

Jeffrey C. Donnelly and Barbara R. Herbert

# Calling all gamers

## Game night in the academic library

**A**cademic librarians looking for new and different ways to bring students into the library have joined a recent trend by hosting game nights in the library. Game nights are a nontraditional way to market the library as a student-friendly location on campus, bringing in students who wouldn't necessarily enter the library under other circumstances.

Through library game night events, students have the opportunity to socialize, network, and play games, as well as have a chance to meet with librarians in a more casual setting and discover the spaces, resources, and assistance that is available to them.

This article examines how two librarians developed a library game night through careful planning, collaborating with key university departments, and partnering with an international corporation to successfully bring students into the library, creating the most successful reoccurring student event at Georgian Court University (GCU).

### Why have a game night in the library?

"Library? No, I've never been there. I do everything online."

"Ask a librarian? Why? They seem pretty intimidating and look like they're always busy at the reference desk."

"There's nothing to do on this campus!"

Every academic librarian has heard these utterances from students. The librarians at GCU have continuously examined this issue

and discussed what they could do to change the minds of the students.

The library had previously tried literary events, food for fines, and even board game nights with only mild success. The university's provost and president had also emphasized a need for more collaboration between academic departments and student life. There was a clear need for improved collaboration on student-centered events at the university.

Game night events are a great way to pull students into the academic library in a very positive and enjoyable way, while connecting and collaborating with other university departments. By hosting an event that is fun and of high interest to students of all types, you are creating an environment in which students will view the library as a positive and helpful place, which provides librarians with an opportunity to gain more return users of the library collection and services. Not all students who come to a game night event will return and become daily library users, but students who would not have normally entered the library to begin with will have an opportunity to meet a librarian

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and learn about the resources and services, which will ultimately improve library usage.

### Creating buy-in

Because of the trend and the need for more student-centered events on campus, we began discussing the possibility of having a game night at our library. We circulated an article in one of the library periodicals, which described an academic library that hosted regular board game nights with good attendance. While the article focused on the success of board gaming, the authors stated that other schools had very popular video game programs with strong student participation.<sup>1</sup> We met



Flier marketing Gamers' Night in the Library.

with the other librarians and volunteered to spearhead the effort. The other librarians were in favor of trying it, so the library director approved the project and put us in charge. Next, we connected with our Student Life department to see if they were open to the idea of having a Library Game Night event. They were in favor of the event and gave us approval for a trial night, as well as a pledge of assistance from one of their staff members. Based on our knowledge of the campus and our student population, we chose to target Thursday nights 7:30 from 10:30 p.m. for the event. GCU's Gamers' Night at the Library was born.

### Partnering with GameStop and on-campus departments

The first item we needed to address was obtaining the consoles and games. We had no budget for this. One of the librarians was a gamer and had some older consoles and games at home that could be used, but we wanted to give students access to more than one console and the latest games. We decided

to try talking to a local gaming store to see if they would be willing to partner with us. After looking up the local stores, we decided to try the international chain GameStop, which had many locations in the surrounding area.

Hoping for the best and preparing for the worst, we approached the manager at one location. The manager was not only receptive, but said that their headquarters encouraged the

connection. They offered to bring the latest consoles and an assortment of games. In return, they asked for sponsorship credit on all publicity and an invitation to any job fair our Career Services office held. We enthusiastically made a tentative agreement to partner on this endeavor. After a tentative date was scheduled, we

agreed on the equipment and games needed.

After securing the partnership with GameStop, we again reached out to the Student Life office and provided an update on the event. They were very excited to find that we had made such a connection. The tentative date was confirmed for the first Gamers' Night at the Library with a plan for possibly more, if it was successful.

We then reached out to Career Services, providing them with all the necessary information regarding our new contact. They agreed to provide GameStop with a job fair table stationed outside the library during each of our events, as well as a table at Career Services upcoming job fairs. They also would plan to connect with our GameStop contact to discuss internships and job opportunities for our students.

Since marketing is a major component to any successful event, we used our connection with Student Life to develop fliers and promotional materials to be spread throughout the campus. This worked well in coordination with our

own marketing initiatives spearheaded by the Library Exhibits and Events Committee, which put together additional marketing materials for use throughout the library. For marketing we used a combination of print fliers, electronic advertisements as screen savers on computers and smart TV's, website ads, social media posts (Facebook and Instagram), and strategically timed mass emails.

