Draft of chapter for *Casebook on Gaming in Academic Libraries* an ACRL Monograph (forthcoming)

"I didn't believe you that being "written in librarian" made much difference. I was mistaken." Lessons learned from starting a circulating video game collection at an academic library.

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Introduction: Why are we doing this?

The title of this chapter is from an email exchange with a Computer Science undergraduate who looked over a proposal to get video games to loan at a branch of the University of Oregon Libraries. A number of things came together in order for us to create this fledgling collection: we became aware that we had very little to offer in this subject area in which there is pervasive social interest and which has many potentials for academic study; we noted that use of the library collection was consistently falling as students increasingly relied on non-library technologies to serve their needs; and we learned that a handful of other libraries were also coming to similar realizations and buying video collections or hosting video game events. Our hope was that by demonstrating our willingness to delve into an area that might be perceived as fun and therefore, not academic, that we would generate good will in our student users, causing them to see the library as a positive, helpful space. We knew not every student who visited us to use the games collection would return as a user of other library services, but we also were certain that a student who never came here in the first place would never make use of our collections or services, so the presence of a games collection had to also improve library usage.

What follows is an account of how we set up a collection at the University of Oregon's Science Library. This collection is in its infancy and continues to evolve; changes in how it is managed changed even while editing this chapter. We learned a number of things in creating this incredibly popular and well-received collection, so we decided to share our experience.

How we did it: Circulation

Choosing what to purchase:

We purchased four popular gaming systems: Wii, Playstation 3, and XBox 360 units, and the hand-held Nintendo DS, and games that could be used on these consoles. Since the gaming market is shared relatively evenly among the producers of these platforms (Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft, respectively), we elected buy one of each rather than choose a particular manufacturer on which to focus.

We selected games initially based on currency and perceived popularity, with an eye to having a varied selection of game types, such as action/adventure, sports, and role-playing, for each game system. Our initial purchase was forty games, of which some were available for multiple platforms, and some were unique to one system.

Circulation Policies:

We decided early on that if we were going to circulate gaming consoles, we needed to make these things possible:

1. The inclusion, in any checkout of a console, of all the pieces that would either always or usually be needed, for the most likely video monitor options.
2. A means of verifying that each of those pieces was present at check-out and check-in, without creating a ponderous filing system.
3. A fines structure that would effectively encourage prompt return.
4. Limitations on any one user's borrowing power, so that one enthusiastic person couldn't check out every gaming console at once.
5. A loan period that would suit both our need to make the materials widely available and the borrower's likely desire to be able to keep their game for several days, or over a weekend.

To these ends, we decided on the following:

For each console, we purchased a commercially available kit to hold the console itself, assorted wires and controllers, and user manuals. For the DS, this box came with some useful accessories, such as charging adaptors for home and car, earbuds, and game cases. For the other systems, the case was not as comprehensively useful, possibly because while the DS is a hand-held (and therefore deliberately portable) game, the manufacturers do not expect the larger consoles to be treated as portable. Still, we assembled a kit containing AV hookups (standard and HD), two controllers, a power supply, and a means to recharge batteries during use. At the check-out point, we maintain a list of contents for each case, and check off the presence of each piece, then require the borrower to sign an agreement that stipulates that all the pieces are present as marked off, that they will notify us at once if a part gets damaged or lost, and that they will return all the parts. This signed page also includes information about overdue penalties.

In addition to the consoles, we also purchased extra controllers, in order to foster the opportunity to use the games for social or group interaction.

As far as circulation policies, we adopted a three-day loan for both games and game kits and accessories, with steep daily overdue fines.

Storage and security

Another issue we had to come to a decision about was how to display the materials while keeping them secure, and how to effectively check out the game disks (in nearly all cases, these are ordinary CD/DVD-size disks), which must play and therefore are not good candidates for barcodes.

Our initial approach, which is working well for the size of the collection, is as follows: we purchased sturdy plastic sleeves designed for display of VHS or DVD paper-board covers,

and cloth DVD-size sleeves. For each game, we separated the game disk, which we placed in the cloth sleeve, from the various instruction booklets, which we barcoded for circulation and placed in the plastic sleeve. Neither of these remained attached to the hard plastic box in which the game was originally purchased. The game disk sleeve is kept behind the circulation desk, in a drawer designed for DVD/CD storage; this drawer is in a locked cabinet in which we also store the game consoles and peripherals. The plastic sleeve with the instruction booklet is kept on a publicly-accessible shelving unit (also designed for video display), along with the hard plastic case, onto which we affixed labels that indicate they are display boxes. This allows our patrons to tell (by presence or absence of the plastic sleeve with the barcoded booklet) whether something is checked out, but also allows them to see, visually, what games we have even when they *are* checked out; patrons bring the plastic sleeve to the counter and we retrieve the matching game in the cloth sleeve, which fits neatly down into the plastic sheet. At this time, we merely divide up the shelving unit by platform, because there are not more than twenty games for any one platform; as the collection grows, we will probably need to be more concerned with organization by either call number, genre, or title--or something else we haven't yet thought of.

