

**Uploadable Content: Collaboration in a Video Game Advisory Team**

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## *Introduction*

A misunderstanding led to the creation of University of Oregon Libraries' video game collection. Librarian Annie Zeidman Karpinski thought she was basing it on what University of Illinois - Urbana Champaign's Library was doing, when she got permission from her supervisor, gift money from an assistant University Librarian, and started asking around about how to buy video games and consoles for patrons to check out. As we set up this collection, we found out that UI-UC didn't actually let patrons take a game and a console with peripherals home with them, as we were planning to do. This simple mistake forced us to invent processes and procedures to handle the collection. What follows is our description of how each Video Game Advisory Team member adds value to the gaming collection and culture at the University of Oregon Libraries. We will discuss the evolution of our video game acquisition process, the digital controversy, keeping up with trends at PAX, and look toward the future development of experiential learning.

## *Acquisitions Evolution*

We started by taking the library purchasing credit card and going to big box stores, then small local stores and having a spending spree. The bulk of the collection was developed by a knowledgeable staff member, David Baker, who was himself an avid gamer and a brilliant person. He was able to guide purchases based on what he knew about playing games and what was being written about upcoming games. We would develop a list of items we wanted to get, but we also consulted with the employees of the stores, who were often very knowledgeable and we could rely on David's encyclopedic knowledge of the field as well. More on this process is explained in a book chapter published soon after the collection started (title and date here).

Annie and David would sign out the department credit card and go shopping for titles to add to the collection. This was a fun way to purchase, but created stress for the acquisitions unit because of all the steps necessary to reconcile the credit card within the monthly time frame. Charges on the card need to be accounted for with the equivalent of matching purchase orders and receipts, which sounds simple enough at first, however, several elements compounded to make this process problematic. Purchasing excursions happened twice a year, which meant a large number of items were acquired at a single time, making it difficult to create all the purchase orders in a timely manner. Institutions like UO have checks and balances in place to deter fraud when using a procurement credit card, for example, random audits. We could be sure that each video game purchase would be scrutinized, adding extra work for these acquisitions. We tried a couple of times to coordinate in-person purchases with better timing for the credit card, but the volume stayed the same, so it was always a time crunch to create all of the order records before the period ended and the statement arrived for reconciliation.

David shaped the collection and was able to coordinate the various departments that were involved in this unusual endeavor. However several things happened to make us change the entire process. The first was that David died suddenly. After his death, Annie hoped to carry on the collection and his work, but the process couldn't remain the same. The other significant change was that it was no longer tenable to use the purchasing card as we had been doing to

go on a shopping spree. What developed was a system of inviting others who had expressed interest in the collection to become a collection development committee, including Derek Cloo, Lydia Harlan, Jimmy Murray, and Kate Smith. Initially, the idea of forming a video game committee was met with institutional resistance. We found that a robust advisory group has allowed us to explore many different aspects of the changing video game industry. Every member has made significant contributions towards making the collection work within a complex academic library structure.

One of the first things the new committee did was to subscribe to three video game magazines - Games TM, Game Informer, and Edge – to assist with collection development and keep up on gaming news. As Lydia works in the acquisitions unit where the magazines arrive she is the first stop on their route to each team member. Everyone on the committee works on adding materials to a wish list, currently a shared Google spreadsheet. We try to balance popularity of the games and getting them for different platforms (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, the librarian approves and submits the requests to the acquisitions unit, which places the orders with the vendor. This new arrangement solved the procurement card reconciliation problem, and it worked smoothly until our reliable and flexible vendor, The Book House, went out of business. Our orders are now placed with Midwest, which is working well. Given the volume that we acquire at one time, using a vendor is more expensive per item, but 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.

### *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 as a digital only. 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 items are distributed, and we have to recombine them for a patron. 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.

If demand grows for more games that require online distribution and support, libraries will have to find a solution to security and privacy. If libraries move forward with online content for their gaming collections, some issues may arise such as faulty purchases to the library online accounts or online harassment. Moreover, patrons do have the ability to charge the account once connected to the Internet, and if the account is registered by the library it could create financial problems for that library. Past users could also create a difficult environment for new users of a rented console. If patron one is malicious during their online game session, backlash could be directed towards the next patron using the console who is sharing the same username. Most, if not all, of these issues can be addressed by a library configuring privacy settings when purchasing an online license for a console. Family settings can also be set as a back up to the global privacy settings found on all consoles. Tightening security and restricting opportunities for patron purchases and communication within the games would help organizations avoid any unnecessary problems that may occur.

