

CHAPTER 30

Hunger to Change the Game: Using Assessment to Continually Evolve a Library Orientation

Kylie Bailin¹, Benjamin Jahre¹, Sarah Morris²

¹Lafayette College, Easton, PA, United States; ²The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, United States

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The literature on library orientations tends toward complicated programming and focuses on overwhelmingly successful orientations. Although librarian-led tour-based orientations have often been maligned in the literature (Marcus & Beck, 2003; Phipps, 1968), we have found that when a tour is modified to include interactive elements, it can be just as engaging as the most elaborate activities. At our college we started with a complicated orientation game that did not always meet students' expectations and overtaxed library staff. This chapter explains how we used assessment to move to an orientation tour that included a game to support active learning, which has been far more successful with both students and librarians.

Lafayette College is a small liberal arts school with 2500 students. The Lafayette College Library encompasses Skillman Library, the main library on campus, as well as Kirby Library, the government and law library. The Library employs 15 faculty librarians and 14 support staff. Lafayette is a residential campus and as such the library gets a lot of use as one of the students' primary social spaces. Every incoming student takes a First-Year Seminar that typically includes two library sessions which prioritize information literacy, so it is not necessary to focus on this in the orientation. Students have a mandatory set of collegewide orientation activities, but these do not include the Library. Because we are a small campus, most of Lafayette's students visit the main library building before the orientation. However, their mandatory orientation activities and campus tours leave out the details of what resources and services the library has to offer.

RESEARCH GAMES

At the beginning of each year, the Library runs a first-year library orientation as a way to familiarize students with the physical spaces and main services of the libraries. Because this orientation is not mandatory, it historically struggled with getting turnout. In 2013, we revamped our orientation, retitled “The Research Games,” to coincide with the release of *The Hunger Games* film. The same theme was used in the following year with minor changes for improvement (Bailin, 2015).

The Research Games was held on a Tuesday night during the second week of classes. It began with a race on the quad outside the library before moving inside, where each group of students (see Fig. 30.1), or “districts,” rotated around six stations. Each district had a bag of library resources, which they had to return to each station. The bags were designed to have a sampling of library collection materials with which groups familiarized themselves, and returning the bags to stations allowed the groups to explore services and spaces and meet friendly library staff. A full description of The Research Games is described by Bailin in a previous article (2015).

RESEARCH GAMES: FROM FEEDBACK TO TOUR

Feedback

Feedback from students who participated in both iterations of The Research Games was collected and analyzed to determine student satisfaction with the orientation. There were 24 responses out of a total of



Figure 30.1 A “district” of students participate in The Research Games orientation.

88 participants, and they were mostly positive. 83% enjoyed participating in The Research Games; 92% thought that participating helped them understand the services the library offered and where to find them; 75% said that the orientation made them more comfortable in the library; and 79% said it made them more likely to ask a librarian for help. Although it is satisfying that a majority of students surveyed had positive feedback about the orientation, there were the issues concerning competition and scheduling, which we could not fully address.

The issue of competition revolved around wording. Calling the orientation a game implied that there would be competition. Although we had a bit of this at the beginning with the race on the quad, the logistics of the orientation required that all the teams finish around the same time, as they each rotated to a different station with no winning team. One student said in the feedback that having the word “game” in the “title was completely misleading” when in practice the orientation felt more like a tour (Bailin, 2015). The other challenge of the orientation was scheduling. One student pointed out in our feedback that only having the orientation on one night was limiting and by having multiple instances, we could deliver the experience to more students and “be more flexible to students’ schedules.”

As we were leaning toward moving to a more traditional librarian-led tour, the survey asked respondents if they thought that a library tour from a librarian would be just as useful as The Research Games and 71% said yes. For those who answered no, there might have been confusion about the depth of an orientation tour compared with the general campus tours, which make a short stop in Skillman but do not cover all that the library offers. There were a few comments that students would not have paid as much attention to a librarian giving a tour. Again, we thought this might be a conflation of the campus tour and library tour because The Research Games involved several librarians talking to the students at each station, already akin to a tour. Most comments were positive about the orientation and about transitioning to a tour. One student commented that they “enjoyed the experience because it was laid back and I could ask questions. Just provide that atmosphere by giving students what they want: food and conversation!” (Bailin, 2015). This led us to reason that if we provided those elements, we could be more flexible with the overall structure. We planned to incorporate fun and interactive aspects such as food, games, prizes, and socializing into the new tour format.

One of the other factors that led us to convert our orientation to a tour was the time, effort, and planning involved in putting together The

Research Games. One person was responsible for doing all of the planning, scheduling, and training of all the other librarians who were involved. As there were many librarians involved in this evening event, it took a lot of effort to recruit volunteers, to make sure everyone was on the same page, and to coordinate the event. We were interested in creating an orientation that was not only useful for the students but also sustainable for the organizers. Because the feedback from The Research Games led us to believe that many of the bells and whistles did little to truly enhance the outcomes or experience, we wanted to ensure that librarians were putting their significant efforts toward activities the students would find fruitful and that they were not exhausted at the end of the day.