Lessons:

We did anticipate that the small size of the collection might represent a problem if many students were interested in borrowing. Many games--and all four consoles--have been checked out fairly constantly, frustrating patrons who wanted them and found the system for reserving the games and consoles (the booking system) difficult to use. Further, staff also found the interaction between the circulation and booking modules to have unexpected outcomes that were difficult to make sense of. This has required flexibility in thinking about how we want to manage our loan rules; the change made during the editing of this paper (therefore, no

conclusions regarding effectiveness have been drawn) has been to alter the loan period to one of many hours (currently 60), rather than three days, in the hope this will maximize use and make patrons less frustrated. Time will tell.

In addition, while we anticipated that some users would object to the decision to include video games in an academic collection, we didn't realize there might be staff resistance to circulating these materials. We'll talk more about how we addressed patron concerns below in the conclusions or Why sections. The average age of the permanent staff of this library is 45, and several of them found the materials frighteningly unfamiliar. We resolved this problem by carefully labeling all the parts in the game kits, and by reassuring staff that if they followed the checklists for circulation by comparing label to list, they would be getting everything they were supposed to, and wouldn't be reprimanded for difficulties that might be encountered.

How we did it: Acquisitions

Hardware:

Because the purchase of video gaming materials is outside the usual purview of acquisitions in an academic library, creating a work flow for the University of Oregon's Science Gaming initiative proved challenging initially. The most obvious issue to overcome involved the purchase of game consoles and associated peripherals. Our Acquisitions Unit is accustomed to purchasing all kinds of materials formats: books, DVDs, CD ROMs, maps, photographs, electronic resources, and journals. What distinguished these purchases from the usual library acquisitions was the fact that in addition to individual game titles, which are comparable to any other software, and which were categorized as "computer disks" in form field on Millennium, our catalog system. Our project also involved ordering actual hardware that would normally be purchased through Facilities/Purchasing or Library Systems.

The Acquisitions Department was the logical choice to take on the responsibility of purchasing these items for several reasons. Due to the nature of our work flow, we had an established relationship with Metadata Services and Digital Projects (MSDP) and were therefore in a very good position to work closely with them—and close collaboration was absolutely essential in expediting this project given the timeframe we had for getting the systems up and running. It also made sense that the people responsible for ordering these items would need to develop a solid knowledge of the various game systems and accessories involved in supporting this initiative. We all had high hopes for this project, and it seemed like ordering gaming materials was in our future! We wanted to make sure this new "expertise" remained within our department so that future purchasing would be that much easier. Finally, regardless of who actually purchased the equipment, Acquisitions would still be responsible for creating order records, allocating funds, and paying bills—so keeping the ordering within our unit was the most logical option.

The first step in establishing an Acquisitions work flow for the gaming materials was to decide how to create order records for things like video game consoles and controllers which were not going to be cataloged by MSDP, but which needed to be accounted for in Millennium so that we could encumber the appropriate fund indices and process payments in Banner, the university's accounting system. We decided to create a generic bibliographic record under the title "Science Gaming Materials" and attach individual order records for any purchases that were not actual video games, including game consoles, specialized controllers (such as dance pads and guitars), protective cases, cables, and miscellaneous accessories. In creating these order records, a generic fund code was used in the fixed-length field of the record, and the specific index was placed in an internal note field. In addition, we used the identity field to indicate exactly what

was being purchased--for example, 3 Wii Nunchuk controllers.

Software:

Once a process was established for acquiring the hardware, we turned our attention to creating a routine to deal with the ordering and processing of individual game titles. Initially, a few games were purchased through the university bookstore, in conjunction with the game consoles and peripherals. The person responsible for content, used Amazon.com to create a wish list that contained the bulk of the titles she was interested in purchasing, and our ordering specialist was able to purchase items directly off this list. The Amazon wish list feature was very useful because it listed exactly which titles needed to be ordered, and how many copies were required. It can also be used to rank each item (highest to low). Since our ordering specialist was not familiar with video games prior to this project, the clarification provided by the wish list was helpful in avoiding confusion and possible duplication when we were asked to order the same title across several platforms.

