Gaming in the Libraries

By Maira Bundza, Central Reference

Have you ever run through a library in your stocking feet, or were encouraged to have fun and be loud in a library? Well, that is what happened at Waldo Library on two Friday nights in February of this year. Seventy-six high school students, who had come to Western Michigan University to interview for Medallion Scholarships, were enticed to an evening in Waldo on February 11 and 18, 2005.

Each year, usually in February, outstanding high school seniors interview and compete at WMU for a substantial scholarship to attend the University. In recent years, applicant numbers have fallen off, and a recommendation from a consulting firm suggested that the students might be more attracted if challenging programs or activities were offered as well as sample lectures. Dean Joe Reish, University Libraries, offered to host what he referred to as a “fun event” that would occur on the night before the interviews. His offer was accepted, and “the game was afoot”—to paraphrase Sherlock Holmes.

An informal committee consisting of Adrienne MacKenzie, the Coordinator of Orientation; Dean Reish; Regina Buckner, the Director of Operational Services; members of the Information Literacy Committee; and all interested staff met several times to plan. The idea that emerged was to have activities that were instructional; would give the visiting seniors some skills to survive in college; and, at the same time, would offer an evening to enjoy, that is, to have fun! After much discussion, the planners decided on four challenges or games that, in essence, demonstrated key resources available in our libraries and developed skills needed for research.

Waldo Library was closed to the public on both evenings with the prospective game players scheduled at 7:00. When all were assembled, each individual was given a call number (usually used only to order books on the shelves) and then had to line themselves up in call number order around the second floor atrium. This was their first learning task since few had ever seen or used a Library of Congress book number. After an introduction and welcome by David Isaacson, Central Reference, on the first evening, and Elaine Jayne, also from Central Reference, on the second, the “orderly” group was divided up into eight teams.

Two teams went to each challenge game, and competed against each other; only twenty minutes were allotted per challenge, and everything moved with considerable alacrity as well as antic resolutions. Before the evening was over, four unique gaming experiences “happened” to each group of students.

Artifacts of the Elders was created by our Director of Archives and Regional History Collections, Sharon Carlson, with help from our new Systems employee DJ Wyrick. The challenge was meant to introduce students to archival and rare materials held by the University Libraries. Students examined assorted memorabilia and “rare artifacts” from the WMU Archives to answer a series of questions and unravel a cryptogram. Questions included, for example, the cost of tuition in 1913 and rules for female students at Western in the 1940s and 1950s.

The cryptogram was followed by an anagram, which revealed some information about materials in the Libraries’ Special Collections. This “game” turned out to be one of the favorite challenges for the students, and showed them that libraries contain more than books and periodicals.

Battle of the Search Engines was designed by Science Reference Librarian Barbara Cockrell and Off Campus Services Librarian Michele Behr. The “battle” illustrated the advantages and disadvantages of an open Internet search engine, in this case Google, versus an online database, i.e., Proquest’s ABI/INFORM Global. Each
Not Just Classical

By Greg Fitzgerald, Head, Maybee Music and Dance Library

The jungles and deserts of Africa and Asia...Native American tribal lands...the ancient monasteries of Tibet...and fields of the Old South where slaves sang of freedom: these are just some of the places where the audio resources of the Harper C. Maybee Music and Dance Library can transport you. The collection primarily reflects the emphases of the curricula in the School of Music at WMU—western art music, i.e., “classical” jazz; and music theatre. In addition, it also supports courses in world music and seeks to round out patrons’ experiences by making available the sounds of instruments and voices from around the globe.

Beginning in our own country, recordings produced by Smithsonian Folkways, the record label of the Smithsonian Institution, illuminate the traditions of peoples who came here from Africa and the British Isles, and how they contributed to the evolution of American folk and religious music. This music, in turn, documented and influenced the nation’s history through wars, the Great Depression, labor struggles, and the civil rights movement. Folkways’ reissues of recordings it made in the 1950s and 1960s, complete with song texts and program notes from the originals, are particularly valuable for such study.

