

5-28-2019

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game to Reach New Transfer Students

Kelly Giles

James Madison University, gileskd@jmu.edu

Kristen S. Shuyler

James Madison University

Andrew Evans

James Madison University

Jon Reed

Northeastern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/letfspubs>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giles, Kelly; Shuyler, Kristen S.; Evans, Andrew; and Reed, Jon, "Creating a Library Orientation Card Game to Reach New Transfer Students" (2019). *Libraries*. 163.

<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/letfspubs/163>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Libraries by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game to Reach New Transfer Students

Kelly Giles¹, Kristen Shuyler¹, Andrew Evans¹, and Jon Reed²

¹ Libraries, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA.

² University Libraries, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA.

Corresponding author: Kelly Giles, Applied Sciences Librarian, James Madison University, MSC 4601, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA. Email: gileskd@jmu.edu

Abstract

Librarians and staff at a public university drew upon previous experience with instructional games to develop, implement, and assess a card game as a library orientation activity for new transfer students. This project was shaped by a desire to meet transfer students' unique needs as well as the logistical constraints associated with the university's transfer student orientation. The card game, modeled after *Apples to Apples*, presented information about the campus library system in a fun, informal way that allowed transfer students to socialize with each other while learning. Survey responses indicated that students found the game both enjoyable and helpful.

Keywords

Outreach; Information Literacy; Games; Transfer students

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 1

Background

Every August, James Madison University (JMU) provides an optional orientation for new transfer students. JMU, located in Harrisonburg, Virginia, is a four-year public university with an enrollment of approximately 20,000 students, primarily undergraduates. In fall 2016, 15% of JMU's students entered as transfer students out of the total incoming class of 5,289. The campus is served by two main libraries, Carrier Library and Rose Library, and two smaller branch libraries. JMU Libraries participates in transfer student orientation by offering an introduction to the campus library system.

During transfer student orientation, back-to-back 45-minute time slots are devoted to concurrent sessions about campus resources. This schedule presents several challenges when planning the library orientation, held in Carrier Library. There is no travel time between the two concurrent session periods. Students need several minutes to walk between the building where other orientation activities are held and Carrier Library, leaving only about half an hour for each of the library orientation sessions. Any resetting of the space between sessions must occur while the first group of transfer students is leaving the library and the second group is arriving. Transfer student orientation overlaps with a campus resource fair and various opening meetings, so few librarians and library staff are available to assist with the event. The concurrent session format also means that the number of transfer students who will attend the library orientation sessions is not known in advance. Students are free to choose which sessions to attend without registering. Each session could potentially attract as many as 150 students, although the actual number has typically been about 50 students per session. Even this smaller number often seemed crowded in the Carrier Library classroom.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 2

For several years, the library orientation sessions consisted of a librarian giving a short talk about resources and services and answering questions from the transfer students. While the lecture-based sessions provided transfer students with important information about the library, it was hoped that a game could present the same basic content in a more interactive and engaging manner. A game would also give transfer students an opportunity to get to know one another better and build personal connections at their new school, which may contribute to students' sense of community. Townley et al. (2013) found a correlation between reported sense of community (SOC) and post-transfer GPA (p. 285), and also found that transfer students “considered SOC to be more important at the post-transfer institution than at the pre-transfer institution” (p. 286). An additional benefit to abandoning the lecture format was that it would allow the library orientation sessions to move out of the classroom. A large, open study area in the library with tables seating four to six people each was well-suited to small group activities such as games. Transfer student orientation was held before fall semester classes began, so the study area was available for events.

Trying to create a new game from scratch on a minimal budget would have been a major undertaking. Fortunately, librarians at JMU had already developed or adapted several games as orientation activities and aids to information literacy instruction. Two casual online games were developed to help students improve their citation and database search skills (McCabe & Wise, 2009). A localized version of the open-source *Information Literacy Game*, originally developed by librarians Scott Rice and Amy Harris at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (<http://library.uncg.edu/game/>), has been used as a classroom activity. An alternate reality game (ARG) for first year Engineering majors requires students to explore the Rose Library building to find clues and solve a mystery (Giles, 2015). A library staff member responsible for training

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 3

student employees had also organized game-based activities to reinforce job skills and encourage teamwork, such as a game show-style competition and a card game (Evans & Giles, 2015).

