
10 by 10 Badge	11			
Buddy Badge	13			
Burton Bell-Ringer Badge	16			
Business Card Badge	9			
Cheese Badge	15			
Excellent Participant Badge	11			
Handshake Badge	4			
Hub, Hub, Hooray Badge	10			
I'm Clicking Badge	6			
Joiner Badge	16			
Linked-Up Badge	14			
No Egg on My Facebook Badge	14			
Ready Resume Badge	11			
Rockin' Resume Badge	16			
Sign on the Line Badge	16			
Sparty Hero Badge	14			
Three-way Badge	16			
Thumbs-up Badge	5			
Twitter Bio Badge	16			

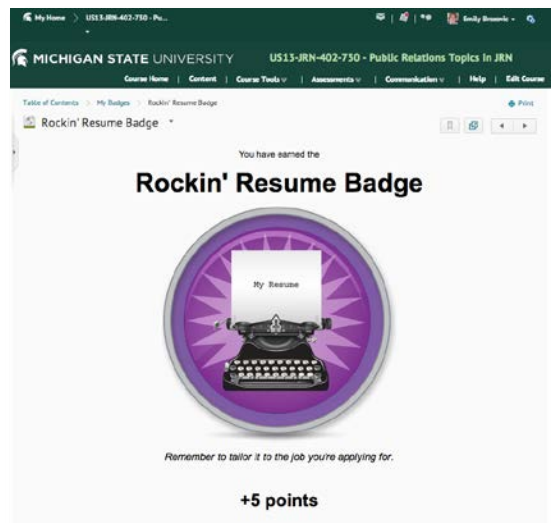
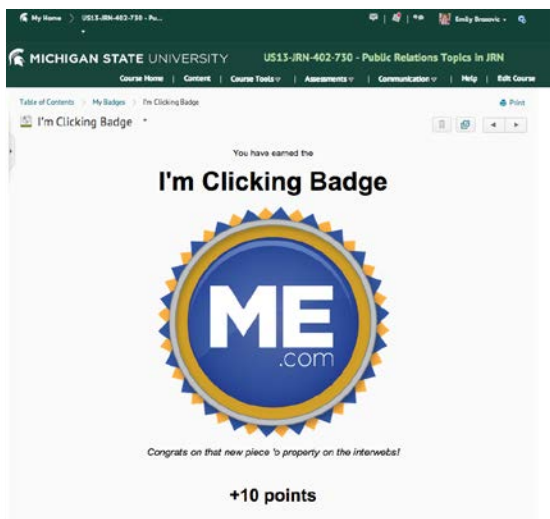
Administrator view of the course's badge groups. As students completed assignments, they were added to the respective badge group. Since all assignments available were not required, different member numbers are present.

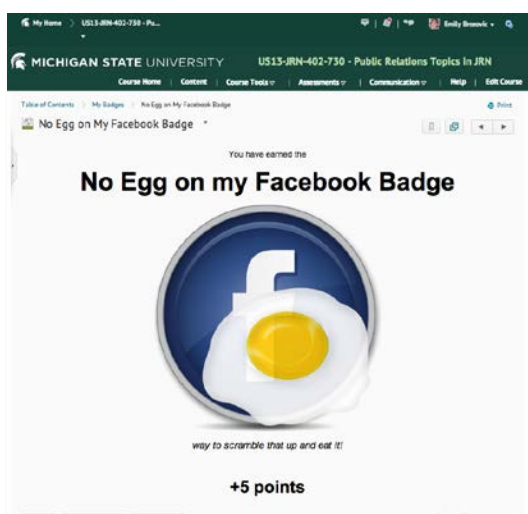
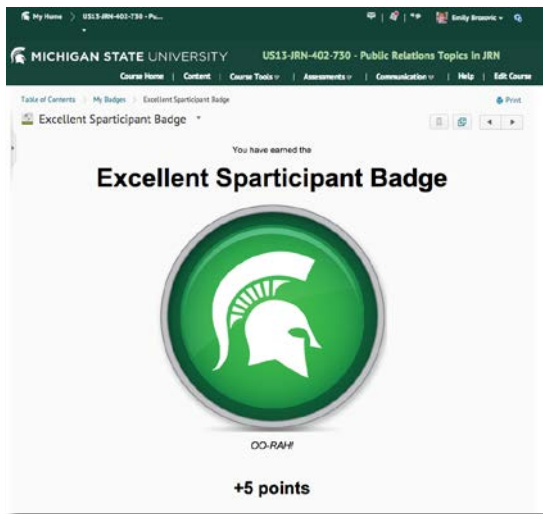
Each page (rewarded badge) inside of My Badges was set with a restriction that the student must be a member of that badge’s respective badge group in order to have the page appear in their view of “My Badges.”



Administrator view of My Badges, noting that all conditions must be met for a student to view the respective badge page (award).

