POWER-UP!

Building a games collection in an academic library: the experience of Carleton University Library.

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Project statement

How to build a games collection at Carleton University Library

Objectives of the project

In summer 2008, the Library was approached by faculty with a request to purchase games to support courses in computer game development in the Schools of Computer Science and Information Technology. The Library now has a growing collection of over 320 video games and over 30 board games.

Here's how it happened …

Methodology used to implement the project

Qualitative methods including interviews and participant observation. The process was also modelled on the one used at University of California, Santa Cruz. (Kane, Soehner and Wei, 2007)

Major findings and their significance

Games and Interactive Media Committee was formed in Fall 2008 with representation from the Library, faculty in Computer Science and Information Technology, the Student Academic Success Centre and Computing Services. By early 2009, the Committee prepared a final report including a request for funding from the University.

Report was presented to the Library Collections Committee in Spring 2009 and games were added to the Library's collection profile. The Committee obtained start up financing of $13,000. Funding for games collection is now an on-going part of the of the Collections budget.

Building the collection: core list of games titles was supplied by faculty teaching gaming courses. Faculty requested both "good" and "bad" games as well as older games to show the development of the discipline. Students also encouraged to request titles.

Acquisitions: New titles are easily purchased online. Older titles and replacement copies are more difficult to locate and are usually purchased used from a reputable games vendor.
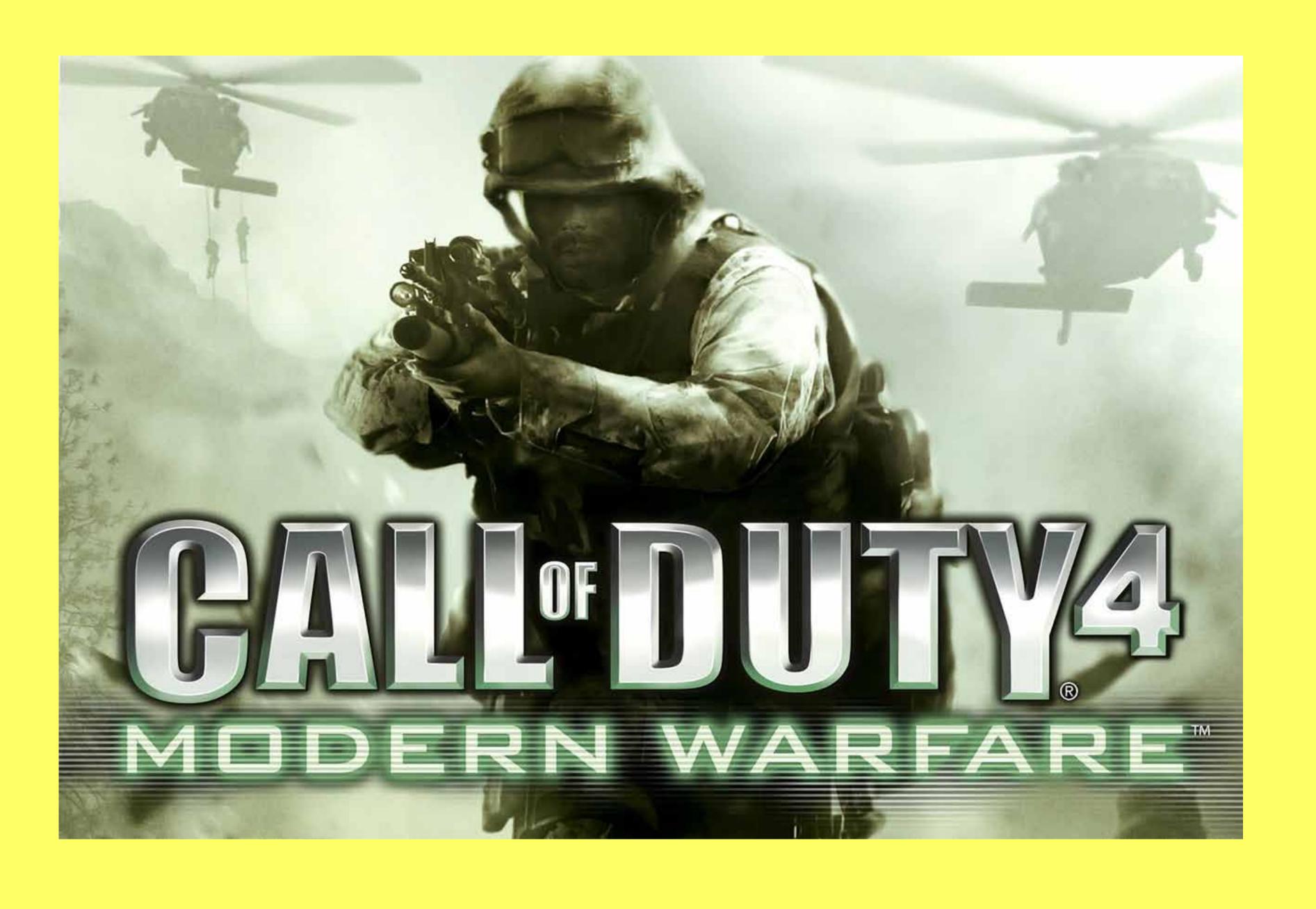
Metadata: Much of game collection has required original cataloguing or complex copy cataloguing. Platform is a key issue for video games and the catalogue was also reindexed to add MARC field 753 to the title index which has proved very useful.
To date, the top three circulating video games are: Super Paper Mario (Wii), Super Mario Galaxy (Wii) and Call of duty 4 (Xbox 360)

