RTTP Publications Committee Guidelines for Game Authors

Controversial Issues

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*Academic Freedom:  The RTTP Publications Committee views academic freedom as fundamental to the intellectual and teaching mission of the RTTP Consortium.  AAUP define academic freedom in its documents as follows: “institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition."  This includes what they refer to as “unfettered teaching and research in institutions of higher education.”*

If an author or coauthors choose to write a *Reacting* game (i.e. use the RTTP brand), submit to the RTTP editorial process for download from the RTTP game library, and/or seek publication through Norton Press or the Reacting Consortium Press, they must submit to peer review and the editorial decisions of the Editorial Board, the Publications Committee, the Reacting Consortium Board, and the appropriate press.  *Reacting* embraces controversial topics and issues at the core of every game accepted for play and publication.  The RTTP Editorial Board  seeks to advise authors on how best to manage especially controversial elements of games so that the controversy does not overwhelm the educational aspects of a game or the specified learning outcomes.

The RTTP Editorial Board and the Publications Committee recognize that each campus has its own culture, that the composition of the student body, as well as that of the faculty and surrounding community, helps shape that culture, and that diversity is a hallmark of higher education throughout the world.  The suggestions that follow are guidelines based on best practices identified through the experiences of game masters and game authors that should be considered by new authors who hope for a national and even international audience for their games.

The RTTP Editorial Board maintains the final authority about which games to send to the Consortium Board, which forwards them to the Publications Committee for consideration by our publishers.  The Board, the Publications Committee and the publishers maintain ultimate authority over which games go to press.

*There is no one set of strategies that works for all games.  What follows identifies potential problems and goals that authors should consider.*

RTTP Consortium Board Assumptions:

1.  RTTP does not seek to avoid controversial issues in games but rather embraces historical tensions, conflict, and controversy as key to the pedagogy.

2.  We also recognize that some issues are more difficult to manage than others, especially in situations where we are urging students, sometimes for several weeks of classes, to embody individuals or composites of individuals who were at the center of sharp and historically significant controversies that often continue to resonate in contemporary society.

3.  RTTP seeks to promote deep reading of complex evidence (including written, visual, audial, and material culture), a finer understanding of interactions among peoples at the center of conflicts, and a recognition of the complexity, circumstances, and development of individual and group decisions and actions.

4.  RTTP is not a re-enactment of specific historic events but rather a pedagogy that encourages students to understand controversies through deep study and participation in acts of written and verbal persuasion.  Games should be written in that context.

5.  Authors should recognize that games frequently heighten emotions among students in unexpected ways.  This is often a good development that supports a new level of understanding among students.  But games also need to keep the intellectual enterprise and understanding itself as the central purpose.

6.  The RTTP Editorial Board, Publications Committee, and RCB will weigh the risks and benefits of highly controversial elements included in games when reviewing proposals and/or drafts to be included on the RTTP master list or for any kind of development funding from RTTP.

Considerations for Authors:

1.  More contemporary games may invite heightened emotions and connection to core values, but some controversies are ancient and timeless.  Be aware that a concept like deference, for example, can trigger strong and perhaps unexpected reactions.

2.  References and use of language or visual symbols that violate, prima facie, campus policies on hate speech or actions will need special care and attention.  Any incentives or rewards for engaging in such activity must be clearly in support of the learning outcomes of the game and should be carefully explained.  The Editorial Board, RCB, and Publications Committee will look closely at such game elements and judge their utility as part of their overall deliberations.

3.  Students need to be appropriately prepared to manage controversy among themselves.  Some students may never have been exposed to the principles of creative conflict or productive argumentation.  Please read the strategies outlined in the Game Master Guidelines document for game masters.

4.  Controversy can easily spill outside the classroom or be noticed by peripheral audiences—roommates, parents, students and faculty not in the class, administrators, the student newspaper, even the general public.  People not directly involved in RTTP as teachers or students will have no context for understanding the use of inflammatory language, visual symbols or other items that on some campuses may be viewed as so abhorrent, they will not be allowed in any context or viewed as educational in any way.  Try to imagine a junior colleague explaining what is going on to a department chair or dean.  Does your game provide a clear rationale and connection between the controversial elements and learning outcomes sought?

5.  Authors should be thoughtful about the impact on students when creating roles and role sheets for characters that must advocate for repugnant ideas such as racism and sexism.  These will be difficult roles to play and require extra instruction and consideration.  Explicit rationales and connection to learning outcomes must be included in the role sheets.

6.  Authors who wish to target a wide audience should keep in mind what is appropriate for first year students (games are commonly used in First Year Seminars), 18 year olds encountering deep critical thinking and intellectual controversy for the first time, diverse student bodies at diverse institutions, as well as other groups such as non-traditional students and veterans.  Advice to both students and game masters is encouraged and welcome.

7.  Now and then, a student may have very strong feelings about controversial aspects of a particular game.  One strategy that some authors have pursued is to write a role, often a “historian” or “reporter” of current events, whose job it is to record and report, ask questions, and interact in the background with other characters for information gathering purposes.  This device can allow a student to stay in a game and learn more about the controversy without taking a particular position.  These characters are in the indeterminate group.  Such a role allows the student to pursue the educational outcomes of the game and participate effectively without erecting defensive barriers that may be a bar to learning.  It is helpful for game masters to have this option.

Individual students may have deeply-rooted reactions and feelings about controversial aspects of a particular game that go significantly beyond intellectual discomfort; if serious, such responses may impede student learning and engagement thus undermining the goals of a game. Authors should consider including one or several roles that allow game masters to assign such students meaningful roles in the game where they can participate and learn about the controversy without taking a particular position. Such roles are often identified as “historians” or “reporters” of game events, who record, report, interview, summarize, gather information, etc.

8.  Authors are strongly encouraged to consult the Game Maser Guidelines on Controversy to gain a deeper understanding of possible challenges due to controversial content and to consider different options to anticipate and address such challenges through game design, role development, and framing of the game through course design and pedagogy.