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Reference Olympic Glory! Motivating Student Employees Through Competitive Training

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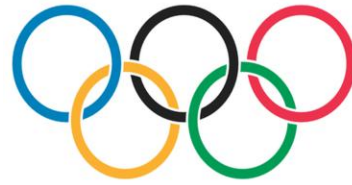
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Reference Olympic Glory!

Motivating student employees through competitive training

ORIGINS OF THE LIBRARY OLYMPICS

Jim Smith's article teaching LC call numbers was the inspiration for my game-oriented training program. In his article, Smith provided a set of 52 call numbers which, when sorted correctly, would be in numerical order within suits (for example, Hearts from deuce to ace). Following his example, I created two identical decks, modifying some of the cards to better reflect my library's collection.

I first used the card game when I had several new student employees start work in the same trimester. After working through the tutorial in LC Easy, a software program commonly used to teach the basics of LC call numbers, students played the game individually. They were encouraged to consult a cheat sheet I created based on two of the sources below.

The cards made it easy to see where they were having trouble and to focus on these problem areas. Students gained skill and confidence quickly. Once they demonstrated their competence, they had a chance to compete with each other in speed and accuracy using the dueling decks.

I received very positive feedback from the students, not only about how well they felt they understood the call numbers, but also about how much fun they had learning the system. This enthusiasm made me realize that a training program comprised of games, puzzles, and challenges, especially one in which students could compete against each other for prizes and personal pride, was exactly what I needed.

I approached two of my more seasoned student employees, and with their input and suggestions the Library Olympics began to take shape.

EVENT PLANNING: OBJECTIVES & ASSESSMENTS

Olympic event planning encompassed multiple stages:

1. Writing learning objectives on note cards, grouped by concepts or themes.
2. Identifying 1 or more objectives for each event.
3. Creating scorecards of questions and activities that would demonstrate mastery of the learning objectives.

OLYMPIC EVENTS

This is a list of all the Fall & Winter events. Most were independent activities that students completed alone, in pairs, or in teams. Italicized events were group training sessions to which all participants were either invited or required to attend.

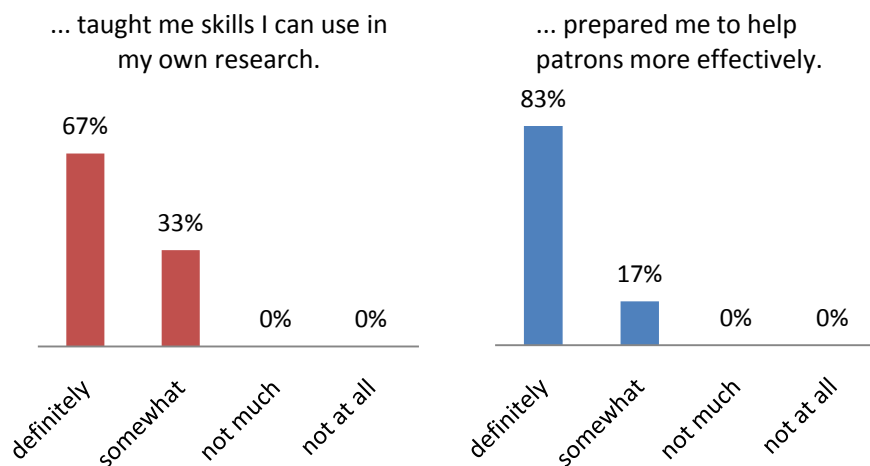
Fall Olympics:

- Stapler wrangling – managing the temperamental heavy-duty stapler
- Reference desk gymnastics – finding items at the desk, goofy physical challenges
- *Keeping statistics with Analytics* – contributing to the new, more complicated statistics system
- Call number duel – speed and accuracy challenge using LC call number training decks
- Analytics challenge – practicing the statistics process
- Textbook genius – finding textbooks in the library using the catalog, a clipboard list, etc.
- Book searching basics – known item searching; limiting by facet; placing book requests
- Library web site scavenger hunt – finding information on the library site, including FAQs
- *Be a better book searcher* – keyword vs. subject searching, Google books, tables of contents
- Missing book relay – finding misshelved books—a timed event

Winter Olympics:

- What did u say? – library jargon word search and definition matching
- Piles of periodicals – scholarly vs. popular vs. trade magazines
- Wordle hurdles – identifying key concepts, generating synonyms, making a Wordle
- *A is for articles* – finding & choosing databases, refining results, e-mailing articles, using folders
- *Giving great service* – discussion, skits, & brainstorming about customer service
- Gold medal searcher – using AND and OR, understanding results using Venn diagrams

Participants said that the Library Olympics events...

