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## Review: Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries edited by Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclipa

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## **Review: *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries* edited by Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclipa**

Reviewed by Janna L. Mattson, George Mason University

*Keywords:* book review, games, gaming, gamification, information literacy instruction, outreach, collection development, Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries (book)

### ***Book Reviews* edited by Jacquelyn Ann Williams**

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## Review: Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries edited by Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclippa

In their book *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries* published by the Association of College and Research Libraries, editors Stephanie Crowe and Eva Sclippa examine games in the contexts of collection building, information literacy instruction, programming, and outreach in higher education. As the editors point out, traditional boardgames have “experienced a cultural renaissance,” prompting libraries to include tabletop gaming in their instruction and outreach efforts (Crowe & Sclippa, 2020, p. v-vi). The editors write that this trend dovetails nicely with the current emphasis on active and experiential learning in higher education. Readers who are interested in exploring the concept of gaming or gamification or looking to integrate game collections—electronic or tabletop—into the work they do at their own institution, will find *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries* useful as the editors’ main goal is to inspire and guide other librarians with their own gaming efforts.

The book, which includes studies on online and traditional gaming in the context of current cultural and educational trends, is organized into four sections. Section I, An Overview of Games and Gamification, has four chapters that include case studies at various academic libraries. Section II, Adding and Maintaining a Circulating Game Collection in Your Library, includes three chapters that offer insights from academic libraries of various campus sizes on building a gaming collection. Section III, Games and Gamification in Information Literacy Instruction, includes five chapters written by librarians from large state institutions who are pushing the boundaries to enact gaming pedagogies in information literacy programming and initiatives. Finally, Section IV, Programming and Outreach through Games, the largest section of the book, includes five chapters about the use of gaming in public and outreach services.

The first two chapters in Section I offer best practices for libraries wanting to host game nights for college students in collaboration with campus partners. For example, Courtney Baron of Oxford College Library at Emory University suggests partnering with local game stores and student organizations, offering a wide variety of games, providing refreshments, and holding events on Friday evenings. While weaving programming and collection

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development efforts together, Tammi M. Owens and Claire Staub, the authors of the second chapter, are transparent about the successes and failures of hosting game nights. Like Baron, they point out that timing is crucial to success.

Mackenzie Morning's chapter on using gaming to train student workers offers a unique approach that can be replicated, at least to some extent, in most libraries. Using a simple button maker, Morning created a rewards-based system she calls "library flair" for students who have completed training segments. Throughout the chapter, the author includes helpful reflective questions for readers considering implementing a similar program. Morning also describes her team building efforts using DIY superhero-themed escape room kits. While these ideas are provocative and inspiring, the chapter would be stronger if it focused solely on library flair. With other chapters in the collection on escape rooms, this content seems repetitive.

Angie Brunk and Dale Monobe wrap up the first section of the book with a chapter on accessibility and games, a must read for anyone planning to introduce any kind of gaming into their instruction or outreach programs. Their chapter offers advice about ADA compliance and diversity, equity, and inclusion considerations.

The second section focuses on building and maintaining game collections. University of North Texas Libraries' Diane Robson and Erin DeWitt-Miller successfully grew their electronic and tabletop game collection with strategic planning and visioning. They offer the reader a shortlist of practical questions to consider when planning purchases or events to ensure accessibility for students with disabilities. They also include circulation policies and maintenance procedures. Collaboration and problem solving are at the center of Stephen "Mike" Kiel's Chapter 6. He creates "custom arcades" with faculty for their own game-based curriculum and provides the reader a list of questions to ask. Keil also provides training for staff with little to no gaming knowledge to assist patrons with game recommendations. In Chapter 7, the last chapter of section II, Emily Moran's shares lessons learned in tabletop game collection development at Lycoming College, such as searching the database BoardGameGeek.com, and provides helpful advice on collection assessment through surveys and circulation data.