The lives and struggles of African-Americans, as expressed in music, are vividly documented in the Library of Congress’ Archive of Folk Culture, on the Rounder label, with examples of African-American songs and spirituals. The Long Road to Freedom, a six-CD set on the Buddha label, provides what it calls “a musical history of America’s Africans” beginning with roots music from Ghana, Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, through examples of shouts and spirituals, Louisiana Creole and slave songs, songs of the Underground Railroad and Civil War, children’s songs, minstrel music, and others, sacred and secular. Totally in the sacred realm is the Smithsonian series Wade in the Water that explores African-American spirituals, gospel, and congregational singing.

Another taste of America is provided by The Best of Broadside 1962-1988, which samples “anthems of the American underground” from the popular magazine dedicated to topical songs from an era of turbulent social change. Songs about war and peace, the nuclear arms race, civil rights, women’s rights, and labor struggles form the core of the collection, which features a lavishly illustrated guide with song texts and historical background.

While Native American music is not strongly represented in the collection, there are several Smithsonian compilations of music from various tribes, and a disc on the Rykodisc label features songs of the Ojibwa, Menominee, and Winnebago peoples of the Great Lakes region. (The library has additional Native American music on LP records, which are gradually being replaced with compact discs.)

Beyond our shores, the Rounder, Ocora, and Rykodisc labels each contributes a series of world music recordings. A sampling of the titles takes us to the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Africa, Indonesia, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Some discs represent a geographical overview, while others explore a particular genre or people in more depth—Indonesian gamelan, the Zulus of South Africa, the Maori of New Zealand. There are some examples, too, from the Americas and the Caribbean. Most of these recordings were made “in the field” and represent a wide range of musical expression usually centering on community life and traditions and often accompanying dancing.

Indeed, the dance is integral to an understanding of world cultures and their music, and this is where the library’s visual resources come in. Primary video offerings in the area of world music are the JVC Anthology of World Music and Dance and its cousins, co-produced by Smithsonian and Folkways. The original set consists of thirty videocassettes covering Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Polynesia, while others, of several cassettes each, augment the coverage of Africa and add Western Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean to the mix. Single videos throughout the collection feature specific types of music and dance, often as part of a theater experience. These visual resources are valuable for showing the rituals and dances associated with the music and for demonstrating how musical instruments look and are played.

Also from around the world comes perhaps the most unusual audio resource in the library—the BBC Sound Effects Library. Containing relatively little music in the traditional sense, this set of 40 compact discs can be useful to composers and theater sound designers. It includes hundreds of sounds—all kinds of animals, insects and birds, machines and transport, people at work and play, weather conditions—from all over the world. Want to know what an Iberian marsh frog sounds like? Need to hear border collies, playing and fighting in the early morning? Or a Land Rover’s window opening and shutting? How about an open market in Algeria? They are all in the BBC collection! A handy index describes each sound in detail.

While the library maintains a policy of limiting loans of its audio and video recordings to faculty, emeriti, and staff, other patrons are invited to use these resources anytime within the library, where, because of the policy, they are more likely to be available when requested. (One exception is the BBC Sound Effects Library, which students may borrow.)

Increasing both the accessibility and size of the library’s audio resources are the newest “additions” to the collection: online listening services. Two such databases are being offered through 2005, after which they will be re-evaluated. Classical Music Library provides music from over thirty classical labels, the major ones being Arabesque, EMI, Hyperion, and Newport Classic. Users of the service may browse or search for specific works by composer, title, genre, and several other access points, and create playlists for repeated use. Naxos Music Library offers listeners the entire catalogue of the Naxos label, including jazz, folk, world, and new age music as well as a large classical repertoire. WMU patrons may listen anytime anywhere, accessing the services using links on the Music and Dance Library home page (www.wmich.edu/library/music/), or by a title search in WestCat.