The New Tour: Planning, Promotion, and Execution

Based on this student and librarian feedback, it was clearly impractical to continue doing The Research Games. There were, however, several elements that we wanted to retain: making stops at various rooms to familiarize students with the building; highlighting particular collections and services (e.g., the Research Help Desk, media browsing stacks, etc.); and interacting with library staff. To continue featuring these elements while also addressing the issues of student confusion and librarian burnout, we transitioned from The Research Games to a tour of the library with a fun, interactive game at the end.

One of the first challenges of moving to a tour was figuring out how many tours to offer. Owing to the amount of work involved in setting up and organizing The Research Games, it was unrealistic to hold that event more than once. By contrast, we anticipated that running a tour would require significantly less preparation and fewer librarians. There are many demands on students' time during their first few weeks on campus, so we reasoned that by offering several tours early in the semester, more students would be able to participate. To accommodate as many different schedules as possible, we planned to hold five tours over 2 weeks in the hour immediately following the last scheduled class period of each day. We rotated the days, Monday through Thursday over the 2 week period, avoiding Friday afternoon.

Sign-ups were another challenge that had to be addressed. For The Research Games, as everyone participating came at the same time, it was sufficient to have students register through a simple Qualtrics survey. With five different tours planned, we created a spreadsheet in Google Docs; therefore students could simply put their email address in the column for

the day they preferred. This change allowed students to update their availability as their schedules evolved. We were also able to maintain a cap of 20 students (which increased to 25 in 2017) per tour, plus a waiting list, as tours can get unwieldy with too many participants (Oling & Mach, 2002).

Promotion of these orientations remained the same as for The Research Games. The most effective means of outreach was an email to all first-year students, which included the link to register. As soon as these emails went out, we saw an increase in registrations over previous years. We also had a large poster displayed in the lobby of Skillman, and smaller posters were distributed throughout the campus. Residence Life provided us with a good partnership, and we printed extra posters for the Resident Advisors. Starting in Fall 2017, our orientations were also included in the campus orientation brochures and were listed in LafSync, a new portal from Student Life designed to manage student activities and organizations. In future years, as students become more used to the system, we will try to use the RSVP feature in LafSync.

Each of the orientations' time slots was mostly full on the online registration. The day before each orientation, we emailed a reminder to everyone who registered for that day, including the waitlist. Some people canceled, others switched to another day, and some showed up on the day without registering; but this was never unwieldy. A total of 84 students in 2015, 77 in 2016, and 70 in 2017 participated in the orientations. This was a dramatic increase from 41 students in 2013 and 47 in 2014 who came to The Research Games and represents about 10%–15% of the total first-year class.

To alleviate the burden of one librarian orchestrating all of The Research Games, and to encourage student interaction with many of our librarians, tours were led by different librarians. This necessitated developing a loose script for each guide to follow; therefore students would get the same basic information regardless of which tour they attended. Each tour followed the same general outline. Students were greeted at the front of the library, where they introduced themselves, were told about the Library's Instagram contest (which we encouraged them to do throughout the tour), and received some free promotional items and a pamphlet highlighting library services for students. They then learned about research assistance at the research help desk, and about checkouts and available equipment at circulation. From there, students were shown the Library's collections and rooms, and they ended the tour in Special Collections,



Figure 30.2 During the stop at Special Collections, an archivist talks to students about the Marquis de Lafayette’s sword.

where an archivist discussed a bit of college history and displayed some of the most popular items in the collection, including the sword of the Marquis de Lafayette (see [Fig. 30.2](#)). This gave the tour guide an opportunity to do final set up for the game we created to accompany the tour.

Developing the Game

There were three primary reasons for including a game as part of the Library’s tour. The main goal was to build in an active learning activity that would also meet the desire students expressed from *The Research Games* to include competition in their orientation. We also wanted to include a component that would test the knowledge students had gained on the tour as a means of incentivizing them to pay attention, which would hopefully increase retention of the information beyond the orientation ([Detlor, Booker, Serenko, & Julien, 2012](#)). Finally, we wanted to retain an element that would allow students to socialize with each other. Without a game, there would not have been much opportunity for students to interact.

We knew the game should be short, easy to administer and update, and easy for students to understand. To accomplish these goals, we created a PowerPoint presentation with five questions, each on a different slide. The questions covered material that was included in the script, so we could be sure that students would have heard the answers during their tour. Examples of the types of questions we asked include the following: “Name three items you can check out from the library” or “Where can you go for research assistance?” Each team had sticky notes and was told that the team

who wrote the correct answer and raced to hand it into the librarian first would win a point. Even though we were testing their recall of information we had just given out, the students were also handed a Student Guide to the Library, which contained some of the answers (See Fig. 30.3). Students got really competitive and most sprinted to hand in their answers before the other teams (See Fig. 30.4). Members of the winning team received a library-branded stress reliever brain.

