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WILD GOOSECHASE: LAUNCHING LIBRARY TOURS WITH A MOBILE APP

JORGE A. LEÓN JR. AND ROBERT LINDSEY

INTRODUCTION

As academic libraries fine tune services in the digital age and reshape their roles on campus, there is a constant struggle to connect with new generations of students. The outreach efforts of each institution are affected by many factors, from the size of the institution, to resources, to its location on campus. At the end, most institutions experiment with some combination or another of library tours, treasure hunts, first year classes, or even the dreaded scavenger hunts. The scavenger hunt has a troubled history in libraries of either being loved or hated. This case study is the experience of a mid-sized institution exploring and evolving its library tours to include mobile device scavenger hunts where teams of students scramble through the library competing against one another.

THE PITT STATE STORY

Pittsburg State University (PSU) is a mid-sized university in southeast Kansas, with an approximate FTE population of 6,900 students. The Leonard H. Axe Library is the main library on campus, with one branch library in the Kansas Technology Center, serving the College of Technology population.

In 1994, Pittsburg State University began an optional Freshman Experience (FE) class under the First Year Programs department. At the time, Axe library participated by providing some type of student tours. Often this took the shape of a physical tour, with librarians touring students through some of the four floors. The tours were followed by a separate introduction to online resources. This second optional session was often opted out by FE teachers who felt they couldn't lose a class period.

In 2008, the Freshman orientation and Transfer Transition (TT) classes moved under the purview of the Student Success Programs. During the reorganization of the for-credit program, the library had only one 50-minute session, with required student attendance and included a quiz. Changing to fit the different time format, the library session became a brief walking tour and an in-class presentation of library services and resources. This method had some success, but provided limited opportunities for engagement. While the librarians now saw almost every first year student, the tour and presentation formats were not very engaging. Students struggled to connect with content so early into their first college semester. As Axe Library underwent collection relocations and multiple building renovations, librarians had to pick and choose what to show, causing inconsistencies. These were some of the major factors that led a team of librarians to explore other options that facilitated higher engagement, while retaining the learning objectives.

MOTIVATIONS TO CHANGE

Among the chief precipitators for change was the perceived lack of engagement that the tour and class lecture format brought. For some time, there had been a sense that students were not connecting with the material or the librarians. Library sessions were held too early into students' first year (before many of them worked on papers) and the sheer number of students per class made it difficult to have meaningful small group interactions. By the fall of 2017, the incoming first year class exceeded 1000 students. This meant the almost 50 FE and Transfer Transition (TT) classes needed to be covered within a five week period by the two main instruction librarians. This overload of classes and class sizes was a major motivator.

INITIAL PLANNING STAGES

The two instruction librarians and the assessment librarian got together to explore different game concepts. The focus was on high engagement activities that allowed for embedding learning objectives. Scavenger hunts fit the bill, but there was a negative perception of scavenger hunts in the library. Prior scavenger hunts, organized by other campus entities, created a mess in the stacks and students just relied on others for the quick answers.

Knowing many of these concerns the librarians worked to create a structure and parameters that would help avoid pitfalls and mitigate some of the fears. Much of the game structure took shape by asking guiding questions, such as:

- Would the class be divided into groups for collaboration? Or as individuals to encourage competition.
- Self-paced activity? Or during class time? Monitored?
- If mobile, would students have access to library devices? Or would the scavenger hunt rely on student devices? (Would they all have one?)
- What's the learning curve? Time investment? Mobile app?
- Were there language barriers for international or ESL students?

Similar to how outreach efforts may be dependent on each institution's populations and available resources, the "right answer" to the questions above varies from institutions to institution. For example, Pittsburg State University has a substantial international student population (approximately 7% during Fall 2016). Anecdotal observations confirmed that smart mobile devices were not universally distributed among incoming students. Looking at institutional factors like these helped shape some of the outcomes including the software and app acquisition decisions.

CHOOSING APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

Around the time the project was taking shape, one member applied for an iPad project at Pitt State, made possible at PSU by the Provost and the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology. The team was awarded the use of 13 iPads for the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 semesters. With devices allocated for the project, the next phase was to select an application or software for the project.

There were several viable options for scavenger hunts and similar game concepts; each program had its pros, cons, and costs. One option was to use survey programs, like SurveyMonkey or Google Forms, in combination with Qualtrics or another database. Another option was to use an existing Android and Apple app like GooseChase or Scavify and contend with downloading apps or setting up accounts. After considering several options, the team chose the GooseChase application. This application allowed the librarians to monitor in real time as students went through the activity and provide instant feedback. The application had a quick set-up and easy learning curve. Finally the option of an education license made the whole product affordable.

THE SET UP

It was time to construct a game and test it out. A large challenge was integrating the scavenger hunt within the existing framework of the Freshman Experience library session, and not losing learning objectives and "quiz-able" material. The plan called for the FE session to be split in half. During the first half-hour, librarians provide an overview of library resources and in the second half students, divided into groups of three, are challenged to answer as many questions of the scavenger hunt as they could within a 20 minute time limit. The game was designed to reinforce lessons shown earlier, with students exploring the library, utilizing LibGuides, taking selfies at service points, and interacting with resources on different floors. To encourage competition the librarian and instructor stayed behind, watching submissions and answers in real time, as well as awarding bonus points to teams that exceeded expectations. Students were encouraged to post comments, compete with other teams, and get creative. And of course, prizes were offered for the top teams. The library partners had helped contribute candy and coffee shop coupons for all participants.