## *PAX*

Penny Arcade Expo (PAX) has been a valuable source to test out the latest games, technology, and keep abreast of current issues and discussions in the gaming community. PAX encompasses PC, Tabletop, Console, Mobile, and other gaming. Every year the Exhibition Hall is an arms race from all of the major developers in who can construct the most colossal, awe-inspiring booth. Along with the exhibits that showcase the major developers, as well as the indie developers, there is a strong collection of panels talking about issues and culture in gaming. Recently, there have been challenging and exciting discussions of gender and race in gaming. These panels have pointed out the ways developers and game makers have yet to break away from entrenched industry ideas about who plays games, and what those gamers want.

Our focus last year was on testing all the available Virtual Reality (VR) technology. At 2015 PAX Prime, one member was able to test all of the current players in the VR market. Through her patience and research, she was able to come back with a detailed report about the feasibility and appropriateness of the different technology in regards to how we might use it in an academic library setting. She was able to see the HTC Vive, the Oculus Rift, the Gear VR, and the Playstation VR peripheral demonstrated live. Rather than just reading reviews, we now have firsthand data to guide our decisions. The popularity of this emerging technology was also apparent at PAX. The Vive was such a popular booth that many convention goers waited in line in excess of 6 hours for a 15 minute demo.

Because of all that we can gain from going. We plan to have at least one member of our group attend PAX on an annual basis. We have had institutional resistance for funding this convention, but thanks to the group member who regularly attends on her own we are able to take advantage of the information she can gather for us all. Our hope is that with more education about the value of the experience, that we will be able to receive regular funding for one group member to attend this convention.

### *Future Development of Experiential Learning*

As our committee works on future development of the video game collection we are joined by the UO Libraries' committee on experiential technologies. This committee's charge is to review, discuss and monitor the use of new and emerging technologies being deployed in academic library settings to engage users in hands-on learning. The UO Libraries is committed to this type of learning as evidenced by the additions of a makerspace and visualization lab in the new Allan Price Science Commons & Research Library.

The overlap of video games and experience driven learning explain the importance of another convention to the work of the video game committee, SIGGRAPH (short for Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques). Whereas the PAX convention is focused on gaming technology, SIGGRAPH is more broadly focused on advances in computer graphics and interactive technologies. Our committee will be working with library administration in the hopes of securing funding for at least one member to attend SIGGRAPH 2017. We believe strongly that this convention offers an amazing opportunity to keep abreast of the latest technologies and any relevant overlaps with the video game collection and newly constructed makerspace.

One very exciting area of experiential learning relevant to the video game collection is VR technology. The Allan Price Science Commons & Research Library is in the process of acquiring a developers kit version of the incredibly exciting Microsoft HoloLens. This VR headset differs from the previously mentioned Oculus Rift and HTC Vive in that the user's view is not entirely limited to the VR world projected by the headset. In the Microsoft HoloLens the user views the VR projected into the world around them. This opens up possibilities for apps and games that are able to respond to the unique environment each user inhabits upon each use of the device. From a practical standpoint this also allows the Library to use the Microsoft HoloLens in any space without a need for a dedicated environment beforehand. While apps for this device are in their infancy and are heavily skewed towards more traditionally academic uses (i.e. human anatomy research) there are games being developed as well.

### *Conclusion*

With consoles moving toward a digital account based format, growing complexity of license agreements, and the price tag necessary to dedicate resources required to run VR successfully, we realize our original vision for the video game collection is becoming less relevant, however, we can envision multiple parallel futures. By staying connected to this wildly innovative environment through PAX and SIGGRAPH we have the opportunity to expand the scope beyond the original vision and become a supporter of experiential learning at the

University of Oregon. Or, perhaps the University would be better served by a historical video game collection and we would continue our work in much the same way. The intent of the collection was meant to be ephemeral and it might simply age itself out of existence. 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.