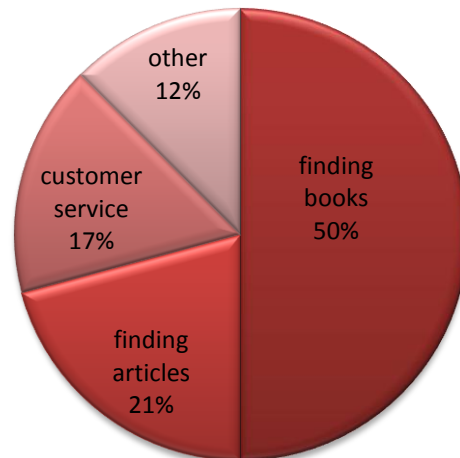
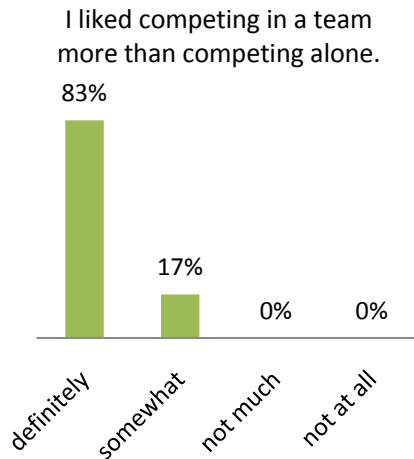


FUTURE CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM

Based on data collected in the follow-up survey of student employees, the Spring Olympics will:

- Be exclusively team-based.
- Offer new ways to earn incentives.
- Emphasize more article searching skills.

The Library Olympics skills I use most frequently are:



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Following is a selection of sources consulted or borrowed from in developing events.

“How to Find a Book by Call Number.” *University Libraries*. Kent State University, 25 Oct. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2011.

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User Education Services. “Brainstorming Concepts and Effective Search Strategies.” *University Libraries*. University of Maryland, Aug. 2010. PDF file. 28 Feb. 2011.

Reference Olympic Glory! Motivating student employees through competitive training



*Hilary Kraus
Johnson & Wales University Library*

Poster session presented at ACRL National Conference 2011, Philadelphia, PA.

Student employees are the key to any library's success. They open the doors, shelve the books, direct patrons, and lock up at night. Students in the Reference Department also frequently provide front-line research assistance and referrals. But as any supervisor knows, it can be difficult to motivate students to learn the skills they need to do their jobs well.

Collaboratively developed by the Reference Department student supervisor and two student employees, the Library Olympics program was designed to energize this learning process. Students suggested the theme, contributed ideas for incentives, and designed posters and related materials. Their enthusiasm was critical to obtaining buy-in from other members of the student team.

The Library Olympics included group training sessions, independent learning activities, and team challenges. Training content ranged from basic skills (finding supplies, fixing the stapler) to more complex tasks (locating library resources online, searching the catalog). Concise and specific learning objectives served as the cornerstone of each event. Within those parameters, a concerted effort was made to build humor, physical activity, and competitive energy into events.

Multiple incentives were offered for participation. A large chart noted athletic progress, providing bragging rights to those pulling ahead in the competition. Milestones (such as each student completing a set number of events) were rewarded with home-baked treats. At the end of each academic term, medals were awarded to those completing the greatest number of events.

Feedback on the Library Olympics was generally positive. While the demands on the supervisor – developing events, evaluating progress, designing and leading training sessions, encouraging participation – were considerable, the payoff was worth it. Students gained important skills, and participation in team events and training increased their sense of belonging to a cohesive team. In addition, the existing archive of materials could easily be used to duplicate the program in future years (after some student turnover) or adapted for use at other libraries.



Special thanks:

The Library Olympics program would not have been possible without the partnership of Philip Santini, student reference team member extraordinaire. His ideas, participation, and design contributions were essential to the program's success.



REFERENCE OLYMPIC GLORY!



Motivating Student Employees Through Competitive Training

Hilary Kraus

Johnson & Wales University Library

Origins of the program

The Reference Department needed a student employee training program to:

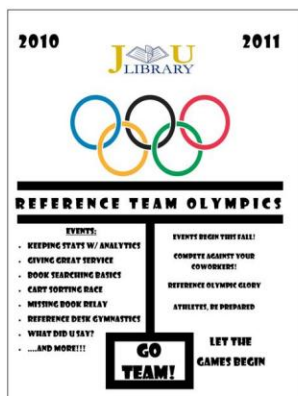
- Develop skills
- Encourage teamwork
- Engage and motivate participants



Why the *Library Olympics*?

Because our students suggested it! They asked that training be a competition with recognition for achievements. Student employees:

- Chose the theme
- Designed posters
- Brainstormed event names

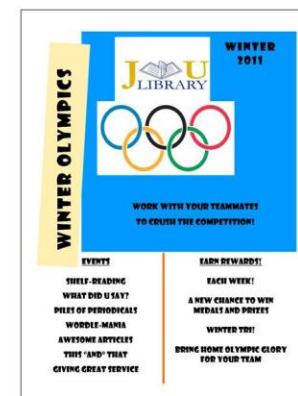


Strategies for success

- Create cohesion with an overall theme
- Identify the most vital skills to teach
- Create assessments to evaluate learning
- Plan events around academic calendars

Listen to your students!

- They know what's fun and what works
- Solicit – and *implement* – their ideas
- Let them pick the incentives
- Incorporate their feedback



Types of events

- Group training sessions
- Independent learning activities
- Team challenges

Positive event feedback

- challenging * helpful
- competitive * fun * interactive
- active * group-oriented

Favorite events

- Call number duel
- Reference desk gymnastics
- Wordle hurdles

