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What is "Student Engagement?": Collaborating with Student Life to Create Trivia Night Events

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Background

Librarians at institutions of all sizes have long struggled with effective outreach to their students. At Jackson College, a small community college in Jackson, Michigan, the library had been trying for years to find a way to get students to attend outreach events. Engagement was low and attendance was lower. We were searching for something fun to engage students, and after seeing a few public libraries host trivia nights events at their local bars, we were inspired to see if we could create something similar. The fact that I had some celebrity status on campus as a two-time "Jeopardy!" winner in 2014 made the idea even more appealing. However, we knew that we would need help to make such an event happen. Having seen the success our Student Life department has with their student events, we decided to reach out to the Student Life Director to see if a collaboration on a Trivia Night series would be possible.

Planning

The Library Director and I first approached the Director of Student Life in the summer of 2018 to see if he would be open to collaborating with the library on a Trivia Nights series. As Jackson College has a very small on-campus resident population who are often looking for activities, we also reached out to the Director of Housing to brainstorm potential ideas. This session proved fruitful, as both areas were open to collaboration and excited about the idea of Trivia Nights. In order to capitalize on my celebrity status, we decided that I would host most events, with the series culminating in a face-off between the winning team and me. The events would not be hosted in the library; rather, we decided to move to our student center, known as the Jets Hangar. Most student events happen there, and it features some equipment, such as a microphone and large projector, that we do not have in the library. For accessibility purposes, we decided that all questions would be projected on the screens as well as read aloud. Additionally, due to budget constraints and timing considerations, we made the decision to write our own questions rather than buy previously produced rounds from other companies. As the host, I decided that I would write all the questions.

Just before the beginning of the Fall 2018 term, we nailed down a final schedule of five total events, with the fifth being the championship face-off. Teams would accumulate points over the course of the previous four sessions to determine the winner. We submitted a marketing request to our marketing department, who created posters as well as advertising the events on digital signs throughout campus, in email newsletters, and on social media. Additionally, we decided that prizes purchased by Student Life (e.g. gift cards and Jackson College swag) would be awarded to the winning teams each evening.

Structure

Each Trivia Night event was held in the evening on a weekday, typically every other week. Teams were comprised of three to six members, with bonus points given if a team included a Jackson College employee (faculty or staff) on their team, in order to help build relationships between staff and students. All teams had to have at least one student, however. We also encouraged teams to come up with their own fun team name to represent them throughout the series. Each semester, there have been an average of 12 different teams who participate. In order to ensure fair participation by all, no cell phones were allowed; teams could be disqualified if someone at their table was seen with a cell phone out during a round.

We decided on a format of three rounds with 10 questions and a particular theme for each round. The first round typically had a General Knowledge theme, and the other two often related to an event occurring around the time of the trivia night (such as Indigenous Peoples Day). Each question was worth one point, unless the question had a multiple-part answer, in which case each part was worth one point. The team wrote down their answers for each question of the round and turned in their answer sheets at the end of the round. I then reviewed the answers with the group while student workers from Student Life scored the sheets. Standings were calculated and read between rounds while participants had a chance to eat complimentary snacks or take a small stretch break.

The final round was a "winner-takes-all" lightning round worth 10 points and was modeled after the final round of NPR's quiz show "Ask Me Another," where questions are all sudden-death; if someone misses a question, they're out, but if they are correct, they continue playing until just one person remains. Each team needed to select one representative to answer the questions; the other team members could cheer them on but not shout out answers. These rounds tended to be the most difficult as students enjoyed collaborating with each other rather than separating.

The Championship Night event was held as a one-on-one faceoff between me and the winning team of the season. Additional elements, such as giving the teams the option to earn extra points based on how well they thought they would do in a category, were included to give the team a potential advantage over me. While we had hoped this additional spectacle would encourage all teams to come and watch, we had very low engagement with none of the other teams attending and a few other spectators scattered throughout the Hangar.

Changes Made to Structure

After the first season, we made a few changes to our structure. The biggest change was having the Director of Student Life, rather than me, write all the questions for that season and put them into presentations. I had many more time constraints in Winter 2019, so I was unable to write them myself. I did still host and proofread questions, however.

Other changes affected how Trivia Nights were run. One change was to allow teams to only have two players. We had a few issues with students finding a third player for their team during the first semester, so we decided to relax that requirement. Additionally, we changed the bonus round structure to a timed round using worksheets, such as map quizzes. These allowed all team members to work together and were much more popular than the lightning round format. Finally, we changed the Championship Night event to allow all teams to compete against me for a chance at bragging rights and prizes. This encouraged all teams to return and this resulted in much more engagement.

STUDENT FEEDBACK SURVEY

During the Fall 2019 Championship, student participants were asked to voluntarily provide their email addresses in order to receive a survey about their perception of Trivia Nights as an event. Twenty email addresses were collected and 12 responses were received. The survey addressed most aspects of Trivia Nights, from the overall experience to the food provided to the difficulty of questions.