In consultation with MSDP, it was decided that Acquisitions would not spend time searching and importing individual records from OCLC for each game title, which is our usual procedure when ordering new materials. Instead, our ordering specialist keyed brief order records for each game that could then be overlaid by catalogers when items were received and sent for cataloging. This allowed us to focus our efforts on acquiring the gaming materials as quickly as possible, while providing catalogers with information that could help them determine how the games would be cataloged in our system. Because we were able to use the information from Amazon to create order records in Millennium at the time of purchase, once the games were received, they could be immediately routed to MSDP after a very quick update of the receive date field in the record. This helped us minimize the amount of time the materials spent

in our unit and allowed us to streamline our work flow.

Lessons:

The most unexpected problem we had was the absence of secured storage space. Although we deal with a wide variety of media and formats, multi-hundred dollar video game systems provided a unique challenge to our limited departmental space. These items were simply too expensive and tempting to be left alone on the shelves the way most of our other unprocessed materials are. When they were not being worked on by staff, the consoles and games were kept in the only lockable space available to us—the department head's office. This was inconvenient for both the Acquisitions staff and the department head since he was not in the habit of regularly locking his office, and we were required to find a key whenever he was away. For future projects involving the acquisition of tempting items such as video game systems, set aside a space where items can be locked away securely and conveniently. Because of the limited time frame for implementing the video gaming project, we paid extra to have the games shipped quickly from Amazon.com. As a result, we incurred significantly higher shipping costs than we would have had we had time to use the free shipping option.

Another very important lesson learned from this project was the need to work closely with our colleagues in other departments, such as Library Systems and MSDP. Collecting video games is uncharted territory for those of us in academic libraries, and the challenges involved transcend any one department. Working with the cataloging staff as we began to develop our work flow allowed Acquisitions to take full advantage of the knowledge and resources MSDP could offer, while at the same time encouraging their staff to start thinking about the unique issues involved in cataloging video games. By working collaboratively, we were able to acquire everything that was essential to building a solid foundation upon which the video game project

could grow, and we were able to do it in a remarkable short period of time.

How we did it: Cataloging

In many ways, cataloging and processing the new collection of video games was fairly routine. We had experience cataloging computer files and so were not dealing with an entirely unfamiliar format. However a number of issues arose which required special attention, and the limited time frame for cataloging and processing presented challenges as well. Equipment for viewing the games was a fundamental concern for catalogers. According to AACR2, most information in the catalog record is taken from the item itself (the title frames in particular) rather than the container, so catalogers need to be able to run the game, especially when doing original cataloging. Catalogers have dedicated equipment for playing videos and DVDs, for example, and we needed to develop a plan for providing this access to the games.

In the initial phase, we were able to address this need by keeping the newly purchased game consoles in Acquisitions while the first batch of games was cataloged. (As noted above, the consoles and games were locked up when we were not working on them.) As the collection grows, we will need to find a different solution. The consoles are now located in the Science Library, which is across campus from the cataloging operation. Assuming that consoles will wear out with frequent use and need to be replaced, we are considering the idea of ordering replacement consoles in advance of need and storing them in cataloging. When needed as a replacement, a console could be rotated in as the circulating "copy" and another replacement console ordered.

Given that there was catalog copy available in WorldCat for most of the titles purchased, it was also important to consider when it was necessary for catalogers to view the games. It is essential for original cataloging, and important when working with catalog copy that requires

significant editing (minimal level cataloging, or records that clearly contain errors). We are comfortable with trusting other libraries' work when working with full level copy in most cases, and so discovered that we did not need to view many of the titles cataloged.

For most titles, copy was available in WorldCat at least for one platform (Nintendo, Xbox, etc.). Fullness and quality of the cataloging varied, as is often the case with nonbook formats. Our cataloging normally follows AACR2 and the Library of Congress Rule Interpretations, but the Library of Congress has not begun cataloging video games. In the absence of the model provided by LC for many other formats, there is great variation in cataloging practices among libraries. We found it necessary to develop field-by-field guidelines to supplement the usual standards to help catalogers make decisions about editing copy and creating original records. Guidelines address such topics as the wording of system requirements notes and summary notes, ESRB ratings, and subject and genre access. Guidelines also documented the choices we made about classification and coding in our local system.

