Play it, learn it, make it last: Using gaming to create self-sufficient library information users

Objective
To create and pilot an interactive web-based game intended to enable incoming students to become self-sufficient through hands-on learning. The library chose a gaming model with the expectation that competition, rewards, and novelty would function as powerful tools when used to engage students.

Current Conditions
- Librarians observed a lack of functional information skills among incoming students
- Library orientation is limited to a 5-minute presentation during the administrative orientation
- This orientation does not adequately prepare students to make effective use of library resources

Experimental Study
- Use a game to provide additional, voluntary library orientation
- Pilot with first year medical and dental students
- Focus on key skills as identified through librarian experience and reference transactions
- Teach one skill in each of the five rounds
- Use prizes, donated by the campus bookstore and local restaurants, to encourage and reward participation
- The theme of the game was Operation and each round was named after a different well-known piece from the game (e.g. Funny Bone, Writer’s Cramp)

Participation
- 250 first year medical and dental students were invited to participate
- 30 students participated in at least one round of the game
- 6 students completed all rounds
- 3 students attended our semi-structured follow-up interview

Core Skills by Round:
1. How to get full-text of an article in PubMed
2. How to get books or articles that the Health Sciences Library doesn’t own
3. How to interpret a catalog record
4. How to access and search within a major e-book collection (AccessMedicine)
5. How to contact the library and get assistance from Informationists

Round 1: Understanding e-Link. How to get the full-text of an article in PubMed.

Advertisement for the Orientation Game, published on our website during August. The theme of the game was Operation.

Discovered Themes
- Programmatic timing – November is the best time to introduce new information seeking skills
- Students need the skills for their summer internship applications
- Participation rewards – determining factor
- Students love the rewards
- Appreciated the game’s format and clarity

“I didn’t see the usefulness of it until I started to prepare for summer [internships].”

“The drawing at the end didn’t seem worth it… but then you saw friends getting prizes.”

Conclusion
Based upon responses from the follow-up activity, students found the game to be valuable. They:
- Liked the interactive online format
- Described it as “easy to use”
- Were motivated by the competitive nature of the game and the rewards provided

The recommendation to move the game to later in the Fall semester would allow the students to directly apply the skills to their academic endeavors, further increasing self-sufficiency.

More research needs to be done to see if the Class of 2018 continues on its path towards self-sufficiency.

The students who participated in the follow-up activity will be monitored in subsequent academic years.

Corresponding author: Lindsay M. Greenawalt, MLIS
lg2683@cumc.columbia.edu