

# Uploadable content

## Collaboration in a video game advisory team

A misunderstanding led to the creation of University of Oregon (UO) Libraries' video game collection. We thought we were replicating the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign's (UIUC) Library collection. One UO subject specialist librarian got permission from her supervisor, gift money from an administrator, and since she wasn't a gamer, asked around about what video games and consoles to buy and how to do it. As we set up this collection, we found out that UIUC didn't let patrons take the games and consoles with peripherals home with them, as we were planning to do. With no space for the consoles in the library and a firm belief that material should circulate, this initial misunderstanding forced us to invent processes and procedures to handle the collection. What follows is our description of how our Video Game Advisory Team was formed, and how our team adds value to the gaming collection and culture at our library. We will discuss the evolution of our video game acquisition process, our circulation practice and statistics, and issues with the trend towards downloadable content.

### Acquisitions evolution

Annie Zeidman-Karpinski, subject librarian in a UO branch library, collaborated with avid gamer and brilliant staff member based in the main library, David Baker, to assist with running the project. The bulk of the collection was built by shopping in person at both big box stores and small local stores, where knowledgeable employees would be consulted. Baker was able to guide purchases with

his encyclopedic knowledge of the field, personal gaming experience, built-in community of student employees who were also gamers, and by keeping up with trends in gaming and upcoming releases. He also had strong connections with the many departments that are involved with acquisitions, cataloging, and processing new items.<sup>1</sup>

As a two person team, they shaped the collection and were able to coordinate the various departments that were involved in this unusual endeavor. However, unforeseen and unfortunate events forced us change the entire process when Baker died suddenly. While we hoped to carry on the collection and Baker's work, his role was difficult to fill. The other significant change was that it was no longer tenable to use the library's purchasing card to go on a shopping spree, as had been the practice. What developed was a system of inviting others who had expressed interest in the collection to form the Video Game Advisory Team, including Derek Cloo, Lydia Harlan, Jimmy Murray, and Kate Smith. This group represents staff from

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very different parts of our large library system and gives us a meaningful way to collaborate.

Each member of the team helps with different aspects of building and managing this collection. One of the first things the new committee did was to subscribe to three video game magazines—*Games*, *Game Informer*, and *Edge*—to assist with collection development and keep up on gaming news. Because Harlan works in the acquisitions unit where the magazines arrive, she is the first stop on their route to each team member. With limited resources beyond our personal interest and the magazines for educating ourselves about gaming technology, we make an effort for a member of the team to attend the premier gaming convention in our area—PAX. Smith takes a great deal of care and time registering for and attending this annual convention and then reporting her findings back to the group. Going to PAX keeps us current and connected to ideas and movements in gaming culture, and helps us maintain a diverse collection. We have made more informed decisions on large purchases by seeing the technology and using it in person, and contrasting it with other offerings.

Everyone on the committee works on adding materials to a wish list, currently a shared Google spreadsheet. We try to balance the popularity of the games, as well as availability and the quality of the game, on the platforms we support (currently this includes PS4, Xbox One, 3DS, and Wii U). Other deciding factors include considering ratings and reviews, how the games fit with the rest of the collection, how well similar items have circulated, and whether we have all the necessary equipment and resources to provide full functionality.

Once the list reaches a critical mass of titles recommended by the team, our internal policy requires that the librarian approve and submit the requests to the acquisitions unit. They, in turn, place the orders with the vendor. This new arrangement solved a procurement card reconciliation problem. Using the procurement card involved a great deal of paperwork and almost always provoked an audit from oversight offices, creating even more work. While using a vendor is more expensive per item,

especially given the volume that we acquire at one time, ultimately it saves hours of staff time on both the purchasing and receiving ends. For items that aren't games, like consoles, controllers, and even the bags to carry them in, someone in the group researches our best options, posts their recommendations with links to online stores, and we all decide which items to prioritize within our budget. Some version of this collaborative and complex process is likely to be needed for any academic library with a collection like ours.