What Works Well

Overall, the feedback from students was extremely positive. Almost all participants rated their overall experience as "amazing" (Figure 1). When asked, students had very kind things to say about their participation in Trivia Nights (Appendix A). We were surprised to find that every respondent said that the questions were a "good mix of easy & hard", since there were often many complaints during the actual events about the difficulty of questions. Additionally, we found that all respondents had attended multiple Trivia Nights (Figure 2), so the series format really seemed to engage participants.

Figure 1: How Would You Rate Trivia Nights for This Semester?
<Placeholder; Editors will place Table here in final doc>

Figure 2: How Many Trivia Nights Did You Come to This Semester?
<Placeholder; Editors will place Figure here in final doc>

What Still Needs Work

A downfall of the survey is that it was sent only to participants on the Championship event, which is the culmination of the entire event series. In the future, we hope to also survey students who attend some of the very early events in the series to gauge their perceptions. Also, we would like to hear from those students who are in the Hangar during the event but decide to be spectators

instead of actively participating each week, as we are very interested to know about what keeps them from participating and what we could do in order to better engage them in the event.

The aspect of trivia that received the most negative comments was the food and drink offered. Most students were looking for more variety than what was offered. As Jackson College has a food service contract, we are obligated to use that food service vendor for any events on campus. This leads to few affordable options for events such as Trivia Nights. We are still working to find a good variety of food and drink that doesn't break the bank.

The other aspects that could use work regard logistics. It is very time-consuming for one person to create the presentations and write the questions for each series, no matter who is doing it. However, we do not have the budget to buy a trivia program that is already compiled. In the future, I may try to collaborate more with others in the library to take some of the burden of writing all the questions off me.

Finally, our collaboration is very person-dependent and runs most smoothly if both the Director of Student Life and I are present. When he has been absent, we have encountered some issues with logging attendance, having available paper materials (such as answer and score sheets), and the technology that we use in the Hangar. More cross-training between the library and Student Life would greatly help the events to consistently run smoothly, even when an organizer is absent.

IMPACT ON THE LIBRARY

Trivia Nights events engage students in a space outside the library and is seen as something "fun" rather than educational, even though we do try to work in some educational material. Going into the collaboration, we were only interested in connecting with students in a new way, but the overall impact has been much larger.

Increased Student Comfort with Librarians

One of the most tangible impacts of Trivia Nights on the library has been that students are much more comfortable approaching librarians at Jackson College. Many repeat attenders would just come up to say "hello" to me in the library, or would ask me for help on their questions regarding research. I also have had a few frequent spectators recognize me from trivia and feel much more comfortable asking me for help as a result. Particularly, there is one student who has been very hesitant to seek out help from others but is willing to trust me because of trivia, so I have been able to help them throughout the past two semesters.

One of our most loyal teams is comprised of members of Jackson College's baseball team. They have been huge supporters of trivia and consistently push for new seasons. I have often seen them during campus tours, where they are leading a group of prospective new students that the baseball team is recruiting. They usually greet me enthusiastically and ask about trivia, which helps create a sense of community in the library for those prospective students and shows that librarians are approachable and helpful.

Word-of-Mouth Marketing by Students for Library

Another impact on the library is that students now bring up the library and librarians in conversation with each other, using Trivia Nights as an introduction. I have witnessed this personally as well as heard it from colleagues and other students. Before the Trivia Nights events, most students viewed the library only as a building with books and computers where students could gather and possibly study. The Trivia Nights events have helped students to see it also as a place where they can ask for help with assignments and feel welcomed by staff. We have had many students who might not have talked about the library to friends prior to attending trivia and whose perceptions changed due to trivia—and they passed along those changed attitudes to their friends in turn.

Greater Engagement of Library Staff in Cross-Departmental Committees

Over the past decade, the library at Jackson College has struggled to be included on committees or other campus collaborations. Happily, the collaboration with Student Life was just the start of many additional collaborations the library has been able to be part of on our campus, due to the fact that the Director of Student Life is involved in many other campus committees. When those committees were formed or were searching for new members, he would often suggest a library staff member to be part of that. From there, once we were involved in a few committees, it greatly helped to raise our profile on campus.

It is hard to over-emphasize the effect that more campus engagement has had on the library. We are seeing much more recognition of the many unique things that the library and librarians bring to the table, which is greatly improving library visibility on campus by both employees and students.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Our Winter 2020 season was interrupted, as many things were, by the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, Jackson College has committed to 100% online classes for Fall 2020. However, we hope to have trivia make a return in an online format. We plan to pilot it in a couple standalone events over the summer to test it out, and then roll out a full series in the fall, just like normal. There will have to be some adjustments to the format as it is much harder to have teams collaborate in the same way online. Since online trivia is currently enjoying some popularity, I am planning to attend some online trivia events held by others in order to see how they are making it work and what we can adapt using the tools available to us.

