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Where Do We Go from Here?

Expanding the Reach of Your Gaming Events

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Introduction

People have been playing games in and around libraries in some form or another since at least the 1850s.[1] We have seen their use growing over the last several years as more libraries are recognizing the largely positive effect they have on our patrons. International Games Day (IGD), an initiative of the Games and Gaming Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA) typically held in early November each year, expanded into a full week in 2017 in response to the large number of libraries interested in participating.[2] However, this event happens only once a year. What about those libraries interested in hosting regular events? How can they change their approach to focus on the long-term to create a regular program to keep their engagement with their communities high and bring students into the library regularly? Here we explore several examples of bringing gaming into academic libraries more than once or twice a year.

This chapter utilizes case studies from various institutions to explore methods of deepening student engagement with games. We begin with exploring ways to engage with student input, then move into how games can support educational outcomes, and end with discussing how to foster creativity and making. Through these case studies of successful gaming programs, we discuss a variety of considerations such as casual versus hardcore gamers, international students, game design events, and institutional support. Each case study ends with key takeaways.

Engaging with Student Input

Because of the availability of support offered by ALA and its many sponsors, many institutions find it easy to begin by hosting a gaming event during International Games Week or another one-off way to support gaming. However, many libraries see a benefit from offering more regular opportunities for students to use library spaces. As libraries build up their game collections, offering continuous game opportunities can be a low-cost and relatively low-effort way to encourage more student use of library spaces.

As with any programming, it's important that you collect useful and actionable feedback from the students that attend. Listening to our attendees can encourage more meaningful experiences and ensure game offerings meet their needs and interests.

Case Study: Miami University

Miami University is a mid-sized public institution in Oxford, Ohio, with around 20,000 students. It primarily serves undergraduates, with its undergraduate curriculum focusing on liberal arts education. While a large portion of its students live in nearby off-campus housing within the city limits, Oxford is small and densely packed enough that Miami can be considered a residential university. The library system consists of one main library (King Library) and three branch libraries that cater to specific subject areas and departments (Wertz Art & Architecture Library, Amos Music Library, and B.E.S.T. (Business, Engineering, Science and Technology) Library).

Miami hosted its first gaming event in 2013 on International Games Day, which was based on and justified by ALA's recommendations and guidelines and repeated on an annual basis in subsequent years. For each event, the libraries supplied tabletop games from our circulating games collection, and several other games were loaned from the personal collections of some of our library staff. A handful of video game consoles were also set up for people to play. The events were free to attend, with free food (typically pizza and candy) offered as an enticement for our students.

Our first two events (in 2013 and 2014) drew around seventy-five people each, including library staff, and people generally seemed to have fun. Our events in the next two years (in 2015 and 2016) saw a drastic drop in attendance, with around twenty-five people at each event, a significant portion of whom was library staff. No formal assessment was conducted beyond counting attendance, although we know a handful of things that likely contributed to the declining attendance. The funding received from the libraries' administration was reduced, which forced us to cut back on our offerings. There was one year where we were not able to adequately advertise the event and another year where the date for IGD set by ALA was too close to Thanksgiving break. Another important factor was the planning committee itself. Our gaming events were being planned by our outreach committee, which hosted around seven major events each semester. They were being stretched too thin to do anything more with the event than what had already been done. A few of the members were truly passionate about gaming, but they didn't have the support they needed to try a different approach.

In the fall of 2017, there was renewed interest in promoting the event by a group of Miami University library staff and librarians, who had been pushing for games events on a more regular basis. Simultaneously, there was a push on Miami's campus to promote more non-alcoholic, student-centered events, primarily through a student-run university activities and programming organization called Late Night Miami, which offers additional funding for organizations or departments who are planning evening events on Thursdays, Fridays, or Saturdays.

That August, with new group leadership, a series of gaming events was devised: one event every month, each lasting at least four hours, with the location floating between the four different library locations on campus. In addition, we decided to focus on tabletop gaming for all events, except for the biggest game night falling during International Games Week (IGW). Our impression, based on informal observation of previous events, was that video gaming took away from the social aspect we were going for, and we deemed the additional effort needed to set up video game stations for each event too high, so we reserved video games for just the big event. In our funding request to our library administration, we emphasized that is was not just a time to play games, but a social bonding event for students and library employees as well as an exhibition of each of the library locations and the libraries' collection of games. We also made a point to collect as much feedback from our attendees as possible, mainly via surveys emailed to participants a few days after each event but also through informal conversation and observation.