After handing out prizes, the final activity of each tour was time to enjoy brownies and cookies. We knew that students would appreciate free food, but we also wanted to encourage students to continue to forge new friendships in the early stages of their first year at Lafayette. However, in



Figure 30.3 Students work together to solve a question about the Library.



Figure 30.4 Students race to be the first to hand in the correct answer.

reality, most students were eager to grab their food and leave. In 2017, we tried having a feedback wall and encouraged students to fill out comments while they were waiting to get some food. However, we did not get many responses, so will not include this component next year.

LESSONS LEARNED

After the second year of running this orientation, we circulated a questionnaire for assessment of the library orientation toward the end of the first semester of 2016 and again at the beginning of Spring 2017 with the rationale that students would be better able to assess the usefulness of the orientation after they had some reason (such as an assignment) to need the Library's resources. Unfortunately, we did not survey the 2015 participants until this time as well but received a similar number of responses from the 2016 participants. The questionnaire was intentionally short: 11 questions that asked students to reflect on their experience during the tour and the impact that the tour had on their knowledge of library resources and their comfort with the Library's offerings. We had 45 responses to the survey, which were overwhelmingly positive. 98% of participants enjoyed the orientation; 96% said that the orientation helped them understand the services the library offered and where to find them; 89% said the orientation made them feel more comfortable in the library; and 82% responded that the orientation made them more likely to ask a librarian for help. Of those who responded "no" to the last question, one wrote, "the other resources exemplified in the tour are sufficient if the need for help were to come up" and another wrote, "I feel comfortable as is asking a librarian for help with research," revealing that some of the respondents who said "no" did not necessarily feel uncomfortable or less comfortable with librarians after the orientation. However, one did say that they still did not feel comfortable, and another one said "librarians are not specialized in the subjects that I have assignments on."

In addition to receiving such positive student feedback, informal conversations with the librarians who participated in orientation corroborated our understanding that a tour plus game format was less stressful and more helpful overall than The Research Games had been. Because we created a script and assembled materials that we could then circulate to librarian guides ahead of time, we found ourselves freer to either support the orientation by taking photos, greeting students, or to do other tasks as our jobs demanded.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given our positive experiences and assessment of our orientation, we plan on continuing to offer the tour-game hybrid orientation in years to come. Based on our assessments, however, we do plan on making a few changes. In past years, we were torn between offering the survey immediately after the orientation and offering it later in the semester. Administering the survey immediately (the day of or within the week) would allow us to receive students' feedback while it was fresh on their minds; administering the survey later in the semester would better measure how useful they actually found it when they had library needs. We chose the latter in hopes of better measuring "effectiveness" in the eyes of students, but we think that the fact that orientation has been so far removed from their minds contributes to our lower response rate. This coming year we plan on sending out two surveys with moderate adaptations to the questions. The first post-survey will ask students about their immediate experience (e.g., whether they felt that the orientation would be helpful in the coming semester, whether they would be more likely to approach a librarian, etc.). The second postsurvey, administered toward the end of the semester, would ask them if it *was* helpful to them, and if they *did* approach a librarian. We hope to do this not only to have a pulse on students' self-efficacy post-orientation but also to gather data on how first-year students approach library services.

The second change we intend to make is removing the Instagram component. We tried to engage first-year students on Instagram through the contest in both years but received very few new followers or contest submissions. This past year we even received a negative comment in our assessment: "The tour leader over-stressed/was pushy with the existence of an Instagram contest which detracted from the overall experience." We have a very successful social media campaign, Finals Fairy, which we run at the end of each semester (Darling, 2015), so we have decided to save our efforts and uncomplicate our tour by removing the Instagram competition from the orientation.

CONCLUSION

Our move from an elaborate game to a simpler tour-game hybrid was possible, in part, because of Lafayette's small size and the optional nature of the library orientation. Students self-select to attend which has resulted for us in a highly engaged group of participants. This model would likely not

be a good fit for larger research universities, but our orientation is scalable for schools beyond Lafayette's size. Certainly more sessions could be added, allowing for greater flexibility regarding student schedules. Each tour group could be expanded, as well. Even though we capped sign-ups for each tour at 20 and later 25 students, we have never turned away individuals on the waitlist. Our model could easily accommodate 30 students per tour without adding extra strain on tour guides or the budget.

Lafayette is also fortunate to have an excellent Special Collections department that has many items of historical interest to the College. For example, we mention on the advertising poster that students will see the Marquis de Lafayette's sword. The success of these orientations would not have been possible without the contributions and enthusiasm of our colleagues in Special Collections.

In crafting library orientations, especially when competing for students' time and attention, it can be tempting to be drawn to the splashy and ornate. However, this can complicate the planning of the orientation and is no guarantee of increased success. Sometimes a library's outcomes can still be achieved by customizing a basic format, such as a tour, with a few choice creative and interactive elements. By continually assessing both students and librarians and embracing a willingness to change in response to feedback, we were able to more precisely meet our orientation goals while reducing strain on our library's resources.

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