Additionally, we are hoping to use the trivia format to introduce students in our Liberal Arts Pathway to the resources available to them in the library. The library was invited to be part of the Pathways Showcase event for Liberal Arts prior to the decision to move online, so we are unsure if it will go forward. However, if it does, trivia should provide a fun opportunity to show off some library resources and skills in a way that will engage students.

CONCLUSION

When our library first had the idea for Trivia Nights in the summer of 2018, we had hoped that students would be interested and it would be successful. The fact that it has turned into a multiple season event that many students look forward to every semester has been extremely satisfactory. Additionally, the opportunity to collaborate with Student Life has opened the library up to many other collaborations and ideas throughout the campus. It has also brought the library to students in a way that they hadn't experienced before. Trivia Nights seem to bring everyone together. Everyone wins with trivia!

Quotes from the Fall 2019 Trivia Night Survey: What's One Think You Like About Trivia Nights?

- Took me away from the school and baseball stress.

- How it's all just for fun but can still get a little competitive.

- …the convivial and fun moments, the learning of new things!

- Good to have students, staff, and faculty all together.

- …Meeting new people, having fun.

- …The intensity and the positivity shown by the teams and the staff.

TRIVIA PRESENTATIONS (ALL PRESENTATIONS ARE CC-BY):

Fall 2018 (by Jen Fiero):
September 19, 2018 (General Knowledge, Movie Quotes, Welcome to Jackson College!)
October 3, 2018 (General Knowledge, TV Theme Songs (audio), Geography)
October 17, 2018 (General Knowledge, Halloween, Disney)

Winter 2019 (by Chas Lietaert):
February 7, 2019 (General Knowledge, To the Stars, A Round of Fire & Ice)
February 21, 2019 (General Knowledge, Dance, That Mitten Life)

Fall 2019 (by Jen Fiero):
September 23, 2019 (Space Theme: The Right Stuff, The Final Frontier, Gimme Some "Space")
September 30, 2019 (General Knowledge, ¡Sí Se Puede!, Banned Books, Bonus: Map Quiz: South America)
October 14, 2019 (Fall into Fall, Indigenous Peoples Day, Pilot Season, Bonus: Picture Round (famous buildings)
October 28, 2019 (Hocus Pocus, Halloween at the Movies, Haunted History, Bonus: Picture Round: Guess the Halloween costume)

Winter 2020 (by Jen Fiero):
February 3, 2020 (General Knowledge, Sports Super Bowl, Superb Owls, Bonus: Sports Team Logos)
February 17, 2020 (General Knowledge, Black History Month, Name That Tune (audio), Bonus: Quote matching - Black History Month)
March 2, 2020 (General Knowledge, Herstory (Women's History), Best Original Song, Bonus: Picture Round (famous women)

QUESTION RESOURCES:

J! Archive
Sporcle
Random Trivia Generator
Free Pub Quiz Questions
Listicles from museums & historical societies regarding particular events

TRIVIA NIGHT LIBWIZARD SURVEY

https://jccmi.libwizard.com/f/trivia

Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)

Figure 1

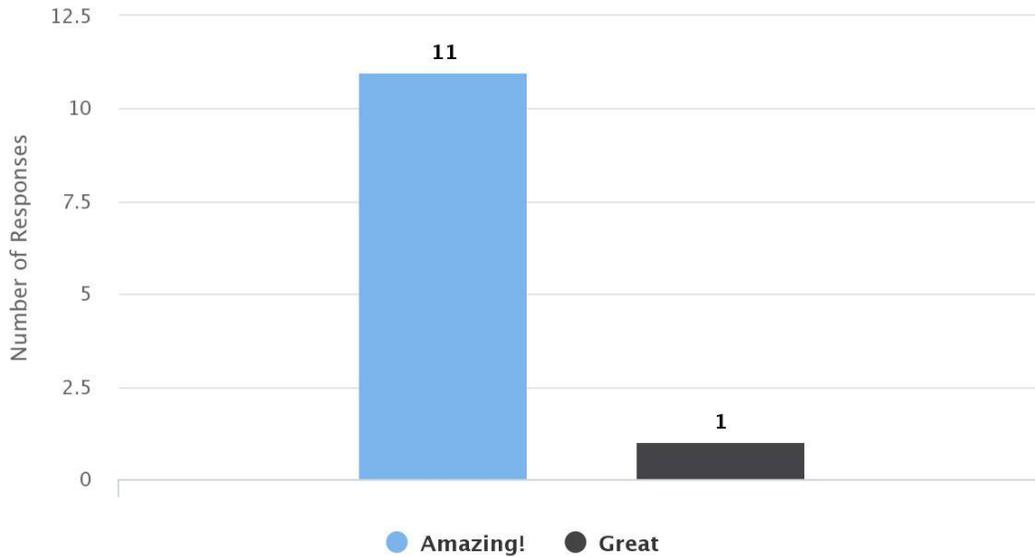Overall, how would you rate Trivia Nights as a whole for this semester?

Figure 2

How many Trivia Nights did you come to this semester?