## Circulation

Our video game collection is prominently featured upon entering the main floor of the Allan Price Science Commons & Research Library. We have found that serendipitous discovery is very important for patrons with this particular collection and thus work to ensure titles we own are easily discoverable. We display consoles and relevant accessories available for loan. The empty game cases are shelved by platform, alphabetically, and remain shelved at all times. During circulation, the disc, any instruction manuals, and a copy of the original case insert are placed into a soft plastic sleeve. Games, consoles, and accessories all circulate for three days. We allow bookings of both games and consoles, which has proven immensely popular with individual students and student groups on campus.

In 2014, a little more than six years after we started the collection, the average checkout was 27 per game. The sports games averaged approximately 25 checkouts per unit, and the Mario games averaged around 55 checkouts each, with Mario Kart in first place at 173 checkouts. The video game collection accounted for 13% of overall circulation at our smaller branch library. Now, two-and-a-half years later, 75% of the collection of 733 games has circulated. On every platform Mario Kart continues to be in the top five total circulating items, along with Elder Scrolls and NBA2K14. On average we see five-to-six checkouts a day, and 4% of the collection circulates weekly. Of our newest games, 54% circulated at least once within the year. So while a small number of games have

staying power, our newest games tend to be what our patrons are checking out. With that in mind, we prioritize replenishing the collection with the newest releases.

### Digital games

With all that is involved with purchasing physical video games, one might wonder why we don't simply purchase digital games instead, and the short answer is that digital games are even more complex than their physical counterparts. While digital distribution is how independent games are being released on different gaming systems, this platform creates problems for libraries when records have to be created and matched with discoverable content. Physical games can be entered into a library catalog and given a barcode, but when something is only digital it isn't so easily distributed in the library world. For UO Libraries' purposes, a solution was created that involved attaching each individual digital game to a specified console unit. When a user finds a digital game in the catalog they'd like to check out, it can be traced to the exact console on which it's been installed. This process works well for full-fledged digital games, but it still causes problems with downloadable content, known as DLC.

Extra content for games is now released as DLC and typically enhances the experience by providing more puzzles, characters, and depth to a series. The difficulties of cataloging these items arises because the majority of DLC is released digitally. These items could be cataloged just like full-fledged digital games, but DLC has to be paired with the game it's made for. This creates an interesting situation when multiple DLC items are distributed. We could try to re-combine them under the correct title for our patrons to use all of the content. The extra time and inconvenience can usually be bypassed by purchasing a "Game of the Year" edition, which contains all the DLC bundled for a particular game on a disc. These bundles are usually released late in the games' cycle, which may negatively impact the items' popularity with our patrons.

Digital distribution has become the norm in gaming, and so has online-only content. Games such as *Destiny* and *Final Fantasy 14* require users to subscribe to a service offered by Microsoft or Sony. This puts us as lenders in a tough position because setting up, paying, and configuring online functions for consoles can take a lot of time and money. And, even if that is possible and we could subscribe to such a service, the patron's home network may have to be set up as well to actually work. These problems currently outweigh the benefits when it comes to purchasing online only games. We hope that there is a solution in the near future.

### Conclusion

With consoles moving toward a digital, account-based format, and the price tag necessary to dedicate resources required to run virtual reality successfully, we anticipate that there are many challenges ahead for our committee. We also know that the collection, the leadership, and the approach have metamorphosed along the way.

The intent of the collection was meant to be ephemeral, so naturally its shape has changed over time. We can envision multiple parallel futures, one where we expand the scope beyond the original vision and become a supporter of experiential learning at UO. Or, perhaps the university would be better served by a historical video game collection. Whatever the outcome, we learned valuable lessons about how to engage the hearts and interests of the many people who work in a large library system through our work collaborating on the Video Game Advisory Team.

### Note

1. Annie Zeidman-Karpinski, David W. Baker, Duncan Barth, Lara Nesselroad, Rosemary Nigro, and Lori Robare, "Lessons Learned from Starting a Circulating Videogame Collection at an Academic Library," in *Gaming in Academic Libraries: Collections, Marketing, and Information Literacy*, edited by Amy Harris and Scott Rice (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008), 26–38. 