

Case Study: Academic Library and Their Collaborators Based on Game Services

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Abstract: Academic library always emphasis collaboration with others, therefore since the very beginning of providing game services, libraries noticed the importance of partnership and collaboration with a wide range of related groups. Hence we could find a great number of examples of collaboration of game services. But the existing literature mentioned the collaboration topic scatteredly and these articles are lack of general overview discussions. So in this paper, we sort the collaborators to several categories, and would like to analyze cases as many as possible to illustrate how libraries and collaborators work together and how they successfully facilitate a better experience of game services. We finally find that different collaborators bring different benefits and libraries have better choose their collaborators based on different situations, and these efforts are all good attempts which provide examples for those libraries who are novice on providing game services.

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1 Introduction

Academic libraries have had plenty successful experiences on providing game service, which include game events, game-based Information Literacy instruction, games & gaming devices circulation and gamified traditional services. Evidences from literatures showed that college and university libraries had already been accustomed to supporting their campus communities' academic and curricular needs through all kinds of game services. For example, University

of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Library has circulated their game collections Gaming Initiative to "support a wide variety of campus interdisciplinary programs, scholarly research, and student needs involving video games"^[1]. Rose Library at James Madison University (JMU), developed interactive game "Mystery at the Library" as a library orientation activity for freshman engineering students to search online and in the library building to get familiar with the library services^[2]. The feedback indicated that the game was both helpful and fun for a majority of respondents. The reading promotion program Save the Classics of the Disappearance of Xiaobu, which was made at the Campus Reading Festival by library of Wuhan University in 2015, was highly recognized by faculty and students. The number of participants in the game increased to over 4000, and 44 departments participated in the game within 31 days from game launched to shut down^[3]. Karen Markey et al. Concluded that demonstration game BiblioBouts developed by University of Michigan could help students perform better in beginning their research. BiblioBouts let students exercise repeatedly to reach different sources and evaluate their relevance^[4].

Based on these previous successful experiences, we could find the fact that the diversity of library game services allows academic library to achieve multiple goals include encouraging reading, marketing themselves, drawing more students to library, better Information Literacy instruction, supporting the academic research and meeting the needs of students' activities in campus and so on. These practical implications cannot be denied by even the most stubborn conservatives. More and more of the researchers and librarians support to start their own game service in academic library.

Although a number of researchers mentioned in

their papers that game services would do good to the academic library on the whole, there are still few academic libraries in China begin their first step on game services in the past few years. Except the librarian's bias of game, there are several obstacles on implementations that prevent them to get started. Different libraries may have different difficulties. While generally speaking, the implementation obstacles include the following ones, technology barriers, budgets and human source shortage, insufficient influences among students, and organizational capabilities. Since these problems which cannot get solved by some libraries alone, to solve these problems in practice, several researchers suggest academic library to find collaborators to achieve a win-win solution. Researchers noticed the importance of collaboration at the very early time, as early as 2006, Ameet Doshi^[5] considered to partner with computer science department and larger, more developed game research laboratories for more complicated library games which require strong programming ability and a dedicated amount of staff resources. Besides, Doshi also mentioned that libraries could pursue external funding sources from governmental agencies and philanthropic foundations.

Since then, we can see many academic library's collaboration cases and cooperation initiatives. But the problem is that all of them are decentralized and specific, no overall studies have been carried out. Why collaborate? How to collaborate? In this paper, we will discuss possible collaborators through analyzing several cases of academic libraries in details to help those libraries with difficulties start their first game service.

2 How the libraries overcome challenges with their partner?

Library partnered with a wide variety of collaborators on game service. Based on their relationship with the campus, we classify partners into three categories, inner campus collaborator, outside campus collaborator, and multiple collaborators from both sides. For each classification, the author will choose one or several representative cases to analyze. And in every case, we will discuss and try to summarize the characteristics of this collaboration, including why they collaborate, who they choose to collaborate with, how they collaborate, and what impact their collaboration brings.