The new group leadership chose to focus on reaching an unmet need of casual gamers who would not feel comfortable in a hardcore gaming environment. Devoted gamers on this campus had other alternatives for weekly gaming, but people interested in tabletop, parlor, and modern board games did not have an organized time and place to play. Our large population of international students is also interested in learning about American culture and showed interest in basic card games and games we may have learned as children. They have also been happy to teach us games they learned as children in their countries. The library provides a learning environment where social interactions are valued over the inherently competitive nature of many games.

Library administration approved our newly proposed events series, albeit with minimal funding. We decided to limit our spending to just food and drink and supplement our offerings with small prizes we already had on hand (swag from vendors at ALA annual conference as well as small Miami Libraries-branded items), which we offered to our attendees on their way out. We also decided to apply for additional funding through the Late Night Miami organization to use for our big event during International Games Week. They awarded us $2,000, which allowed us to increase the food supply and spend a considerable amount on additional prizes to give away.

Our fall 2017 semester events were largely successful. We saw a decent turnout compared to the previous two years, mostly because of strong advertising efforts by staff in our Art & Architecture library. Student employees posted hundreds of flyers on the walls. We also collected names and email addresses of attendees at check-in, which we used to create a mailing list through which we notified past attendees about future events (and through which we also sent out our post-event surveys). Our IGW event had almost 100

attendees, while the other three averaged around thirty each. However, with the increased attendance, we found we had more staffing responsibilities than we had seen during the previous four years. We decided to try doing everything in shifts: helping to set-up for the event, checking in attendees, monitoring the food supply and the prize table, taking hourly headcounts, making notes about which games were being played, hosting and teaching games, and helping tear down after the event. We found it takes at least four people to effectively staff an event for 100 participants. The largest hiccup we encountered actually turned out in our favor: the approval process delayed the first event, so we could not schedule the game nights four weeks apart as initially planned. However, many attendees appreciated the resulting shorter two to three weeks of separation between events.

During the spring semester, we continued hosting gaming events every few weeks. We were not able to get any funding beyond the limited funds provided by the libraries, and even with our attempts to budget the same amount for each event and spending conservatively, we very nearly ran out of money by the time our final game night came around. That being said, we still managed to increase our attendance for nearly every event, with an average of around forty at each game night.

In addition to the post-event survey we sent out immediately after each game night, we also decided to send out an end-of-the-year survey to everyone who had attended at least once during the 2017–2018 academic year. We found the biggest draws for people were the social interactions and the free food. They really appreciated the focus we put on the board games and quality time with friends. They also had several suggestions for us to improve future events. During the spring, we reverted back to our original plan of having one event every month; some attendees mentioned that they preferred the compressed schedule we had in the fall, with a few weeks in-between instead of one month. Several also noted the lack of variety in the food we offered (our default option was pizza) and wanted to see different things at each event. We also got several suggestions to increase the variety of games we offered, both more traditional games like Sorry! and Clue, as well as the more obscure and in-depth games that are popular with hardcore board gamers.

While we categorized our gaming events series during the 2017–2018 academic year as a success, we also recognized and tried to address the issues we ran across while planning for the following year, which were primarily funding-related. We again met with Late Night Miami to see if they would be willing to fund a series of events instead of only one. While they understood our position, they receive applications from groups all over campus, and so prefer not to fund more than one event per semester for each group or more than one campus event during the same night. The funding amount had risen to $4,000 per event (far more than we needed), but they suggested we increase the food and provide more expensive prizes in order to best utilize the money. With this in mind, we started planning for the fall semester, with the idea that we would host three small-ish events in each of the branch libraries using only our limited library funding and a giant, wrap-up event during IGW using the funding we received from Late Night Miami. However, in July, we got word that Late Night Miami had received no additional funding requests for the night of our first game event and so approved an additional $4,000 for us to use, allowing more flexibility with budgeting. In addition, we were able to connect

with one of the residence hall directors, who also happened to be an advisor of a handful of Miami's student gaming groups. This gave us access to housing bulletin boards and resident advisors as well as connections with more students who might be interested in participating in our game nights, which allowed us to expand our marketing efforts (and ultimately increase our attendance beyond events held in previous years).

