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Mystery at the Library: An Orientation Game for JMU Engineering Students

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Mystery at the Library

An Orientation Game for JMU Engineering Students

Goals

A mystery game was developed by the Applied Sciences Librarian to help Engineering freshmen become familiar with Rose Library and library tasks that new users often find confusing. This game was intended to be an engaging hands-on activity that students could complete at their own pace.

Development

A rough version of the mystery game was created during the summer of 2010. Development involved deciding which library tasks (e.g. finding the reference section) to include in the game, then creating the story.



Name: Georgia Garamond
Occupation: Librarian, Midlantic University
Favorite Author: Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Research Interests: Astronomy, Russian History, Tangoska Event

The theft of a rare book – a fictional notebook that belonged to real-life inventor Nikola Tesla – seemed an appropriate crime for a library setting. Tesla was selected as a historic figure likely to interest Engineering students. A series of clues dropped by the thief would lead players through the library and provide hints about the thief's plans.

Staff at Rose went through the clues and provided feedback leading to a more streamlined version of the game, which debuted in the fall of 2010 as a homework assignment for Engineering 101 students. While the activity was largely successful, student comments and the observations of librarians and desk staff helped identify areas for improvement. The instructions were revised and a particularly cryptic clue was replaced for the fall 2011 version of the game.



Name: Lucinda Sato
Occupation: President, Nikola Tesla Fan Club
Favorite Author: Neal Stephenson
Research Interests: Perpetual Motion Machines, Photography

Implementation

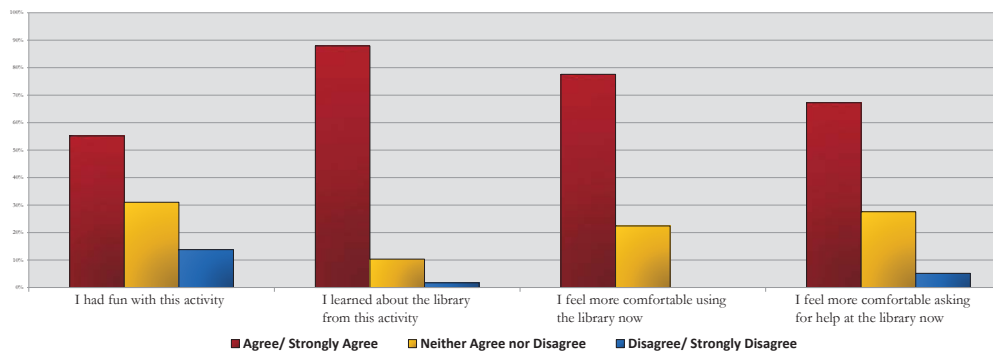
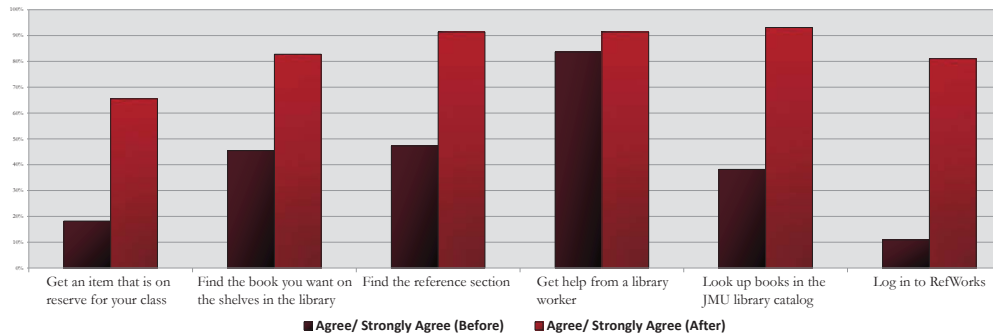
Instructions and suspect profiles were provided to students via the Blackboard group for Engineering 101. After finding the clues hidden in the library and hacking into a RefWorks account belonging to the thief, players had the information they needed to solve the mystery. To complete the game, players answered a brief Blackboard quiz using information from the clues. This quiz tracked participation so students could receive credit for the activity.



Response

Online surveys were distributed to students before and after the fall 2011 mystery game activity. Of the 123 students in the class, 55 completed the “before” survey and 58 completed the “after” survey. The “after” survey showed an increase in student familiarity with each of the listed tasks. For most tasks, the change was dramatic. A modest increase was seen with the task that students felt most familiar with before the game, getting help from a library worker. Reaction to the game was favorable. A majority of respondents agreed that it was fun and helpful.

Do you know how to perform the following tasks at [Rose Library] or online?

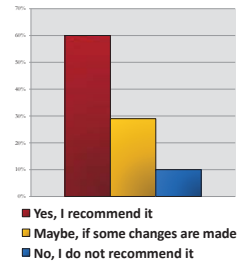


Most respondents recommended that the game be used again.

One of the most common suggestions was to make the game longer, with more clues and more exploration of the library building.

When asked to describe what they had learned from the game, the most common answers were about the layout of the library and how to find books.

Would you recommend that this activity be used with other classes?



“It was pretty exciting looking for [clues] around the library.”

“It was fun!”

“I learned that all the librarians are willing to help.”

Conclusion

The Mystery at the Library activity succeeded in helping Engineering freshmen become more familiar with Rose Library. Most students also reported enjoying the game. Input from both students and desk staff was valuable in identifying areas for improvement in the game.

The mystery game did require more planning and preparation than a traditional scavenger hunt or library tour. Further studies may include comparing the effectiveness and popularity of the game to other library orientation activities.