2.1 Inner Campus Collaborator

It is convenient for libraries to find partners on

campus, since all the participants are easy to communicate and can be complementary.

2.1.1 Campus Units

Other campus units as a collaborator are always welcomed by librarians since they are easy to coordinate with and are typical partners of all kinds of library programs. Among all of them, residential life, connected closely with students live and play, is one of the most popular target collaborators when libraries planning their recreational game events for library outreach. For the small academic library of Lycoming College who started Game Night early and was famous for their online information literacy instruction game programs Goblin Threat. They had long collaboration tradition and when they initiate the Harry Potter Night event, Residential Life participated. This event had been a big success so the campus publications gave it a number of positive reports. As a result, not only positive attitude was led to library, but the relationship with Residential life was strengthened. In this case, we can see that other campus units reduced the pressure of publicity and shared labor of library^[6].

2.1.2 Student organizations

Residential Life has a wide influence among students, but when some librarians embedded to Residence hall, students might regard them as intruders of their spaces. While partner with students organization do not have this kind of concern. In order to bring students into library as their neighbor Wake Forest University did, Librarians at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) had collaborated with Student Government and the Campus Activities Board every semester since they held their first Game Night in 2006. Librarians were very satisfied because over 200 participants eagerly attended in the events every time and their connection with student affairs deepened^[7].

Besides reach more students, students' organizations could play more roles in game events. The Lawrence University Seeley G. Mudd Library was also a beneficiary of partnership with student organizations. Angela M. Vanden Elzen and Jacob Roush reported that their Smash Bros. Brawl. Tournaments "have experienced a substantial increase in attendance and enthusiasm since they have been planned and run collaboratively with the Lawrence University Gaming Club"^[8]. There were several reasons that they choose

to work with students. Since students know more than librarians on games, they can not only help to select funny, competitive, influential and fast-pace game for their events, but preform more professional on organizing it, which greatly saved the embarrassing librarians with little knowledge about rules, equipment, installation, etc. The librarians are freed, and for those libraries who have limited budgets for new systems and controllers, participants are often willing to share equipment and games. We could find that the student's organizations built their reputation on campus through cooperating with library, as well as library built their reputation among potential users. This successful collaboration mode resulted in Seeley G. Mudd Library hosted 9 tournaments in three years.

2.1.3 Specific departments

Marketing is one of the most common short boards of library, it is naturally that library seek help from related departments. Hudson County Community College Library hosted their first game event, a Super Smash Bros. for Wii U Tournament as part of its maker space and student-outreach programming in 2015^[9]. This was a simple event not required too many librarians but the library staff can only use word-of-mouth advertising to spread news and send email to inform all of the students of the events. Obviously, they still need a collaborator on marketing. So they worked with the College's Communications Department to promote the event by creating and distributing flyers and publicizing the events on the College's website.

Except marketing, there is a traditional collaboration mode working with department that librarians are familiar with. As an emerging new discipline, video game courses are being taught in different departments. This frontier interdiscipline asks library for new requirements. Science & Engineering Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz was asked by the computer science department to build new collection of video games and new lab for video games in order to support their new program of game design. So they began to build one of the first game collections in academic library through Video Game Pilot Project working with faculty in the computer science department. The items in their new collection were chosen by the faculty for their new classes, and librarian determined the number of equipment, including TV-stations, consoles and controllers for the lab after consulting faculty. The cost of the project was covered by donations and start-up funds from computer science department as well^[10]. The collaborative project allowed the library adapting themselves with new tech-

nology environments and strengthened their connection with the campus and faculty members, and benefited the new discipline construction.

2.2 Outside Campus

Most academic libraries prefer to find partners on campus to make up their own deficiencies. Unfortunately, some of them could not get sufficient technology and budget support on campus. Moreover, some of them need to reach out the campus. The complex and changeable reality require them to seek outdoor.