Whether on a computer anywhere or just within its walls, the Music and Dance Library’s audio resources are certainly “more than classical,” jazz, and musical. They reach in every direction to bring the sights and sounds of musicians and dancers around the world to our students and other library patrons, in recognition that the musical community is indeed a global one.
Thinking Out Loud: Google-Not

By William R. Brody, President,
The Johns Hopkins University

[In December, 2004, President Brody wrote that the “highly successful multi-billion-dollar initial public offering for Google, a company created by a couple of Stanford graduate students” suggested that Johns Hopkins might well emulate their efforts, and, in so doing, assist “users to find and validate information in mammoth files.” Read on and discover that this university president has a special solution to managing information that might well be “faster and more robust” than the latest technology.]

Surely among all our talented students and faculty there must be the seed of an idea that could command an equally high premium [cf. Google] in the commercial world. Rather than wait for something like this to happen spontaneously, I could charge our Office of Technology Licensing to be proactive and see if it could create a company that Hopkins could take public—and increase our endowment by more than a billion dollars. Think of all the wonderful programs and scholarships we could create with such a success.

Then the light went on! Full of Googleness, I suddenly realized that we already have the ultimate information search engine right here at Johns Hopkins. It’s one that is readily accessible and highly trusted. And it can be used to locate important references from credible sources, without getting a lot of extraneous garbage. Just think of what this Hopkins search engine would command on the NASDAQ market.

Therefore, any day now, two prominent New York investment banks will announce the initial public offering for JHUSL.com, the newest and most powerful search engine yet—better than Google, Yahoo, MSN and AskJeeves by a long shot. Already traders have lined up across the world to purchase shares. Why this excitement? It’s all in the discernment. What is so great about JHUSL.com is that when you perform a search, say on “16th-century weapons of mass destruction,” you will get only one or two dozen references—the ones that are really meaningful and helpful—rather than the 50,700 that came up in the Google search I tried.

What is this great technology, you ask? Well, JHUSL stands for the Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries. You see, our library has the most effective search engines yet invented—librarians who are highly skilled at ferreting out the uniquely useful references that you need. Rather than commercializing the library collections, why not export to the public market the most meaningful core of Hopkins’ intellectual property—the ability to turn raw information into useful knowledge.

I hope by now you realize that any talk of taking our library public is simply to emphasize the point missing in all this Google mania: Massive information overload is placing librarians in an ever more important role as human search engines. They are trained and gifted at ferreting out and vetting the key resource material when you need it. Today’s technology is spectacular—but it can’t always trump a skilled human.

Have you hugged your librarian today?

Johns Hopkins University President
William R. Brody writes “Thinking Out Loud” for The Gazette, the University’s weekly newspaper for faculty, staff, and students. His columns appear regularly in the first issue of the month and can be found at www.jhu.edu/~gazette/president. The above reprint is reproduced, with permission, from the December 6, 2004 issue, Vol. 34, No. 14.
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The Citation Jumble and Plagiarism Puzzle were created by Science Reference Librarian Linda Rolls to give students a jump towards mastering two key elements of putting together a research paper. In the first game, the contenders learned how to assemble the essential parts of a citation in proper order. Each team had a book, an article from a journal, and a Web site for which they had to put together a complete citation. The parts of each reference were drawn from a basket containing laminated slips, each of which identified one of a citation's components (e.g., author, title, date, volume number, pages, URL, etc.). The Plagiarism Puzzle was a series of questions to see if these potential student authors knew what is and what is not plagiarism. Somewhat surprising was the fact that none of the teams answered all the questions on plagiarism correctly. But, the "wrong" answers motivated a dynamic and informative discussion about plagiarism, which will be valuable for these future college paper writers.

Finally, in the Go for the Gold challenge, students competed to see which team could find and retrieve the most books in twenty minutes. Prior to the evening's activities, Elaine Anderson Jayne and Maira Bundza, both Central Reference librarians, had compiled ten different lists of materials located on all four floors of the library. The items included a reference book, a current journal, as well as books with provocative titles, such as What Einstein Told His Barber, Emperors of Chocolate, and Bus 9 to Paradise. For the answer to the final question, students needed to use the huge lighted globe found in the Reference area on the first floor—a final test of their GPS skills! To play this game, the competing teams were first given a brief lesson on how to use the WestCat catalog, and quickly learned to search by author and title to find call numbers for the items. Then, students used a bookmark and map of the library that provided information about floor location of Library of Congress call numbers. The game was truly afoot as students dashed off to one of the four floors of stacks or special collections, located the item on the shelf, and dashed back with the book or answer to the starting point.