With the additional funding we received for our first event of the 2018–2019 year, we were able to go beyond our initial plans. We extended the event to six hours instead of four, we were able to order enough catering food and snacks to last the whole event, we greatly expanded our selection of games, and we were able to get additional prizes to offer our participants. Thanks to our additional marketing avenues, we saw more participants during this first game night of the term than we had seen at any other event in our history (almost 100 over the six hours), overflowing our smallest branch library. Also, since we were able to expand our games collection so much, like past participants suggested we do, we were able to allot our library funding for our next events almost entirely to increasing the variety of food we offered as well as add a fifth event just before the end of the semester. Because of the recognition and enthusiasm we cultivated during the previous events and the increased marketing efforts during the fall, we had an average attendance of around eighty each night.

Key Takeaways

- Without dedicated staff and volunteers to help run things, any gaming events we held would have undoubtedly fallen flat (as ours did before their revival in 2017). While buy-in from administrators is important for continued funding of events, buy-in from the library staff who run the events was far more vital.
- Success required focusing on an unmet need in our patron population. By serving the needs of casual and first-time gamers, we were able to attract players, many who have become regular attendees of library gaming events.
- Follow-up surveys indicated that food and socializing were more important than prizes for producing attendee satisfaction.

Fostering Educational Outcomes

Once initial goals of outreach and engagement with the student population are achieved, libraries may want to consider more intentional methods of including games in their programming. As educational entities, a primary mission of academic libraries is supporting the learning outcomes for various classes as well as encouraging personal growth among students. By using games as part of or in addition to traditional curriculum, libraries can support deeper understanding among students.

The creation and support of learning opportunities with games require an understanding of the curriculum and the ability to work closely with faculty. Similar to reader's advisory, it behooves librarians to play games in order to provide recommendations and create circumstances with games that foster learning.

Case Study: MidAmerica Nazarene University

MidAmerica Nazarene University is a private institution in Olathe, Kansas, with a student population of approximately 1,800. The institution has a high undergraduate population, with a primary focus on professional programs. The Mabee Library at MidAmerica Nazarene University is the only library on campus and part of the broader Mabee Learning Commons.

Primarily, when librarians implement games, they have been implemented as a way to increase engagement with the library and meet the recreational needs of the communities they serve.[3] In the last few years, more academic libraries have shown interest in incorporating games into their programs, whether for learning, to provide safe alternatives to the "traditional" college nightlife, to reach out and engage the campus community, or simply because games are fun. Librarians are recognizing that games are a way to promote community, support informal learning, and foster the growth of twenty-first-century skills. Creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking are necessary proficiencies for learning and work, and games requiring the use of these skills to support students' growth and development.[4]

In 2014, the Institute of Museum and Library Services awarded Mabee Library at MidAmerica Nazarene University a Sparks! Ignition Grant to create a library-based Center for Games & Learning, with a focus on tabletop games as a way of supporting and fostering twenty-first-century skills. The goals of the center are as follows:

> The Center for Games & Learning at MNU's Mabee Library sponsors game design and game research for use in educational settings. Effective learning for 21st century leadership demands expertise in skills such as communication, collaboration, problem solving, flexibility, creativity, and innovation. Tabletop games can function as powerful learning engines, requiring players to practice these 21st century skills. As educators learn how to use—and even design—games as learning systems, they engage learners with cultural relevance. To this end, the Center for Games & Learning at MNU:
>
> - Curates an extensive game collection
> - Disseminates cutting-edge research on games and learning
> - Helps educators adapt games for educational purposes
> - Seeks renewal within P-12, homeschool, and post-secondary classrooms
> - Trains librarians seeking to support their communities through gameplay[5]

Since the creation of the center, the library has added 300-plus tabletop games to the collection, hosted many game nights, supported local K-12 and homeschooling families with presentations on game-based pedagogy, and provided community access to the game collection. Faculty and staff at MidAmerica Nazarene University have also used the collection to support the curriculum.