Librarians considered creating an ARG that would allow transfer students to explore Carrier Library, but this seemed impractical given the short session length and large number of students expected. As there were no public computers in the study area, it would also be difficult to ensure that all attendees could play a video game. A traditional tabletop game, like the card game created for student employee training, seemed like the best option. This game, based on the popular party game *Apples to Apples*, had been developed for a training event that included multiple activities spread across the library during the course of an evening. The game session was similar to the transfer student orientation sessions in terms of physical space, duration, and number of attendees. Student employees had visibly enjoyed themselves during this activity, and the game was named as the most helpful part of the training event by a plurality (45%) of respondents on a survey distributed at the end of the evening (Evans & Giles, 2015).

Literature Review

The transfer student population is diverse in many ways, and includes international students, community college students, and older adult students (Tag, 2004; Hoover, 2010; Kranzow, Hinkle, & Foote, 2015). When transitioning to a new institution, transfer students may face challenges meeting increased academic demands, integrating socially, finding community, feeling a sense of belonging, and balancing work-life-school demands (Kearns, Kirsch, & Vidas, 2014; Wood & Moore, 2015; Townley et al., 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Whang et al., 2017). Orientation can help transfer students feel supported on campus (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 4

Kuwaye, 2007), and is perhaps even more helpful for transfer students than for "traditional" students in terms of adjusting academically (Mayhew, Stipeck, & Dorow, 2011). Unfortunately, orientations for transfer students are often optional (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Wood & Moore, 2015), which is the case at JMU. Therefore, some transfer students begin their studies without being informed about important aspects of navigating their new institution, let alone information about using their new library. Additionally, many transfer students miss out on opportunities to learn information literacy skills covered in library instruction sessions typically offered in 100-level or core curriculum classes (Whang et al., 2017). Despite missing a variety of orientation and instruction offerings, including education about libraries and information literacy, transfer students are often expected to have the same knowledge and skills as non-transfer students. Aware of these common challenges that transfer students often face in transitioning to a new institution, some librarians have called for academic libraries to provide more orientation and instruction sessions designed with the transfer student population and their needs in mind (Phillips & Atwood, 2010; Tag, 2004). In recent years, librarians have designed an information literacy game in Blackboard (Kearns, Kirsch, & Cononie, 2017), personal librarian programs (MacDonald & Mohanty, 2017; Lafrance & Kealey, 2017), and other library services and programs (McBride, Gregor, & McCallister, 2017) specifically for transfer students.

Although much of the literature on library instruction games for university students deals with video games, Smale (2011) and Margino (2013) include quiz show-style competitions, ARGs, and pen-and-paper games in their overviews of games used for information literacy instruction at different academic libraries. Neither discusses card games in detail, but in a later article Smale (2015) describes creating an information literacy card game for use with library science graduate students. School librarians have also written about using card games to teach K-12 students

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 5

about topics ranging from the Dewey Decimal System (Imrie, 2014) to character traits in fiction (“Character Appeal”, 1998). Academic librarians have also employed commercial card games for non-instructional purposes, such as during game night outreach events (Blodgett & Bremer, 2014; Vanden Elzen & Roush, 2013).

A search of the literature found several examples of *Apples to Apples* and similar card games being used in a variety of educational settings. Turcotte & Betrus (2016) developed a game called *Teaching Bad Apples* to help education students and K-12 teachers learn to deal with difficult situations. Copeland, Henderson, Mayer, & Nicholson (2013) engaged second graders in playing *Apples to Apples* in a school library. Hao (2014) used *Apples to Apples Kids* as a vocabulary-building tool for Chinese elementary school students learning English as a foreign language. Pressley, Willis, Mullen, & Mullen (2008) describe how *Apples to Apples* can be used as a classroom activity for undergraduates to demonstrate the importance of various interpersonal communication skills. Crews (2011) mentions an Advanced Placement English class that created *Apples to Apples* cards to help the students learn literary terms that would be covered on the AP exam. Mika (2009) developed a card game called *Legal Apples to Apples* to help law students to master legal terminology and practice their creative thinking skills.

Development and Implementation

Developing an orientation game required considering the information needs of new transfer students. A brief session for students with different majors and different experiences with college-level research could not explore information literacy topics in depth, but could at least help to remind transfer students about concepts they had been exposed to at their previous

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 6

schools. These students would be unfamiliar with the JMU library system, so the game would also need to cover library policies, services, and spaces. Above all, the library orientation sessions were intended to help transfer students feel comfortable and welcome in the library. The game project team hoped that a fun, social activity would allow the library to make a positive impression on transfer students while giving them the opportunity to form personal connections with other new transfer students on campus.