### Observations and statistics

For our pilot event in the fall 2015 semester, we made observational notes and counted the number of students that attended the event. Because this initial event was so successful, we were given permission to make this a reoccurring event during the spring 2016 semester. For each event, we spent an average of \$5 on cookies and pretzels for students.

After the first Game Night, we created a participant survey to provide us with quantifiable feedback. Throughout the spring 2016 semester we had continued success, with the exception of Study Day (since no classes were in session that day, most students were not on campus). With the other event dates being highly successful, we continued Gamers' Night through the fall semester, including an initial gamers' event, which took place during new student orientation at the beginning of the semester. With the exclusion of Study Day, we found we had a consistently high turnout at each event, with an average turnout of 29 students.

From our observational data and speaking with students at the events, we learned that students considered the experiences to be extremely positive. We found that during the

events, students would consistently show up in two major waves. One group would arrive 15 to 20 minutes prior to the start time of the event, and a second wave would arrive shortly after 9:30 p.m., when evening classes were ending. Students also requested specific games and wanted to get involved in more events of this type. They consistently wanted more.

When we created our survey, we designed it to complete several objectives. First, we wanted to get feedback on how students were finding out about our event, in order to assess the effectiveness of our marketing strategy and also to understand our participants (gender, major, graduate, undergraduate). Next,



Students playing Mario Kart in the Library Learning Zone.

we wanted to know if the games and systems we provided were what they wanted. Most importantly, we wanted to see if students participating in the event also took time to study

during the event, and if they were likely to return to the library to use our resources and services.

Our survey indicated some surprising results. It showed that even during the digital age, print fliers were still the most successful way to market. Despite providing advertisements on the website, social media, and email, 48.66% of participants indicated they found out about the event through print fliers on campus.

Gender was another surprise. While the majority of participants were still male, 29.85% were female. At some of the events, the population was evenly split. This continues to show the trend that gamers are no longer just male.

We also found that no one academic major or program was completely dominant at the events. Students who attended the event came

from all disciplines. The most popular games at the events were consistently competitive in nature, with Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart consistently being the most popular at each event. Despite being the least popular current generation video game console, the Nintendo Wii U proved to be the most popular system at each of our events. No other system had as much fan support. Students would come to the events wearing Nintendo character-themed t-shirts, backpacks, hats, miibos, and even brought their own custom controllers.

Most interestingly, we found that 25.67% of the students attending the event would take a break from gaming to study and use library resources and services. We also made an additional observation that they would bring their research materials to the tables situated near the event, so they could watch their friends play while they studied and worked on their papers and projects.



Students taking surveys and signing up for the GCU Gamers' Club.

### Benefits for students

Through these observations and the new faces we have begun to see in the library, it's clear that having an event of this type can help not only bring students into the library, but also allows them to discover our resources and services in a fun and positive way.

In addition to the fun factor, the library was able to enhance its working relationship with Career Services, and students were able to apply for positions at GameStop right at the events.

### Future plans

Because of the success and the demand for more events of this type, we created a petition for a GCU Gamers' Club with plans

for even more events that will occur both in and outside the library. Forty students immediately signed the petition, with a handful of those students wishing to have leadership responsibility. With our moderation, the new university club was officially approved by our Student Life department for the spring 2017 semester.

We plan to continue to work closely with the student leaders of this club. Since there is a high interest in e-sports from this group of students, we anticipate this to be the start of an e-sports team for the university, which the library plans to host and moderate. "Some colleges recognize their gaming teams as clubs and give them campus resources."<sup>2</sup> With a club status, our Student Life will be able to provide additional funding for future events.

### Conclusion

Connecting the university departments for Student Life and Career Services

with the right managers at GameStop were the keys to making this collaborative effort a success. With the right support, we found that with minimal staffing and little to no budget, a Gamers' Night in the library can be an effective way to get new students into the building and, more importantly, interested in our resources and services in a fun and exciting new way.

### Notes

1. Jayne Blodgett and Peter Bremer, "Rolling the DICE in a Academic Library," *American Libraries* 45, no. 11/12 (November 2014): 50-53, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed January 24, 2017).

2. Charlie Tyson, "Video Games Go Varsity," *Inside Higher Ed* (June 23, 2014). ↗