This particular challenge had both social and educational purposes. It encouraged students to discuss how to divide up the task to accomplish expeditiously the goal and to work together as a team. In their joint efforts, they also had a chance to know each other better. Further, many students feel overwhelmed when they come from a small high school library and need to use the large research collection here at WMU. We gave them minimal instruction, but encouraged them to ask questions. Amid the laughter and animated conversations, we observed students who strategized and tackled the problems, ran to their designated floors, and met and regrouped to check to see what items still needed to be found. Their enthusiasm was contagious, and we laughed at the large pile of shoes left at the Reference Desk, shed in their efforts to move faster.

As the games ended, all gathered in the third floor atrium for snacks and the award ceremony. Prizes were awarded for each time one team beat the other team at a challenge, and there were two overall prizes for the best two teams. All the students and staff who "worked the games" introduced themselves, thus providing another opportunity to welcome the prospective students to the University and wish them well in their interviews to be held the following day. Most important, there was an atmosphere of fun and excitement among the students and staff that is rarely seen in the daily routine of the library. The games were afoot, the races were run and won, and the Libraries reflected a University where information and knowledge are to be found in special places.

With Apologies to ...
Dwight B. Waldo

In the article "Centennial Afterthoughts" (Gatherings, Fall 2004, No. 35), words were put in Dr. Waldo’s mouth that he would never have uttered! A list of the five names of WMU from its beginnings in 1903 until today was incorrect. For the record, and with an editorial mea culpa, the names are:

Western State Normal School:  
May 27, 1903 - May 11, 1927

Western State Teachers College:  
May 12, 1927 - May 19, 1941

Western Michigan College of Education: May 20, 1941 - June 1, 1955

Western Michigan College:  
June 2, 1955 - February 25, 1957

Western Michigan University:  
February 26, 1957 - Present
The Teaching Archives

By Sharon Carlson, Director, University Archives and Regional History Collections

Those who have never visited WMU’s archives and regional history collections, which are located “off the beaten path” in the oldest building on the East Campus, usually have a wrong conception of what occurs in that ancient academic hall. Collections and archives are preserved and organized there, of course, and the staff assists hundreds of users answer a variety of questions about southwest Michigan, genealogy, and the communities of WMU and Kalamazoo. In addition, one unrecognized or largely unknown service is offered by a vibrant staff who interacts with thousands of students and researchers as active teachers of the methods and procedures of historical research. Each year, they, along with librarians and staff located throughout the University Libraries, provide hundreds of instructional sessions for thousands of students, who seek to find information in the numerous collections located in East Hall and the University Libraries as a whole. Although many sessions are one-time presentations, for the last five years students seeking an intensive library oriented course have had the opportunity to opt for an entire semester’s worth of instruction in History 406, Archival Administration.

Every January, during the spring session, up to 30 students enroll for University credit in Archival Administration, a course where students study the history and theory of the development and management of archival collections, applied techniques, vocabulary particular to archives, and general professional issues. The class is geared primarily for public history majors and minors but it is also an elective class for students enrolled in the business information systems program or anybody interested in learning more about archives.

The class meets twice a week at the Archives and Regional History Collections location on the old campus. A potential drawback from having the class in the more familiar environs of Dunbar Hall, the home of most history classes on the West Campus, is that it requires a trek across campus to Western’s first building, East Hall. Once students learn bus schedules and coordinate car pooling, the situation is not as arduous as it may seem, and has some major advantages. In East Hall, students can examine a variety of original documents. For example, when the class session focused on photographic materials, students examined ferrotypes, daguerreotypes, and other types of nineteenth century cases. They also examined carte de visites and cabinet cards, which exemplified changing photographic technology during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This graphic session was able to conclude with an actual review of glass plate and nitrate negatives.