The working group for the transfer student orientation game consisted of two librarians and two staff members, including the staff member who created the original student employee training card game. This *Apples to Apples*-inspired card game involved selecting an answer card in response to questions such as “How late are the libraries open during the week?” Some answer cards had facts about JMU Libraries, while others referenced popular culture and campus life. Players took turns deciding which of the proposed answers was best. At the student worker training event, a librarian or staff member had been assigned to each group of student employees to serve as a moderator for the game. The moderator explained the correct answers when necessary and addressed any related questions the players might have (Evans & Giles, 2015).

Before this game could be used with transfer students, many of the original cards needed to be revised to reflect the perspective of library users. Questions dealing with customer service skills or procedures unlikely to be relevant to the average patron were eliminated. Content was added to reflect the needs of transfer students, such as information about subject specialist librarians and connecting to library databases remotely. A few items from the library’s Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) web page, covering general information about resources and services, were also adapted for the game. The cards were initially created using the free online Fruit to Fruit Card Generator (<http://a2a.browndogcomputing.com>). A library employee later developed

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 7

original card designs featuring graphics that evoked the JMU mascot (Figure 1). (See Giles, Shuyler, Evans, & Reed, 2017 for more information on creating cards.) The card decks were printed and cut by the campus copy center.

When the project team met to play through the beta version of the card game, a problem quickly became apparent: the lack of an in-game mechanism for revealing the correct answer. At the student worker training event, at least one player in each group often knew the correct answer already. If not, the moderators assigned to each group could explain. Sufficient staff would not be available to serve as moderators for each group at transfer student orientation. Ultimately, the game project team decided to include the correct answer on the back of each question card. The player serving as judge would keep the answer hidden during the round. After the winner of the round was chosen, the correct answer would be revealed to the group.

The revised game, consisting of 27 question cards and 144 answer cards, made its debut at transfer student orientation in 2015. The library sessions were attended by approximately 100 students in total. After a greeting and a brief explanation of the game by session facilitators, the students began to play. Facilitators circulated during the game to answer any questions that students had about the game or the library. The cards soon prompted conversation and laughter among the players (Figure 2). A number of students were inspired to ask facilitators about library services and resources. Students appeared to appreciate these interactions with library employees, as well as the opportunity to interact with fellow transfer students. Facilitators heard at least one table of transfer students exchanging contact information at the end of the session so that they could keep in touch with each other. At the end of each session, students received handouts of the questions from the game with the correct answers, promotional JMU Libraries bookmarks, and Libraries-branded Mason jar-style water glasses.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 8

Over the following year, the card game was used as an icebreaker in a freshman-level instruction session, as part of orientation for student athletes (Sapp & Vaughan, 2017), and as an activity in the university-wide new faculty orientation. Librarians reported anecdotally that the game was popular with students and faculty. A formal assessment of the card game was conducted during the 2016 transfer student orientation.

Assessment

The library sessions offered during transfer student orientation in 2016 were attended by a total of 99 students. At the end of each session, an IRB-approved survey was distributed to attendees asking for their opinions about the activity. The survey asked respondents to provide their opinions by answering “yes”, “no”, or “not sure” to a series of questions about the effectiveness of the game as an orientation activity. There was also space for comments. Students returned 85 completed surveys.

Response to the activity was overwhelmingly positive (Figure 3). A large majority of respondents agreed that the card game was enjoyable (93%) and helped them both to learn about (92%) and feel more comfortable in the library (86%). The game was also recommended for use for future orientations by 89% of respondents.

Only 14 (16%) of respondents wrote additional comments. Just over half of these (8) expressed enjoyment of the activity, with students describing the game as “awesome”, “a fun icebreaker that was informative and entertaining”, and “better than reading a pamphlet.” Two respondents recommended including more humorous answer cards, while another two indicated they would

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 9

have preferred a more informative session. Other suggestions included adding a scavenger hunt game and allowing more time for the activity.

Conclusion

While the decision to adapt the existing student employee training card game for a new audience was made largely for reasons of convenience, the format had other advantages. Many students recognized that the game was modeled after *Apples to Apples* or the similarly structured but adult-themed *Cards Against Humanity*, so little time had to be spent explaining the rules. Each group was provided with a sheet of instructions and players could ask session facilitators for help, but the students were largely able to help each other learn how to play. This promoted conversation among the players and allowed the game to proceed with minimal interruption.

The *Apples to Apples* format worked well for a short session with different groups playing at different paces. The game does not have a special “endgame” phase; the winner is simply the player whose answers were most often chosen as best. If a group did not have time to play through the entire deck, a winner could still be declared at the end of the session. The subjective nature of the judging and random selection of answer cards allowed students with different knowledge levels to compete against one another. Winning a round, or the entire game, did not require players to know the correct answers. Often during a round no player had the card with the correct answer to the current question. Even if the correct answer was played, the judge for the round sometimes chose a humorous answer over the accurate one, prompting laughter among the group. In other instructional settings a game that rewarded the most knowledgeable player might be more appropriate, but a game in which already knowing the right answer wasn't required to

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 10

win seemed a better way to welcome transfer students and help them to overcome library anxiety.

