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Library Gaming Census Report, Year 2

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For each of the last two years, we have done a Web-based survey of gaming in libraries, asking librarians via various library discussion lists that were engaged with gaming to fill out a survey. The data in this article comes from library programs held in 2006 and 2007. The number of responses each year was similar – in 2006, there were 313 libraries that responded and 178 library programs described, while in 2007, there were 404 responding libraries and 218 programs described. During both years, there was a mix of public, academic, and school libraries (and a few special libraries in 2007). As those who took the survey were self-selected, these results can be taken as trends by only those who chose to fill out the survey.

Circulation of Games

Of those libraries responding, about 40% of them circulate games. The game types circulated have shifted slightly over the last year, but the results are very similar (See Table 1). PC games are the most frequently circulated games, but the number of libraries circulating console and handheld games rose slightly between 2006 and 2007, while those circulating PC games and board/card games decreased slightly.

Table 1. Responding Libraries Circulating Games

	2006	2007
Any Game Type	45%	41%
PC Games	29%	25%
Console Games	15%	19%
Board/Card Games	12%	9%
Handheld Games	3%	5%

Policies to Support Gaming

A new question to the survey about 2007 was to learn about policies that the library had about gaming. All libraries responding supported gaming in some way, but half of them had no policy in place about gaming activities. About one-third (36%) had a more general policy in place that included recreation and 7% had a policy in place that explicitly permitted gaming. Four percent of the libraries had policies in place that explicitly prohibited gaming. We would encourage libraries with policies

against gaming to reconsider their policy in light of the current status of gaming in society.

Features of Gaming Programs

Responding libraries reported that 56,767 users participated in 6,777 library gaming programs during 2007. For the programs described in detail, the average attendance at library program was about 30 people, with academic libraries reporting a higher average attendance of 55 people per program.

Game programs were rarely educational in nature (only 8% of the time) and tournaments were a part of a gaming program only about 35% of the time. The gaming program was tied into a summer reading program in about 30% of the cases reported. About 10% of libraries reported that the gaming program was tied into some other type of larger library program, and 49% of libraries reported that while this program was not tied into a larger program, the concept was something they were interested in. Therefore, the programs were typically recreational open-play gaming events that were not tied into a larger library program.

The most popular type of game used in responding libraries in 2007 was console games, with 64% of libraries using console games in their programs. Board/Card games were next most popular with about 35% of libraries using these, and only about 13% of libraries used computer games in library programs. In comparison to 2006 results, console games are up by 1%, while board/card games are down by 9%, and computer games are down by 4%. These numbers are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Percentage of responding library programs using different game types