CREATING CONTENT AND PILOT TEST

Creating content for a scavenger hunt was a fun and challenging experience. Scavenger hunts can often be dreaded in libraries if there is no discernable learning objective and they appear as busy work. In an effort to retain learning objectives,

the librarians focused on students absorbing information through interacting with the questions, reading clues, visiting LibGuides, or interacting with art work in the space.

Sample question 1: College can be tough. Activities like doodling and coloring are a quick way to de-stress. Find a mobile whiteboard inside the library. Draw a doodle of your choice and take a photo of it. For 100 Bonus Points, draw your best rendition of Gus the Gorilla.

Sample question 2: Did you know, you can check out technology and study tools from the Library? Use the link below to browse all of the items available for check-out. Pick the one your team thinks is the most useful. Type in the name of the item (LibGuide Link)

The samples above illustrate some of the efforts paid to question design. The librarians wanted students to physically interact with the resources, exercise creativity, and take ownership of the spaces in the library available to them. The second question illustrates an effort to reinforce LibGuide use and raise awareness of technology available for check-out on Reserves. A number of questions encouraged students to create content and creativity was rewarded. Students were not penalized for lack of artistic ability. And some students displayed some very competitive behaviors.

A key to the success of the project was the opportunity to run pilot tests before the semester started. A small group, consisting of student employees and the Director of Student Success, were asked to run through sample games and give input. Through this process several weaknesses of the technology and the game were identified. The group removed geo-location questions after discovering their limitations, they discovered wi-fi dead spots, and fine-tuned the sign-in process. Time limits were put in to end the game before classes let out to collect the iPads and questions were reworded for clarity.

FIRST SEMESTER RESULTS AND ASSESSMENT

The overall results from the first semester of using a scavenger hunt during FE classes, exceeded our expectations. Most first year students and FE professors expressed that this was a fun and engaging way to interact with the library and that students seemed to bond as a team to compete.

Figure 1. Students locate oversized materials

Figure 2. Students drawing GUS the Gorilla

The Assessment Librarian set up electronic survey forms to encourage FE professors to provide anonymous feedback describing their experience. There was a 62% response rate to the survey, and the results reinforce many of the anecdotal feedback the team had heard. Professors that have been with the FE program for several years were extremely pleased by the change and the enthusiasm the students displayed towards the library.

The Director of the Student Success Programs polled the sophomore “peer mentors” of their experience in the entire FE course. The overall response was that the library session was one of the favorites. The Director later shared that this was a first, to have the library as one of the favorites. Table 1 shows some results of the assessment the Student Success Department gathers.

Table 1. Student Success – First Year Experience <Place Holder>

There was an increase in the number of students scoring a 75% or higher on the library quiz from 2016 to 2017 when the scavenger hunt was first fully implemented. In addition, there was an increase in the percentage of students taking the quiz from the previous year. This may illustrate an increase in engagement from one year to the next by the students and professors.

LESSONS LEARNED

The time between semesters was the opportunity to regroup and make any necessary adjustments. Overall there were a number of lessons from the process. One surprise lesson was just how competitive students can be. During several classes, librarians had to go regather groups back in the class that were determined to finish all the questions. In other instances students would come back and start arguing about how much extra effort they did for bonus points.

From the library personnel side, several issues popped up. The team realized the communication to the service desks and personnel on other floors was not sufficient. In the first week there was confusion, as employees did not know how much to help or how much to let students figure things out. Another issue was the amount of library lingo used. For example, the team used the phrase “service desk” instead of naming a specific desk. Some personnel were confused by this as they expected to point students to a specific desk such as “reference” or “circulation.”

From the technical side, some of the anticipated technology problems showed up. Areas with wi-fi dead spots and connection issues made the game lose its fluid pace. Some of the loaned iPad devices had performance issues. For future semesters the librarians are looking into purchasing devices dedicated for this project.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCLUSION

There is no doubt the format of tours and presentations for first year students was inefficient. This new gaming method illustrated some stark differences and highlighted the benefits of methods that focus on maximizing the user experience. Moving forward, this type of game approach will become the norm with the library FE sessions. As a part of the process, each year the questions will need to be revamped and the librarians need to figure out a long term solution to owning their own devices. In the short term, there are plans to see if this can be used in other classes. There is also a plan to see if a self-guided version can be used during the summer for prospective students and their families. Currently there are plans to continue expanding and trying new components.

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Images for Tables and Figures



Figure 1. Students locate oversized materials



Figure 2. Students drawing GUS the Gorilla

Student Success - First Year Experience				
Library Assessment:	Students will be able to successfully use the library's online research resources			
	participants		proficiency	
Fall Semester 2017	933/1163	80.2% participation	75% or higher	852/933 (91.3%) scored 75% or higher
Fall Semester 2016	713/966	73.8 % participation	75% or higher	527/713 (73.91%) scored 75% or higher

Table 1 - Student Success - First Year Experience