As one survey respondent noted, the game also served as an icebreaker for transfer students, giving them dedicated time for social interaction and a structured way to begin getting to know each other. In their interviews with transfer students at a large public university, Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye (2007) found that students who transferred from medium and small residential institutions or community colleges often perceived their new institution as being less friendly than their previous school and had difficulty getting to know other students outside class (p. 16-17). This can have academic consequences, as peer interaction is a necessary element of collaborative learning (Kirk-Kuwaye & Kirk-Kuwaye, 2007, p. 14). Social opportunities during orientation, such as this game activity, are one way that universities can help to increase transfer students' sense of community and sense of belonging in a new institution.

Survey responses and facilitator observations of game sessions with transfer students, student athletes, and new faculty indicate that this project succeeded in its goal of creating a fun, social, flexible, and inexpensive introduction to JMU Libraries. Librarians and staff plan to continue using the card game for orientation activities with a variety of audiences. The card game format makes the game easy to modify by adding or replacing cards. Since this project began in 2015, the cards have been updated each year to reflect changes to JMU Libraries services and spaces and to include current pop culture references.

Future projects may involve creating "expansion packs" for different subject areas with cards about discipline-specific library resources. Another possibility would be creating a version of the game in which all of the answer cards contain humorous answers. This idea was inspired by

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 11

survey feedback, observations of the game in use, and Turcotte & Betrus's (2016) *Teaching Bad Apples* card game. *Teaching Bad Apples* includes a deck of situation cards that describe real-life problems a teacher might encounter and a deck of reaction cards that contains only unprofessional behavior, such as "make a 'your mom' joke" (p. 399). Instead of providing players with examples of good behavior, the game "teach[es] by counterexample" (p. 399) and encourages players to share their own experiences and reflect upon what they would do or had done in similar situations. This game could serve as a model for a future version of the transfer student card game. In the current version of the game, it is already rare for a question card to be answered with the corresponding correct answer card. Session facilitators have observed that some players seem confused or frustrated when they do not have the correct answer in hand. A game in which none of the answers are factually correct may reduce frustration and help to make the game more fun for all players. As the correct answers would still be provided on the backs of the question cards, this change should not detract from student learning.

Further assessment will be needed to measure the game's effectiveness as both an icebreaker for transfer students and as a library orientation activity, and to evaluate new versions of the game. JMU Libraries will continue efforts to better understand the information literacy and socialization needs of transfer students and establish best practices for meeting them.

References

Blodgett, J., & Bremer, P. (2014, November/December). Rolling the dice in an academic library: Game nights help students feel at home. *American Libraries*, 45(11/12), 50-53.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 12

Character appeal. (1998). *School Library Monthly*, 14, 32-35.

Chin-Newman, C. S., & Shaw, S. T. (2013, Fall). The anxiety of change: How new transfer students overcome challenges. *Journal of College Admission*, 2013(221), 14-21.

Copeland, T., Henderson, B., Mayer, B., & Nicholson, S. (2013). Three different paths for tabletop gaming in school libraries. *Library Trends*, 61(4): 825-835.

Crews, A. (2011). Getting teachers on “board”. *Knowledge Quest*, 40(1), 10-13.

Evans, A., & Giles, K. (2015, July). Building a community: Games in library training and development. Poster presented at Games+Learning+Society 11, Madison, WI.

Giles, K. (2015). No budget, no experience, no problem: Creating a library orientation game for freshman engineering majors. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 41(2), 170-177.
doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2014.12.005

Giles, K., Shuyler, K., Evans, A., & Reed, J. (2017). Apple slices: A card-matching party game about the library. In R. Pun & M. Houlihan (Eds.), *The First-Year Experience Cookbook* (pp. 44-45). Chicago: American Library Association.

Hao, Y. (2014). “Apples to Apples” to foreign language learning: *The comparison of play and non-play intervention at a Chinese elementary school* (Master’s thesis). California State University, Sacramento. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10211.3/121616>.

Hoover, S. (2010). Designing orientation and transition programs for transfer students. In J. Ward-Roof (Ed.), *Designing successful transitions: A guide for orienting students to*

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 13

college. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Imrie, M. (2014). Taking the pain out of the DDC. *Refer*, 30(3), 14-16.