After the completion of the grant, many professors continued to use games to teach. They saw the value in using the game as a medium to convey ideas and concepts. The way the professors used games was not to gamify the curriculum. Instead, they use the tabletop games as teaching tools themselves. For example, since the grant, one professor continues to use the game Forbidden Island to teach differences between management and leadership. In this activity, the students play Forbidden Island and then engage in a debriefing activity where they articulate when leadership and management characteristics were employed and how those characteristics impacted play.

From these experiences, the librarians that work with the center have learned a lot about how libraries and librarians can support the use of games in educational settings. In order to provide support, though, librarians need to become games-literate, able to locate and recommend games like they do with books, articles, and technology. At MidAmerica Nazarene University, this has meant that librarians have played games, watched YouTube videos of other people playing games, and become familiar with BoardGameGeek.com.

Expanding the work of the center has come with both challenges and opportunities. The biggest challenge has been capacity, as this work is in addition to regular responsibilities. Opportunities, though, have also arisen that have allowed people to see the library in a new way. The center has provided a conduit for the library to support curricula and develop programming on a consistent basis, which has reinforced the vision the librarians have.

Key Takeaways

- Librarians can directly support the curriculum by providing games for faculty to incorporate into their classes.
- Including tabletop games in the collection expands the opportunities available to librarians.
- Librarians can also help support faculty by becoming games-literate and understanding how the game mechanisms can foster learning outcomes. For example, cooperative games can support teamwork, collaboration, and communication.

Cultivating Making with Games

To extend the educational value of games, one of the more complex (but most rewarding) methods of cultivating twenty-first-century skills is through game design. The maker movement is established as a goal of libraries, and games provide a variety of avenues to engage with making. In addition to playing and supporting educational outcomes, games have a massive creator community: designers, animators, streamers, bloggers, and modders (modders are people who write, share, and use code to change aspects of a game's original programming). By hosting events focused on creation, libraries can support and engage a potentially untapped segment of this movement: game makers.

For libraries encouraging creation related to gaming, the biggest role is to be supportive of the participants. By their very nature, most academic libraries already do this by

providing ample workspace for both groups and individuals. Additionally, libraries have resources such as whiteboards, computers, printers, and power to allow people to work a long time without needing to get supplies, whether for regular creating/modding sessions, supporting streamers, or hosting a focused game jam. A game jam is the game-focused cousin of Design Sprint or Hack-A-Thon, during which participants design a prototype of a physical or computer game. (See Appendix 14A for a detailed description.) As inter-disciplinary spaces built for students working on a wide range of projects, libraries are a natural choice for almost any kind of creation.

Case Study: San Jose State University

San Jose State University is a large, urban, comprehensive public university of more than 30,000 students. Because of the university's proximity to Silicon Valley, technology is prominent in nearly all disciplines of study and the university has an extremely strong engineering program. The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library is not only the library for the campus but is also the central branch for the city of San Jose's public library. As a bustling center of activity for both the university and the city at large, the library serves as a hub for interaction and collaboration between the gown and town. As an interest across many different communities, adding gaming to programming offered in the building was a no-brainer.

In 2011, the library did not offer any gaming programs, although there were active clubs on the campus and meet-up groups in the city. To start exploring offering gaming, I approached the dean of the library to offer the first event as part of International Games Day in November 2011. This first year's event essentially just pulled from the game collections of several librarians, library staff, and faculty on campus. To foster the program's success during the succeeding years, I ensured that student clubs had a major presence at the event, with the Game Developers Club, having a variety of computer systems loaded with games that students had designed over the years, Tabletop Club and Pokémon Club hosting rooms with those interests, and the Super Smash Club running a Wii U tournament with prizes provided by the library. Prompted by the success of the first event, the library hosted a few more low-key gaming events each year, such as for TableTop Day or just a fun de-stressing event near finals. In each of these, I would invite one or more of the clubs or community partners to be a part of the event. I would also always have two to five students help with the planning process to ensure students would be interested in the event.