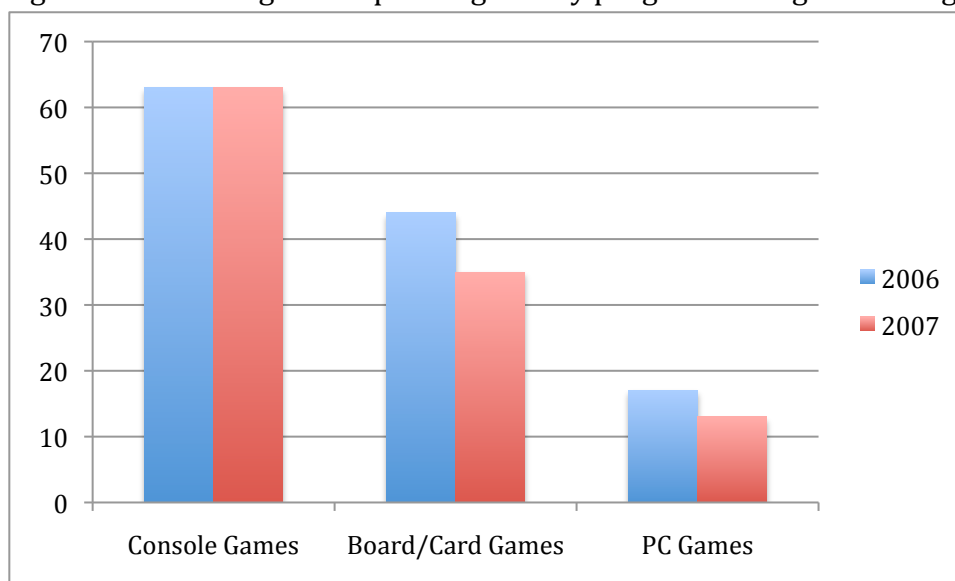


Table 2 contains the most popular games titles named in library programs. The *Guitar Hero* series grew considerably in popularity along with *Wii Sports*, while *Dance Dance Revolution* decreased in popularity.

Table 2. Specific Games used in Library Gaming Programs

Game Title	2006	2007
Guitar Hero Series	22%	39%
DDR Series	45%	35%
Wii Sports	6%	17%
Mario Kart Series	14%	16%
Super Smash Brothers Series	11%	12%
Madden Football Series	11%	8%
Rock Band	0%	8%
Halo Series	9%	8%

A new question for 2007 regarded the type of consoles used in libraries. The Playstation 2 was the most popular console with 34% of libraries using that console. The Wii was just behind with 30%, and the Nintendo Gamecube was a distant third with 11% of libraries. Xbox and Xbox 360 were each used in about 8% of library gaming programs.

Goals and Outcomes

Libraries were asked to indicate the single most important goal of the gaming program, and drawing in the underserved was the most common goal for both 2006 and 2007. The second most popular goal was to increase the library's role as a community hub. Other popular goals were to provide a source of entertainment and to provide an additional service for a group of active library users.

The six most common outcomes for gaming programs were:

- The reputation of the library improved with participants (65%),
- Users attended the gaming program and returned to the library another time for non-gaming services (64%),
- Users attended the gaming program and also used other library services while there (61%),
- Users attended the event with friends and improved their social connections with those friends (60%),
- Users improved their social connections with other previously unknown members of the community (52%), and
- The library got additional publicity (47%).

One negative outcome was that users not involved with gaming indicated annoyance with the event, which happened 10% of the time in 2006 and 8% of the time in 2007.

Costs of Gaming Programs

The average cost to set up a gaming program is about \$650, but this figure is misleading due to the wide range of answers to this question. Twenty-two of the library programs reported a setup cost of \$0 for this program; many of these libraries commented that the equipment was borrowed or patrons were instructed to bring their own games. Forty-nine programs quoted startup costs between \$10 and \$50. On the other extreme, two programs reported start-up costs of \$15,000 and \$25,000. Despite these extremes, a \$650 budget for a new game program is a reasonable figure for a Playstation 2, a Nintendo Wii, one game for each and appropriate controllers, and a few board and card games.

The cost to rerun the same game program is considerably lower with an average of \$65 per time to run the program. Looking at the costs for each program and the average number of attendees, we found that it cost programs, on average, \$2 per user to rerun a gaming program once the initial cost had been met. This typically goes for snacks or prizes if there is a tournament involved. Once the equipment is purchased, the costs are relatively low to rerun the program, and libraries can choose to have neither food nor prizes in order to lower those costs further.

Because of this model, most libraries repeated their gaming programs in 2007. On average, libraries repeated their programs 14 times over the course of the year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is these repeat programs that change the library habits of the underserved to where they come in not only for gaming but for other library services as well.

Future Explorations

It is our plan to continue this census on an annual basis in order to track trends in gaming programs in libraries. If your library is engaged with gaming, please visit the blog of the Library Game Lab of Syracuse at <http://gamelab.syr.edu>; there, you will find both an RSS feed and an e-mail notification link so that you can be notified when the next survey is available. You will also find more complete results from our studies in the Publications area at <http://gamelab.syr.edu/publications/>