2.2.1 Other Academic Libraries

It is true that most libraries do not have enough technology power and human source to develop a new information literacy game on their own. It is also true that most libraries have similar needs on information literacy game. Thus, comparing with originally developing new games, modifying an existing one is applicable for academic library in every size. University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) created a web-based board game as information literacy game and opened the licenses and component downloads specifically to encourage the modification of the game by other libraries. The University of North Dakota (UND) Libraries modified this game and used it in an outreach event, wellness fair, to marketing themselves^[11]. They just made some technical changes on the game with only a little time spending on it, but the event was a big success with more students staying at their table, and interacting more with librarians, and attracted participants including both students who are and those who are not typically users of the library.

2.2.2 Local commercials

Library's game service has the same target group with local commercials which provide the basis for their collaborations. Especially for game event, the cost of library mainly on game devices, new game copies and food, which are local commercials could provide. Meanwhile, local commercials need the marketing chance of game events to reach students. Jayne Blodgett and Peter Bremer concluded some of the key points of their success experiences of Game Night at the University of Minnesota Morris' (UMM) Rodney A. Briggs Library, one of them is collaboration^[12]. When planning Game Night, they looked for a variety of student organizations these years to work

together, because they could help to raise awareness and attendance which increased the participation of Game Night. They also connected with their local comic and gaming store which donated prizes for tournaments and sponsored their Game Night every semester.

2.2.3 Local Community

It is necessary for academic library to reach beyond the campus for social responsibility. Collaboratively providing game service is a good choice. The Indiana State University Library brought Nintendo Wii to a local retirement center providing outreach program for senior citizens. This interactive video game event could assist seniors to socialize, exercise and revitalize. They partnered with local retirement center because they want to advertise themselves and to build a more positive image in the local community. Plus, they would like to set a strong example for students to engage in community and public service through encouraging life-long learning. No matter what, their efforts actually brought laugh and health to the residence of the retirement center.

2.3 Multiple Collaborators

For many small academic libraries with limited choices, they have no alternative but to find a partner to provide game services. On the contrary some leading libraries on game service will choose to work with their partners for different reason. They prefer to develop customized, interesting and app based mobile games for information literacy education, the complexity of game development calls for collaboration. For example, Peking University Library, as one of the top academic libraries in China, working together with students and game companies, produced their first story-type mobile game “The First Encounter of Library” for freshman and basic level users of library. Librarians overall planned the content of game and embedded information literacy knowledge. The students recruited from students’ organization were creative and intelligent enough to design fresh and interesting interactions in the game progress. The game company was selected through open tender and was responsible for turning the brainstorming ideas of students and librarians into reality. Librarians, students and game company staff divide the work, and the deep collaboration of the three brought astounding success. Over a thousand students visit the game in just 10 days since it launched! The game acquired numerous positive assessments including flexible access not limited

by time and space, close to campus life, arousing interest of students in information literacy, repeatedly participated and so on. Later, another game named “Crazy Plan” was made for advanced users to improve the level of information literacy.

2.4 Others

Libraries are not always playing a leading role in game services but to cooperate with other groups. John F. Kennedy Library at Eastern Washington University (EWU) had collaborated successfully with Housing & Residential Life and Living Learning Communities (LLCs) for years on the event Library Lights Out, which was held annually in the library for students living in the scholar’s floors of EWU’s residence halls ^[13]. The event was initialized by Housing & Residential Life and organized by students, library provide food and space. It combined educational activities with a variety of recreational games and programs and benefited everyone. The library outreached the students who self-selected as being interested in scholarship of EWU’s residence halls and introduced library resources in game with very low cost and low resistance. Meanwhile, the LLCs students got a good chance to develop their leadership skills, and participants recognized the refreshed role of library played in campus life. At the same time Housing & Residential Life was brought positive attention on campus.

3 Conclusion

This article discussed representative cases of collaborators of game services, because the game services are new and inherently need multiple skills, which call for collaborating naturally. But this article is meaningful not only for game services, but through these cases of collaborations, we can find common problems and solutions in libraries which means these experiences can be useful for other services of library.

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