Following the success of the first International Games Day celebration, students approached the library to offer more activities and events. The most extensive partnership was with the Game Developers Club. By 2012, the club had outgrown using a single classroom, and with the need to support a variety of group sizes and personal computers, the library seemed like a good fit. Beginning in 2012, the club met weekly in the library using a space that was not normally used for events or clubs. This provided them with dedicated working spaces as well as a location for workshops and talks that they managed within library spaces. Workshops were generally students providing tutorials for how to

do particular things with a variety of game engines and software packages. Some members of the club would participate, while others would break off and work on their own games. Talks would be by people from the industry, such as sound designers, representatives from large companies like Sony and Microsoft, or indie production teams. In 2013, the current president of the club was interested in hosting more twenty-four-hour and forty-eight-hour events. As the first event of this kind, the club was able to work with library administration to get special permission to stay for twenty-four hours in library computer lab spaces for the charity event Extra Life.

Extra Life is a worldwide event that encourages individuals and groups to host twenty-four hours of gaming to raise support for the Children's Network Hospitals. For three years, three of the library's computer labs hosted this event. We dedicated one lab to the game stream, with a limited number of people in there hosting the live stream. Before the event, students signed up for one- or two-hour time slots to play games and would head to that room during their turn. The largest room served as a "green room" where most of the students could hang out, play games, and eat food. This space became crucial to the event as it developed a sense of community, with many students staying over twelve hours, even if they were never part of the stream. The final room had the furniture moved aside and was left quiet and dark for people to take naps or just lie down for a while during the event.

Aside from the physical spaces, the library provided several other areas of support. Since the library was not open overnight and is located in an urban environment, two security officers were required outside of the normal business hours. Additionally, I stayed throughout the full event to be a point of contact between the students and library staff. Prior to and during the event, library IT provided technical support and assistance to ensure everything would work to meet the needs of the stream. Food and drink for the event were largely donated or potluck, with a local coffee shop sponsoring and offering free coffee and students, staff, and faculty providing casseroles, bagels in the morning, and various snacks. Students were responsible for cleaning up at the end of the event and putting all of the rooms back in order. Although there were hiccups along the way, this event had a major impact on growing community and showing that the library can be a space for unique and engaging events.

From the success of this event, the club moved on to offer a site for a Global Game Jam. Global Game Jam, started in 2008, is the largest regularly running game jam, which occurs in January each year at hundreds of locations worldwide. Global Game Jam provides libraries with a theme, additional challenges, and a communication network to tap into during both preparation and the event.[6] Since this event was a full forty-eight hours on a particular weekend, the library was not able to support the full event. Instead, students and members of the public were able to use the science building next door to the library. I was still able to participate by serving as one of the overnight supervisors. The library also was a space that some students used throughout the weekend either as additional workspace, for equipment checkouts, or just to take advantage of the café located on the first floor.

Out of these large events and formal partnerships, students came to see the library as a place to get creative. Over the years, library spaces and technology were improved, and

as some of our "power users," the game students were a continual source for both inspiration and feedback. When the library was building a new media creation space, Game Development club members provided hardware requirements, computer programs, and external component requests for the library. This kind of opportunity not only ensured that the library equipment was meeting student needs but also served as a promotion team that checked out the new spaces during opening week and told their friends and classmates about the new resources. Overall, the library won big with students mostly by showing interest in their creative process and finding ways to support making rather than a large price tag for few events.

Key Takeaways

- Partnerships with interested student groups can improve both gaming programs and library services.
- Growing slowly and organically based on student interest can clarify priorities for offerings.
- Supporting making can take as little as just making the space available but be extremely rewarding for both patrons and the library.

Case Study: Penn State Brandywine

Penn State Brandywine is a relatively small campus that is part of a large state research university. The campus has approximately 1,500 students, with a focus on undergraduates. Unlike many other undergraduate colleges, this campus is not "top-heavy" and instead has many students with a sophomore or lower standing, as many students transfer to a larger Penn State campus in the system to complete their degree program. The campus is commuter-heavy, with fall 2017 being the first offering of on-campus housing. Approximately 17 percent of students live in these new dorms. As someone new to the campus in January 2018 and passionate about gaming, I am getting a sense of what is currently happening on campus while expanding offerings.

