FINDING A PLACE FOR VIDEO GAMES ON YOUR CAMPUS
where we’re from

University of Minnesota Twin Cities

A big library, a big campus, and a lot of exciting work going on related to video games. This presentation is about how we built a video game community in the Libraries, but it will be based on our experiences in our campus and library environment. We'll try to generalize our experiences and think broadly about the communities we all can build around gaming and other technologies.
what this session is about

1. Video games are a quickly evolving technology, and libraries have just begun exploring how to support it.

2. Doing work around gaming and libraries is more fun and productive in a community, but you might have to find or build one.

3. Having an effective community means finding where games fit in on your campus, and within your library’s mission and goals.
academic video game services
Collections
We saw a growing body of literature offering long-sighted guidance on game collection. Libraries were collecting console-based games, but also beginning to think about how to support collections of other formats and genres, including PC games, indie and artistic games, and browser-based games, and how to maintain collections when the bits and discs start to break down. We also saw that libraries collected for a variety of purposes: archival, research, teaching, and entertainment.
Many librarians also see a role of gaming collections in information literacy and teaching. Ward and Laskowski refer to games as “primary source” material for studying social issues, gender roles, and violence. Other resources, like The VideoGameCat, which Shannon created during her time at Colorado State, aims to help educators and librarians select video games based on factors like expert reviews and awards. Some libraries are dabbling in game development, as well, to support student services like instruction and orientation.
Events

Universities often leverage their collection and facilities to host events and organize showcases, or simply host events focused on student engagement. The budget, equipment, and coordination now required to host an event is neither novel nor extraordinary, and many academic libraries now host regular game nights and incorporate gaming into a larger suite of outreach activities.
“As gaming teaching, research, and technology rapidly evolve, academic libraries have the opportunity to grow beyond basic physical collection development and open gaming sessions, and begin developing the next generation of gaming collections and services right now.”

--Laskowski & Ward, 2009
…”there still needs to be a better understanding of how game studies students, teaching faculty, and researchers utilize information and perceive their libraries.”

--Smith, 2008
finding a community
Creating a Community

It was a very organic process, starting in April 2013. Shannon’s game-themed presentation at ARLD Day kicked off an discussion of the possibility of forming an informal group. The group assembled that month, and membership was by invitation or word-of-mouth. At these initial meetings, we realized that we wanted institutional support and legitimacy, but this kind of group didn’t fit into UMN's existing structure. We wanted to keep it exploratory, uninhibited by missions or charges, and wanted it to be open to everyone. This is where the idea of a community of practice came in.
Community of Practice

- group of people that have a topic/problem they want to explore
- may exist for any length of time
- can work on multiple topics concurrently or sequentially
- open to anyone who wants to be part of the community

Example: [http://it.umn.edu/home/it-umn-community/cops](http://it.umn.edu/home/it-umn-community/cops)
finding a community

2013

April
- Assembled informal gaming group

April - June
- Held closed meetings

June
- Became Libraries 1st Community of Practice

July
- Appointed convener, opened up group to all staff
See who shows up
There are a lot ways to find others on your campus who are as enthusiastic about games (or any other technology) as you. You can host informal discussions and brown bags on gaming topics, and see who shows up. Consider starting a journal club, or if one already exists, suggesting papers on gaming topics.

Visit [http://z.umn.edu/gamelinks](http://z.umn.edu/gamelinks) for a full list of resources and ideas.
finding a community

Join existing communities

There are many active communities inside and outside the library community that discuss gaming topics. Check out the LibGaming Google Group, the Games and Learning Constituent Google Group, and the Games, Learning, and Society listserv.

Visit [http://z.umn.edu/gamelinks](http://z.umn.edu/gamelinks) for a full list of resources and ideas.
Attend or follow conferences
Several conferences intersect with games and libraries, including the Games, Learning and Society conference (June), Educause (October), Games for Change (June), Serious Play (July), and some programming at ALA Annual (June-July).

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finding a community

Attend webinars

Keep an eye out for webinars. There were two in March 2014: Games and Gamification (hosted by New Media Consortium) and Gamification in Libraries (hosted by the New York Library Association.)

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gaming + our library roles
gaming + our library roles

Research
We identified UMN research that incorporates game-based methods or studies games in computer science (data mining in MMORPGs, speech recognition and machine learning, human-computer interaction and the social aspects of gaming), kinesiology (motion sickness, physical education in elementary schools, diagnoses of mental disorders in children), and the School of Public Health (gaming simulations to determine emergency readiness).
Teaching and Learning

We keep an eye out for opportunities to use game-based learning in our library instruction. For example, we participated in a playtest of a info lit ARG; one of our group members created a fast-paced game called “Blackjack”; and our group is developing a card-based party game to help students brainstorm paper topics. Additionally, we have found examples of instructors who use games in their classes in the School of Nursing.
Outreach to undergraduates

The student union has a dedicated game room and regularly hosts game nights, so undergrads already have a place to game for fun. However, there is heavy use of the libraries during finals week, so the CoP hosted gaming events as “study break” activities. We bought a Wii and several multiplayer games. Our group also sponsored a information table at student orientation in 2013.
Assessment
Since we’ve been operating for almost a year and we’ve tried a few things, we now want to start looking at assessment to make sure our activities match the goals of the Library and the University. We conducted a survey of 586 first-year undergraduates during Fall 2013 orientation. The survey results gave us a baseline understanding of students’ preferences for library gaming services, and provided a lot of food for thought about what kinds of services we should be offering.
challenges
Challenge #1: Group cohesion

The community of practice is an informal group held together by common interest in gaming. We can't make any demands on time or participation, and each member comes with a different set of professional interests. At first, we tried to make sure that there was something for everyone at each meeting, but month after month, we got nothing done.

We radically changed the format of our meetings. Instead of an open agenda, the convenors solicited ideas from the group on a monthly basis, and created a themed monthly agenda. By setting a theme and inviting members who were interested in discussing that theme, our meetings were much more productive and enjoyable.
Challenge #2: Resources

This picture represents a pretty major accomplishment for our group: it’s the first acquisition of a gaming console by the UMN Libraries (it’s not a WiiU, but the bag is great for transporting it). We also have a small collection of party games with the Wii. We didn’t know if there would be resources available to acquire games at all, since our CoP doesn’t have a budget. So far, when we’ve asked, we’ve received, but we’re not sure whether more ambitious (read: expensive) projects would require additional effort.
Challenge #3: Straight-up failures
There wasn’t much student interest in the initial events we held as a CoP. We hoped that hosting gaming events would be a good first activity for our group, but it ended up being a lot of effort for little reward.
Challenge #4: Making an impact (work in progress)

The underwhelming interest in our initial events surprised us, especially because other libraries reported success with similar activities. We had to admit that sustaining these events every semester wasn’t worth the time and effort, because the payoff wasn’t any greater than other finals week activities. Our survey of first-years really got us thinking -- what ARE the next generation of gaming services?
successes + next steps
Looking ahead

We see a lot of opportunities for the Libraries to engage with gaming on campus. Ideas include hosting a research showcase, making new and advanced technology available to encourage innovative experimentation and use, and forming a collection of games developed by students or researchers at the University. We also want to survey our researchers, student developers, and instructors that use games to learn how the library can support them.
recommendations
recommendations

1. Take the lead!
2. Help other library game nerds find you.
3. Create goals.
4. Give structure to your discussions.
5. Talk about how your efforts fit into the larger library mission / campus community.
6. Go forth and create!