In the same mode, other sessions offered students the opportunity to examine naturalization records, circuit court cases, and other governmental records on deposit in the WMU Archives from the State Archives of Michigan. In most instances, collection security and the difficulty of transporting some heavier materials would prohibit taking such archival materials out of the building. The opportunity for students to see, hold, and review these records is one that makes the class unique and especially useful to students.

While the “hands-on” experience is especially useful and relevant to the course, other aspects of the class have considerable similarity to any upper level class taught at WMU. There are lectures on procedures and techniques, and the students must learn the “language” of the field, such as “provenance” and “original order,” as well as pass a mid-term and final exam. But, another unique aspect of the course is the use of the case study method. The case study method, while commonly used in business administration or public administration courses, is often a new learning experience for public history students. Each case, consisting of a problem related to archival administration, may have more than one correct answer, depending on how the problem is defined, assumptions are made, and parameters established. To complete the study, students must determine and assess the variables, and those analyses will produce different solutions. As a result, students learn to work toward consensus while tolerating legitimate differences of opinion.

During the semester there are two case studies. At the beginning of the semester, students explore a case involving the acquisition of controversial materials. In this instance, the case is drawn from the real life situation of another archival institution in Michigan that pursued the records of a county chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. After some preliminary discomfort with the process and the subject matter, students soon get into lively debates about the possible alternatives that could be taken. The case highlights issues of collection development, cultural sensitivity, and inter-institutional cooperation. Students receive grades for their participation in the class discussion and for completing a paper outlining their assumptions and preferred

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course of action with rationale.

The second case study requires the students to apply knowledge and skills learned in the processing and creating of a finding aid for an archival collection. Most public history students are accustomed to this type of endeavor, as they may have previous experiences in collecting oral histories or studying historic sites. In this case, the processing/finding aid project is the equivalent of the term paper. Because of the work needed to complete such a project, it is also a group project. Students work in groups of four or five students. This has the added benefit of giving them a real world experience in teamwork—a method often used in actual public history decision making.

The “reality” projects in 2005 used a variety of collections including the American Association of University Women Records, the Park Township Records, the Michigan Society of Gerontology Records, and a couple of collections of personal papers and miscellaneous accumulated collections. Selecting actual collections for the students to work on is probably one of the most challenging aspects of preparing for the class. The records represent quite differing issues, and identifying existing collections of two to three cubic feet that are comparable in complexity is difficult. All projects will involve a degree of refolding and almost all collections will be shifted from cartons into archival document boxes. A final collection inventory is also part of the project.

Completing an actual case study project inevitably creates its own unique learning experiences:

• Some records, particularly those assembled by organizations, are in good order. In these instances, students work with larger volumes of material and identify contaminants such as newspaper clippings or rusty paper clips.
• Students also learn how to handle the random photograph.
• Other students have collections with organizational problems. Students have to determine if the records had an original order. If unable to determine the order, students may opt to create series and work with a chronological scheme. Imposing an order makes the records usable for future researchers.

• An additional challenge occurs when a collection has deteriorated or has preservation issues. A collection of personal papers may have been stored in a damp environment, perhaps a garage or basement. As a result, individuals sensitive to mold or other contaminants may have allergic reactions.

For many students, this class is an essential component of the public history curriculum. Not only do they learn archival principles and gain hands-on experience, but also their primary source research skills are improved. Those most interested go on to complete internships in the Archives that require commitments of 120 to 240 hours over the course of the semester. All together, the Archival Administration class, the onsite opportunities, the case studies, and the internships provide a special “training and testing” ground for many future archivists and librarians. And, even if not a chosen profession, each student leaves with a new sense of the meaning behind the old saying that “The past is history, the future is a mystery, the present is a gift; therefore it is called a present.” What a “present” is found in the learning experience called “the teaching archives!”