As of spring 2018, the gaming on campus was insular and limited. There was a tabletop role-playing club on campus, but they hosted non-open role-playing campaigns nearly exclusively and did not have much outreach to the larger student population. The library had a small tabletop game collection that was on two-hour reserve and mostly consisted of games donated by the Multilingual Student Cluster Coordinator. As a diverse campus, there is a robust set of programming for multilingual students, and the coordinator of the cluster had previously offered monthly tabletop games for these students. However, over the years, this program has evolved to include fewer multilingual students, so the coordinator of multilingual students stopped regularly supporting that program after spring 2018. The institution's course offerings include one course on games in popular culture offered as a general education course for students each semester. There is also a new game development minor through the Information Sciences and Technology department.

Since spring 2018, I have added thirty more tabletop games to the collection and changed the policy to allow for overnight checkouts. In the later spring and over the

summer, we moved games from library offices to be in a display and then to a location visible to the floor. This has greatly increased the number of checkouts. We also created a website with information about games as the catalog records are not very informative or easy to browse for this collection.

In summer 2018, we officially offered gaming events in the library for the first time. First, the library partnered with a program on campus that targets students with financial need. In the program, students receive scholarships for summer classes before and after their first full year on campus. In addition to the scholarship, which allows them to get ahead in course credits, the program provides a variety of social activities and opportunities to work on campus. For this summer, the library hosted a gaming afternoon where groups of students rotated through several games in their first week on campus so they could get to know each other and several staff members quickly. Second, the campus hosted international students from South Korea that stayed on campus for a month. The library hosted several formal gaming sessions and allowed the international students the ability to check out the games for use either in the library or in their dorm rooms when they were not in classes. Some of these students became frequent users, checking out one or two games an afternoon to play either in the library or outside on the patio.

For the 2018–2019 academic year, the library successfully hosted more gaming events. The library is the new host for casual gaming events once a month. The library also hosted the campus's first-ever twenty-four-hour event for Halloween. This event was co-hosted with the student affairs department on campus and included many activities: movies, tabletop gaming, Nintendo Switch gaming, crafts, costume making and stack decorating contests, and a mini-game jam with a Halloween theme. To qualify for jam prizes, students had to hand in the game by 6 a.m., include a haunted Wawa (a local convenience store chain), and a mascot from either the school or a local sports team. For the game jam, the library provided some training in using free software (Texture Writer: https://texturewriter.com/, Twine: http://twinery.org/, and Flowlab: https://flowlab.io) as well as providing supplies for paper prototyping. Although we had eighty-eight students participate in the evening's festivities, more than twenty students playing games for hours, and more than half of the students that made it to breakfast were gaming students, only three students submitted games for the game design challenge. Two of the three students reported that they mostly participated for the chance at the grand prize—two one-day passes to the Pax Unplugged convention. With the huge range of activities to distract students, this was a lesson to simplify for creation events. Overall, the three students who completed projects were very enthusiastic about the event and have communicated with me about future gaming opportunities on campus.

On a small campus, getting the bandwidth to support larger making events will be a challenge. However, we also have the opportunity for more direct communication with individuals on campus. Through this direct communication, we can explore the interests of students and ensure that future offerings better meet their needs. Additionally, this experience opened up further communication between the library and the Information Sciences and Technology department, which hasn't used most of the library's traditional services. From this, we can see that one small game-making event can have a positive

impact by encouraging both deeper student engagement and unique educational opportunities in the future.

Key Takeaways

- By targeting specific populations, the library can ensure buy-in prior to investing a lot of resources.
- Increased visibility of the games collection improved games circulation.
- Supporting making can be more work than just playing games but can provide opportunities to know students.

Conclusion

Academic libraries continue to be pulled in many directions: traditional academics versus cutting edge, curricular support versus whole-person education, keeper of things versus engager of humans. By incorporating games in a variety of ways, academic libraries can further their many missions. Games can provide ways for deeper and more meaningful engagement with our population. They can be a cultural resource and tool used for traditional course outcomes. They can provide a means for students to break from just being consumers to feeling comfortable with being creators. We hope the case studies highlighted in this chapter will encourage others to further their missions in feasible ways based on these models.