Kearns, A., Kirsch, B. A., & Cononie, V. (2017). Agoge: An information literacy game for transfer students, *Reference Services Review*, 45(2): 314-331.

Kearns, A., Kirsch, B. A., & Vidas, C. (2014). Searching for Blackbeard's Treasure: Using an interactive information literacy game to reach transfer students. In B. A. Kirsch (Ed.), *Games in libraries: Essays on using play to connect and instruct*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Kirk-Kuwaye, C., & Kirk-Kuwaye, M. (2007). A study of engagement patterns of lateral and vertical transfer students during their first semester at a public research university. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 19(2), 9-27.

Kranzow, J., Hinkle, S. E., & Foote, S. M. (2015). Supporting the transition of sophomores, transfers, and seniors: Opportunities for residence life professionals. *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 42(1), 212-233.

Lafrance, H., & Kealey, S. (2017). A boutique personal librarian program for transfer students. *Reference Services Review*, 45(2): 332-345.

MacDonald, A., & Mohanty, S. (2017). Personal librarian program for transfer students: An overview. *Reference Services Review*, 45(2): 346-354.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 14

Margino, M. (2013). Revitalizing traditional information literacy instruction: Exploring games in academic libraries. *Public Services Quarterly*, 9(4), 333-341.

doi:10.1080/15228959.2013.842417

Mayhew, M., Stipeck, C., & Dorow, A. (2011). The effects of orientation programming on learning outcomes related to academic and social adjustment with implications for transfers and students of color. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 23(2), 53-73.

McBride, K. R., Gregor, M. N., & McCallister, K. C. (2017). Bridging the gap: Developing library services and instructional programs for transfer students at Appalachian State University. *Reference Services Review*, 45(3), 498-510. doi:10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0067

McCabe, J., & Wise, S. (2009). It's all fun and games until someone learns something: Assessing the learning outcomes of two educational games. *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice*, 4(4), 6-23. doi:10.18438/B8FC8M

Mika, K. M. (2009). Games in the law school classroom: Enhancing the learning experience. *Perspectives: Teaching Legal Research and Writing*, 18(1), 1-6.

Phillips, J. C., & Atwood, T. A. (2010). Transferring skills, transferring students: A call to academic libraries. *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 17(4), 331-348.

doi:10.1080/10691316.2010.525394

Pressley, A., Willis, C., Mullen, F., & Mullen, W. (2008). From apples to apples: Teaching perception in communication. *Conference Papers -- National Communication Association, 2008*, 1-2.

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 15

Sapp, L., & Vaughan, K. T. L. (2017). Connecting the libraries and athletics through instruction and outreach. *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, 36(2), 187-195.

doi:10.1080/02763869.2017.1293999

Smale, M. A. (2011). Learning through quests and contests: Games in information literacy instruction. *Journal of Library Innovation*, 2(2), 36-55.

Smale, M. A. (2015, May). Play a game, make a game: Getting creative with professional development for library instruction. *Journal of Creative Library Practice*, 2015.

Retrieved from <http://creativelibrarypractice.org/2015/05/18/play-a-game-make-a-game/>.

Tag, S. G. (2004). A library instruction survey for transfer students: Implications for library services. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 30(2), 102-108.

Townley, G., Katz, J., Wandersman, A., Skiles, B., Schillaci, M. J., Timmerman, B. E., & Mousseau, T. A. (2013). Exploring the role of sense of community in the undergraduate transfer student experience. *Journal of Community Psychology* 41(3), 277-290.

Townsend, B. K., & Wilson, K. B. (2006). "A hand hold for a little bit": Factors facilitating the success of community college transfer students to a large research university. *Journal of College Student Development* 47(4), 439-456.

Turcotte, N., & Betrus, A. (2016). Teaching bad apples: A fun way to tackle difficult teaching situations. *TechTrends*, 60(4), 398-401. doi:10.1007/s11528-016-0080-1

Creating a Library Orientation Card Game - 16

Vanden Elzen, A. M., & Roush, J. (2013). Brawling in the library: Gaming programs for impactful outreach and instruction at an academic library. *Library Trends*, 61(4): 802-813.

Whang, L., Tawatao, C., Danneker, J., Belanger, J., Weber, S. E., Garcia, L., & Klaus, A. (2017). Understanding the transfer student experience using design thinking. *Reference Services Review*, 45(2): 298-313.

Wood, J. L., & Moore, C. S. (2015). Engaging community college transfer students. In S. J. Quaye, & S. R. Harper (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations*. New York, NY: Routledge.