We wanted patrons to be able to access video games using either subject or genre in the catalog. However, using controlled vocabularies to accomplish this presented a number of challenges. Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are established for some individual games, but such headings are to be used for works about the games (such as strategy guides) rather than for the actual games. LCSH also includes headings that represent form or genre (what an item is, rather than what it is about), including Video games, Nintendo video games, and Sony video games. Again, these should be used for works about video games when coded as subject headings (MARC tag 650) in the bibliographic record. One of the most frequent errors we found in catalog copy for individual games was the inclusion of headings such as Nintendo video games coded as subjects. It is possible to bring out the form or genre of an item using LCSH by

coding the headings as form/genre headings (MARC tag 655). However, the vocabulary for genres of video games has not been developed in LCSH, since to date, LC has not collected or cataloged games. The gaming community makes extensive use of genre terms to categorize games, such as "Racing," "First-person shooter," "Tactical role-playing," etc., but there is not consensus on the terms or consistency among sources. This is an area that is ripe for development within LCSH and would be of great value to academic libraries and the gaming studies community. In the short term, we chose to use one genre term, Video games, consistently on all records for individual games. This serves a practical need as it allows users to retrieve all of the records for games with one search on the heading in our genre index. While the collection is small, this approach is adequate. As the collection expands, the need for more specific genre terms will increase. We plan to revisit this decision and consider the feasibility of proposing new genre terms for inclusion in LCSH.

Classification is often a question when dealing with non-book formats. We use Library of Congress Classification for most of our collections, but accession numbers for most non-book formats. We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. LC classification clearly provides better collocation with other resources and would help in collection assessment, which often uses call number ranges. However, all of the titles would go in one number, GV1469.35.A-Z, given the current scope of our collection. Few have Cutters already established (Mortal Kombat is one exception, GV1469.35.M67), so catalogers would spend more time formulating Cutters and shelflisting. In terms of shelving, it could be more difficult to quickly locate a particular call number in the collection for retrieval and re-filing, given the similarity of call numbers. Accession numbers were determined to be more practical for our needs. The format for call numbers is the term "GAME" followed by a five-digit accession number, with the

name of the platform (Xbox, PS3) at the end. Call numbers are indexed in the non-LC call number index in our OPAC, so all games can be found by searching the term “game” in this index.

In order to maximize access to the collection, we used two additional approaches that are not typical in our cataloging. Recognizing that users searching the catalog might be most interested in retrieving all games that can be played on a specific system, we developed a standard way of referring to each platform and used this form in both the system requirements note and a 753 field, System Details Access to Computer Files. A keyword search on a term such as “Nintendo Wii” limited to the material type “Software/Data” retrieves all games for the Wii platform. This could also facilitate the use of canned searches on the terms from a web page. Also, anticipating that users might have questions about borrowing the games and equipment, we included a link to a Game and Equipment Policies page in all records to help answer questions about circulation.

How we did it: Systems and set-up

Setting up the consoles for check out

Each of the four consoles we planned to loan presented different problems from a setup perspective. Our two main goals in this phase were: 1. To create an easy and straightforward experience for our patrons, from their initial setup experience to their in-game experience, and 2. To secure the system software of each console against accidental or intentional abuse by borrowers. These goals sometimes came into conflict; for instance, in order to maintain security for the Xbox 360, it was necessary to disable access to the "Live" experience, in which users could play in real time against others on their own systems elsewhere. This was not transparent to users, nor, in fact, to staff, at the outset, making for a frustrating user experience when an

expected and significant aspect of the gaming experience was not available.

Hardware:

How do we set up each system so our patrons can understand it, so our staff can support it, and so we make options as widely available as we can without presenting unacceptable security risks? The choices we encountered included such technical details as whether to optimize for a 4:3 or a 16:9 aspect ratio, and whether to include connection cables to support more than merely the most likely video/audio setups our patrons might possess. Beyond that, we needed to consider to what extent we needed to provide training and troubleshooting, to both patrons and to our own staff. .

We decided it was important to support various potential setups, and that patrons who were already technically savvy would know probably more than we did about how to best set up for their less standard arrangements. We also noted early on that for all four consoles, the manufacturers have fairly exhaustive documentation available on line. Therefore, we purchased materials that allowed a broad range of options, but set defaults, where possible, for the most likely options (a 4:3 aspect ratio; a non-high-definition/surround-sound AV connection). We also considered including laminated instructions for set-up, and ultimately decided instead to wait and see, allowing patrons to ask us questions and attempting to troubleshoot ourselves (using the on-line manuals if necessary). To date, we've found that our assumption that high-end users would have high-end knowledge has been accurate.

Software:

As each system has out-of-game software, much like a computer's OS, how should each system be set up to ensure the best experience for our patrons while keeping them secure from abuse? To a degree, each console had certain similar options (parental controls, network setup

for internet access); but each also presented fairly unique access and security problems. The most important part of setting up each system's software was to enable password-protected parental controls. If this were not enabled prior to checkout, it would be possible for a patron to enable them, set a password, and lock the library out of our own console.

