Building a Community: Games in Library Training and Development

Andrew Evans, Rose Library, James Madison University
Kelly Giles, Rose Library, James Madison University

Abstract: To develop training programs that would engage, inform, and cultivate a sense of community among student assistants in a university library, games were created involving individual and team challenges in various formats. The integration of games and game mechanics into on board and continuing training events created new opportunities for observable individual and team growth.

Background

The Library is the science and health library at a University, and typically employs about 30 student workers each semester. These student employees are responsible for many services including circulation, re-shelving of materials, stacks maintenance, and basic technical support at the library's Information Desk. For a number of years the training of student workers and wage employees was handled jointly by library staff at different campus libraries and lacked cohesiveness. The position of the Library Information Desk Training Coordinator was created to provide more effective training for our student workers.

Training originally consisted of one traditional lecture-based training session at the beginning of the academic year, plus a series of individual online training modules that student assistants completed through an organizational Blackboard site. These modules required students to read through instructional documents or view a training video and then complete a short test. This format created an isolating atmosphere and contributed to a sense of apathy among the student assistants. After implementing a similar online training program for library staff and student employees at the University of Arizona, an employee survey found that "while there was general agreement that the content helped prepare them to do their jobs and almost everyone liked the pace and the ability to refer back to the training, most were not as engaged by online delivery" and wanted the online training to be supplemented by face-to-face interaction (See & Teetor, 2014, p. 85-86).

Once I began my role as training coordinator, I hoped to develop training programs that would engage student assistants, as well as build a greater sense of community. In their study of student workers training, Mitchell & Soini (2014) found that "ongoing training to reinforce skills and knowledge is essential for success of students in their role" but emphasized that "variety is the key when training students and for fostering a skilled student team" (p. 602-603). I sought to create more active training tools and events that would offer learning opportunities that would also encourage the student assistants to interact with one another. With limited time and funding, I have created training games that not only engage student assistants with training materials but also give them greater opportunities to learn about each other.

Development

Through a process of trial, error, and observation, I began to create games and integrate them into the training process. I wanted to give students a shared experience that would bring them together as a team while actively engaging them as they learned about the various library and building systems.

First, I developed several "choose your own adventure" style games using PowerPoint that could be integrated in the existing online training. These were simple, humorous games aimed at simulating possible customer service and reference interview situations. Soon after their implementation, I observed students talking to each other about the experiences they had while navigating the game.

Soon afterward, I received approval to host an hour-long training event. This was a mandatory workshop and I was able to bring together all of our current student staff, who previously only came together for a large annual training event at the beginning of the fall semester. For this training, which focused on the Library of Congress call number system and maintenance of our library stacks, I created a game based on the children's television game show *Legends of the Hidden Temple*. Student assistants competed in groups of five or six to complete three separate challenges: trivia, a timed call number sorting demonstration, and exploring the library stacks. Feedback from student workers after this event indicated that they had fun playing the game. However, during the event I observed many of them getting caught up in the competitive elements of the game and was concerned that this may have detracted from the intended message about teamwork and cooperation. 88% of the students that attended left

positive feedback on an exit survey, specifically about the game and activities.

In 2014, I created a game based upon the popular party game *Apples to Apples* to be used at the annual training event for all campus libraries. This adaption of the original game involved matching adjective cards to cards naming library people, places, and policies. The mechanics of this game, in which players take turns in groups of six or more take turns deciding which of the proposed matches is best, eliminated much of the previous competitive focus of the student assistants while still keeping them engaged in the game and training information. Afterward, 45% of the students reported on an exit survey that this game was the most helpful part of the training event.

Conclusion

With reasonable effort and resources, the creation and integration of games into training can create great opportunities to develop staff interest, communication, and a sense of community. Even with a large staff of student employees who often only work three at a time at the Information Desk, I was able to observe new friendships being fostered during training events. Games helped to create an atmosphere of communication and teamwork among a large, diverse group of student assistants. The exit surveys I collected following the training revealed that the format and the implementation of the games impacted the results, but every game led to greater engagement from the student assistants both at the training events and during their shifts working at the Information Desk.

References

Jetton, L.L. (2008)*.* Selecting and using technology for student training. *Technical Services Quarterly*, *26*(1), 21-35. doi:10.1080/073171380222555

Martinez, S. L. (2014). Training tech services' student employees well: evidence-based training techniques in conjunction with coaching and mentoring strategies. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, *52*(5), 551. doi:10.1080/01639374.2014.903548

Mitchell, J.J., & Soini, N. S. (2014). Student involvement for student success: student staff in the learning commons. *College & Research Libraries*, *75*(4), 590-609. doj:10.5860/crl.75.4.590

See, A. & Teetor, T.S. (2014). Effective e-training: using a course management system and e-learning tools to train library employees. *Journal of Access Services,* 11(2), 66-90. doj: 10.1080/15367697.2014.896217

Tucker, J. G. (2004). Getting down to business: library staff training. *Reference Services Review*, *32*(3), 293-301. doj: 10.1108/00907320410553704