As students completed assignments successfully, they were added to the appropriate badge group, thereby ‘revealing’ the awarded badge (page) under My Badges. In the end, not all students had the same makeup of badges in their view of My Badges as they could choose which assignments to complete. Following are examples of the award pages that students would see upon earning that respective badge:





V. Evidence of Effectiveness with Students

HYPER ACHIEVEMENT

We designed the course so students could choose from a cafeteria of assignments. To “unlock” top-tier 10-point assignments they had to complete first-tier 5-pointers. They had their choice of 130 points worth of assignments. However, the top grade of 4.0 would be achieved by anyone who reached the 90-point threshold. There was NO GRADE INCENTIVE to go beyond that. Any student who went beyond 90 points must have had some other incentive. We believe that getting more badges motivated them to do work beyond what gave them the highest grade.

Fifteen students completed the course. Four scored below 90 points. One hit 90 on the nose. Ten students, or two thirds, scored more than 90 points, which they knew to be the threshold for a 4.0, and which they could track online. Six students scored 105 points or more, going beyond what they needed to earn the top grade of 4.0.

Points Achieved | Number of Students

125 | (1)
 120 | (1)
 110 | (1)
 105 | (3)
 100 | (1)
 95 | (3)
 90 | (1)
 80 | (1)
 70 | (2)
 60 | (1)

SIRS SCORES

Ideally, we would use a control group—one without badges—to measure the success of that motivation system, but this class was too small to divide. We did have something akin to a control group. During the summer of 2013, the instructor taught two courses, entirely online. The first column shows his SIRS score averages in the branding course with badges, the second column shows how students rated him on an editing course he has taught several times.

Keep in mind that these ratings were for two courses taught entirely online, where some of these SIRS categories aren't relevant, students rated the course with badges higher on every measure except one, where the scores were equal.

Also keep in mind that the badging/branding course being taught for the first time had inevitable kinks that might have given it lower scores for such things as clarity and organization. Yet the students give the new course higher marks on those dimensions.

We believe that working for badges made the branding class more fun, creating a generalized "halo effect" that raised student engagement and enjoyment across the board. It could also be that the students in the badging course, who were mostly in PR, are just generally more positive than journalism students, who dominate the editing class. (Lower numbers equal stronger agreement.)

Instructor's enthusiasm when presenting the material	1.66	1.66
The instructor's interest in teaching	1.55	1.75
Use of personal exp. or examples	1.44	1.72
Instructor's concern of whether students learned.	1.66	2.00
Student's interest in earning the material	1.44	2.00
Student's general attentiveness in class	1.50	2.25
The course as an intellectual challenge	2.11	2.33
Improvement in improvement as a result of course	1.55	2.00
Instructor's encouragement to express opinions	2.00	2.25
Instructor's receptiveness to new ideas	1.66	2.58
Student's opportunity to ask questions	1.77	2.83
Instructor's stimulation of class discussion	2.11	2.45
Appropriateness of amount of material covered	1.62	2.41
Instructor's ability to relate concepts in organized manner	1.55	2.08
Course organization	1.66	2.58
Ease of taking notes	1.77	2.54
Adequacy of the outlined direction of the course	1.66	2.18
General enjoyment of the course	1.55	2.25

STUDENT STATEMENTS

This is how one student described the course and the badging experience:

I really enjoyed earning badges as part of our course. They were pretty effective at motivating me to complete assignments, as they were different than any other grading system I had experienced at Michigan State; they almost seemed like a game. I felt good as I earned new badges and saw them on my board and because they transitioned from easy to complex they set a good pace for the course. I do feel that the badges helped me learn the course material and that they prompted me to do the assignments as it was very clear how to achieve each one. I also think the rewards of the badge were different than just getting a score because they were new and interesting. I'm not sure that the badges changed the way I participated in the course, because I always aim for high achievement, but they were a fun and different system to experience. I thought the badges made learning more fun because they had quirky names and each required something different to earn, this made it feel like a game where I wanted to reach the next level. Although I enjoyed earning the badges, they sometimes felt a little juvenile-which I think worked in their favor in the end, but may not be as well-received by other students.

VI. Plans for Sustainability

From what we have seen, we believe that learning gamification increases student enjoyment and motivation. We would like to pursue badging and research it more closely. The course in which we tried this on, an online course about career branding, moves around among instructors in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. However, we believe the same principles can be applied to the editing course, one that is taught much more regularly by the instructor that tried it here.

That course seems right for badging in that it requires students to perform many small tasks of varying weights. The tasks can be as small as fixing a punctuation problem or as large as spotting libel or a factual inaccuracy in a news report. This is a potential world of points, levels and badges—and monsters.

We would like to begin by taking an online class, splitting it into two sections and further testing, in a more controlled way, whether badging works. This could lead to development of more sophisticated badging, levels and scoring. Given development resources, we can see where other these types of engagement methods may increase learning motivation and make it more fun.