These case studies come from varied institutions with a wide range of budgets, administrative buy-in, and resources. The takeaways at the end of each case study can be seen as starting points to help with small ways you can implement successful gaming programs to your institution. Despite ultimately experiencing success, none of the libraries profiled in this chapter experienced a completely smooth process. We each had to overcome challenges in communication, knowledge building, and capacity. Funding can typically be acquired from outside your library, whether from another campus department, through a grant, or otherwise. Increasing your marketing efforts, expanding into different areas of campus, or tapping other groups can help you with your efforts to improve attendance. Including the larger campus community in planning or prioritization also helps sustain programs over time. By focusing on the population's needs and working with individual feedback and communication, our case studies show that academic libraries can do more with gaming at any size and at any budget.

Appendix 14A. Game Jams

When beginning to support game design, a game jam can be an easy, low-risk way to explore hosting a designing event. Like hack-a-thons, game jams have constraints placed on participants, the largest one being time. Whether it is just a few hours or a weekend, this constraint can be very helpful in an academic setting by providing time for students to complete a project without it taking away from their required coursework. In addition to the limitation of time, game jams also often have other structural components to help guide participants. Examples can be an overall theme, use of particular software, or challenges of various kinds, such as creating an accessible game or incorporating a school mascot.[7]

In order to help facilitate a game jam, a library can offer a wide range of tools. In some cases, just providing space and power is enough. The technology needed for a game jam can take many forms; some just utilize paper prototypes, some have recommended technology, some allow a mix of both. If the jam includes making physical games or if it is a jam that takes a longer time to design, providing a variety of supplies for paper prototyping can be handy. Having paper, pencils, pieces, dice, etc. not only helps those making a physical game, but also can help digital game makers who need to design levels, write dialogue, work out mechanics, and more.[8]

Paper prototyping events can be a good way to include novice game designers in your event. This is especially true if the campus does not have a large engineering or computer science program and there are few with the computer language skills needed to finish the game successfully. Although it may be called paper prototyping, for the best event you should have more than just a notebook. For paper, it is ideal to have a variety of forms—large sheets or a paper roll that people can use to design boards, index cards or card stock to allow with stronger structure to make cards or moving elements, sticky notes to make it easy to move around game elements or reorder narrative elements, etc.

Variety can be good for writing utensils as well. Participants can use pens and pencils for starting sketches and writing out ideas. Colored pencils, crayons, or markers allow people to add drawings or design elements. You can encourage participants to bring their own art supplies unless the game event includes a contest element that requires people to have access to the same design materials. Having additional design elements available can help with both creativity and structure for participants. Traditional game elements such as dice, spinners, and play money can greatly help round out the game creation process. If your library has or can get games that are missing pieces or otherwise unusable, you can allow these to be cannibalized. Using a checkerboard is easier than creating a grid on the fly and drawing on a deck of cards makes something easier to shuffle than hand cutting cardstock. If you can round out your supplies by buying cheap sets of other pieces, it can really add nice flair and provide creative inspiration. River rocks, plastic gems, small toys, wood blocks, etc. can all provide jumping-off points for people looking to move into Euro-style tabletop design.

If you are supporting new game designers that want to make digital games, there is a variety of software that you can recommend. One method is to use interactive storytelling

software such as Twine or Textural. This allows people with little to no coding experience to translate some of their ideas and logic of the game into a digital format. Even if not made for your age range, child-friendly software like Scratch can make it easy for people to get in and start making story plots with programming logic behind it. If people have some coding or game design experience and will be using library computers, you may want to have software available for use. Quite a few game engines have free/demo versions that allow people to build out the game and often just limit the output; a paid version is needed to make the game into something that could be sold on an app store. Game Maker and Unity are both engines that use this kind of model and have a low barrier for entry for those that have some knowledge of coding.

The most common element in game jam implementation is collaboration. In some cases, people come with teams; in others, teams formed at the event kick-off. Even in individual maker settings, it is common to have participants interact throughout the event, such as play testing each other's games at various stages or providing support for particular elements. For example, someone might act as the sound designer on several games, people may have others do voice recording, there may be artists, level designers, or platform experts that float to offer help working through some tricky parts of the design process.[9] Overall, most libraries always have the essentials needed for a game jam. With spaces that are conducive to both group and individual work, the physical structure is already there. Add in some technology, office supplies, and hosts for kick-off and closing and you have the makings of a pretty good jam.

Endnotes

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