Another major concern was our need to ensure that any patron data left behind on a console was kept as private as possible. To do this, we set each console up to retain as little patron data as possible while still allowing the hardware and software to function as intended. In the end, we found there was actually very little we could do to specifically prevent the retention of patron data, if the patron was determined to load and leave their data on the consoles. The best solution seemed to be to simply advise that the consoles should be treated as one might treat a publicly accessible computer workstation, with the understanding that many people would have access to the information on each console.

Things they all had in common:

With each system, we tried to take into account how patrons would be connecting the hardware to output devices. As each console ships with different output capabilities (composite, component, HDMI), and each also ships with different cabling to support those capabilities, we simply tried to note which cables we didn't yet have and so recommend their purchase. [

How to answer the question, Why are you spending money on games?

It is actually an inexpensive way to lure people who might otherwise not be library users into the library. And if they come in for video games, regularly or erratically, eventually they will stop and ask a question or check out a book or look for an article. We have books and other resources that we've paid $5,000 for and no one has even checked out, so the per item cost per use, has been relatively inexpensive.

Our interactive multimedia department has used a video game to get ideas for a learning object they are animating for a large anatomy class on campus. We hope to be able to highlight the academic connections to video games, and a local video game company. Through internships with that local company, students can learn how to make games as well as play them.

This is also a way of fostering the Learning Commons ideals in the Science Library for relatively little money. If we have something here that folks want to use, will they use the library as a space to do other things in? We hope so. It worked that way at University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign. Those students who are regular users of the collection take a proprietary interest in maintaining it and the space. We think the same thing is happening here.

We also think that more and more disciplines will use video games to teach other things, anthropology, sociology, and environmental studies could use the simulation games to understand social behavior and cause and effects on complex systems, business students could use simulation games like Tycoon for the same purpose, anatomy/human physiology could use games like Trauma Center to try out decision making skills. The possibilities are endless and we look forward to seeing how they develop.

Why is this important, and why we are doing it.

Within minutes of setting up the display case a student asked me why we had them. He then confessed that he was studying video games, on his own time. Then he asked about checking out a console.

Generally the skepticism we've encountered comes from a near-moral high ground that very much elevates the noble academic mission that everyone in the university's employ must aspire to. The truth is that this kind of academic morality is very selective, and most often comes from a natural position of self interest; i.e., How is this going to benefit me, my department, my

research, et cetera. This can be tough to argue against because the library can't tell anyone what to research, or how to research it. So if a history professor doesn't see the point of the game collection because it doesn't further her research, she is correct in her assumption that it is useless to her.

The comparison that we've used most is between this one and our film collection. The nature, subject, and quality of each individual production can vary wildly. Each piece might only be useful to a handful of disciplines. It's relatively new media whose relevance is largely pushed by consumer demand, and is subject to format changes and price wars. And yet we have invested considerable funds in expanding our video collection. Much like movies, video games have become socially and culturally relevant as well as financially profitable.

Video games will grow and change, but they aren't going away. Hopefully they will change for the better. One way to do that is to make them, and the discourse surrounding them, smarter. A huge percentage of what is written about gaming is simple service journalism. Consumers need to know when a game is coming out, will their controllers work with it, if it is any good, etc. But real game criticism is still in its infancy (see Chuck Klosterman's article and Clive Thompson's response. http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0706KLOSTER_66 and http://www.wired.com/gaming/gamingreviews/commentary/games/2006/07/71290) Educated people are woefully ill-equipped to discuss and critique video games, in part because the academic world still traditionally considers them unworthy of notice. What that doesn't take into account, of course, is that academia is not the arbiter of cultural relevance. It is necessary, as an academic institution, to acknowledge and react to the cultural growth that happens around us and outside us. Ultimately, questioning the importance of an academic understanding of video games sounds just as silly as questioning the importance of an academic understanding of our

culture. Is this kind of understanding strictly necessary to our existence? Of course not. But can we benefit from the ideas and hard work of others whose interest leads them to seek tools to further our collective understanding through critical discourse and scholarly debate? Simply: yes.

If we can help provide the tools, of course we should do so.

Appendixes will include a link to Scholar's Bank, the UO Dspace, and will have the following documents. We will have permanent URLs shortly:

- **Console set ups – 3 pdfs, 1 for each console – [David/Duncan]**
- **Additional cataloging information – [Lori]**
- **Check out sheets for consoles and misc. – [Lara]**
- **Collection development policy and proposal for games - [Annie] see:**

http://hdl.handle.net/1794/5386

- **Gaming policy in the Science Library – [Lara]**