Statistics and charts for CLA poster presentation

1. Annual growth of games collection May 2008 – April 2012

2. Usage stats for games collection May 2009 – April 2012

3. Usage stats by patron group May 2009 to April 2012

Games usage by Library patron group May 2009 to April 2012 (n=7075)

- 1-3 year undergraduates (4481)
- 4th year undergraduates (1319)
- Graduate students (751)
- Library staff (301)
- University faculty, staff, management (207)
- Other: alumni, community, staff other universities (16)

4. Video game collection by platform

Video game collection by platform (n=342 items)

- PlayStation: PS, PS2, PS3 (139)
- Xbox: Xbox, Xbox 360 (126)
- Wii (72)
- Other: Game cube, independent, student created (5)

5. User stats for video games by platform (May 2009 – April 2012)

User stats for video games by platform, May 2009 - April 2012 (n=4148)

- PlayStation: PS, PS2, PS3 (1,721)
- Xbox: Xbox, Xbox 360 (1,758)
- Wii (663)
- Other: Game cube, independent, student created (6)

6. Enrollment for gaming programs at Carleton University Fall 2008 to Fall 2011

- Bachelor of Computer Science: Computer Game Development
- Bachelor of Information Technology: Interactive Multimedia Design

Conclusions

Games are not traditional materials for an academic library and the rapid growth of the games collection at Carleton created controversy. As discussed in the literature, controversy about both cost and content usually accompanies the purchase of games in an academic library. However, the role of the Library is to support the teaching and research needs of the University. Enrolment in the game development programs at Carleton has increased significantly since Fall 2009 and has resulted in the hiring of several new faculty.

The games collection has fostered a successful working relationship with faculty and students in Computer Science and Information Technology. The Library enjoys a much improved profile in this sector of the University Community.

Further issues to explore

The building of a Library games room was part of the initial plan for the games collection. Tentative plans are still in place as part of a current Library renovation.
Further investigation of the possibility of purchasing consoles and other equipment to support the games collection.

Adding more non-commercial and faculty and student created games to the Library's game collection. In addition, explore the possibility of also storing "mods" / content in Library's institutional repository.

More games programming at the Library including faculty lectures and gaming events for students.

Library has not resolved the issue of how to circulate video games with accompanying equipment (e.g. Wii fit, Rock band).

Question for further research: does the games collection promote Library skills in a hard to reach sector of the student population?

References

Kane, Danielle, Soehner, Catherine and Wei, Wei. "Building a collection of video games in support of a newly created degree program at the University of California, Santa Cruz" Science & Technology Libraries. Vol. 27 (4) 2007: 77-86
Laskowski, Mary and Ward, David. "Perspectives on building next generation video game collections in academic libraries". Journal of Academic Librarianship. Vol. 35 (3) May 2009: 267-273.

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