The third section of the book emphasizes best practices and tips for incorporating games into information literacy instruction in various teaching scenarios. Christina E. Dent and Cate Schneiderman, from Emerson College, offer information games as a solution to high

volume, multi-section one-shot sessions for first year students. In Chapter 9, University of New Hampshire library instructors provide a unique look into a close collaboration with the business department's first year experience programming. Using gaming and digital badging, students work with peer mentors, faculty, and librarians to come up with research-based solutions to real world problems. Librarians who wish to gamify their for-credit information literacy class course may want to review Chapter 10. In this chapter, Stephanie Crowe and John Osinski discuss using the semester-long cooperative board game *Pandemic Legacy*, which challenges learners to identify disinformation to prevent the spread of disease. Given the scale of the instruction in the games described in Chapters 9 and 10, they are not appropriate for one-shot instruction sessions; however, they could serve as research-based examples for instruction librarians to propose to an academic department for an integrated, collaborative information literacy program. The authors of Chapters 11 and 12 focus on how they apply escape rooms as an experiential learning approach as well as a pedagogy for designing hands-on information literacy lessons. The gamified approach to lesson design, according to these authors, engages students' previous knowledge, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. These chapters also provide further detail about how the gamification process aligns with the knowledge practices and dispositions in the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, which will be appreciated by library instructors who use the *Framework* for framing instruction and assessment practices. Previous chapters may have been strengthened had they included similar details linking game playing or gamification to the *Framework*.

Section IV rounds the book out with a focus on library outreach and programming using games. At Texas Tech University Libraries, Kimberly Varderman and colleagues transformed a library services fair into a mystery game complete with snacks and prizes. This approach, according to the authors, proved to be so popular that the librarians reported tripling student attendance over the course of three years.

In Chapter 14, Teresa Slobuski, Eric Johnson, Ginny Boehme, and Lauren Hays offer four case studies from different institutions about deepening student engagement with gaming. In their tabletop gaming programming, library staff at Miami University decided to focus on the "unmet need of casual gamers" (Crowe & Sclipa, 2020, p. 237). This approach allows space for occasional game players and international students to play card and tabletop games and socialize with players on their same level. The second case study looks at MidAmerica

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Nazarene University's Center for Games & Learning, which won an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to support student learning and strengthen community connections using tabletop games. The last two case studies in the chapter highlight collaborative gaming efforts with student organizations to host game jams and other events. San Jose State University, which neighbors Silicon Valley, has built in support for a 48-hour game jam during which students are challenged to develop an online game prototype. In contrast, Penn State Brandywine, tucked away on a small campus, finds success in smaller, simpler gaming events. Each case study ends with a useful short list of key points for consideration, and more importantly, as tools or resources for librarians to use as part of a pitch to library administration.

Chapter 15 highlights gaming's utility in fostering relationships between students and faculty as well as reducing library anxiety. Stephanie Diaz and Russell Hall at the Penn State Behrend library discuss how gameplay's social aspects boost student confidence and encourage student library use. Many students are gaming experts and can share their own knowledge with the faculty or librarians to facilitate game playing. These kinds of interactions may serve as icebreakers for students who feel too intimidated to approach faculty or librarians.

The last two chapters of Section IV outline ambitious gaming efforts in academic libraries. University of North Carolina Wilmington library staff offer a highly detailed description of creating an escape room from scratch, and Emily Jack from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides the reader with a clever adaptation of a special collections orientation to mimic the board game Clue. Both chapters outline bold ideas that have come to fruition from careful planning, hard work, and staff dedication. Readers who are considering something similar will benefit from the experiences captured in these chapters, whether it is to follow the models the authors suggest or opt for a smaller-scale game-based outreach effort.

While *Games and Gamification in Academic Libraries* presents positive approaches and tips for implementing gaming and gamification in library programming today, some suggested concepts or gaming formats are discussed repetitively. For example, several chapters discuss escape rooms, and many recommend the same resources, such as BreakoutEDU and BoardGameGeek.com. The book also would have benefitted from a more consistent chapter structure. Some chapters had useful features, such as best practices and key takeaways, to

guide the reader, while others in the same section did not follow the same approach. Having consistent formatting may have contributed to greater cohesion throughout the book. Additionally, the book lacks a concluding chapter, which is a missed opportunity for reflecting on the future of games in libraries. However, the book's greatest strength is its wide appeal for academic librarians in a variety of positions and work environments. The content is highly practical for those working with instruction, collection development, and outreach services, and this book ultimately deserves its place amongst contemporary professional development literature. As librarians continue to look for ways to deepen student engagement as library users and learners, games and gamification are highly effective tools that hold universal appeal to all in our learning communities.

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