



From Attendance to Impact:

Gamifying Graduate Research Roundtables to Boost Engagement and Assessment

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The Voyage Ahead — Agenda



1. Intro
2. Describe our Graduate Research Roundtable Series
3. The Challenges and Changes
4. The Idea
5. Implementation
6. Early Findings
7. Moving Forward
8. Iterations
9. Q&A



Takeaways

Learn how you can adapt your current workshop program or create a program using some of the ideas we discuss today.



LOEX 2026



Syracuse University

A private R1 institution.

~22K

Total enrollment

~15K

Undergraduate

~7K

Graduate / professional

1870

Founded

Mascot: Otto the Orange



AHOY — A LITTLE ABOUT ME

Your Captain for this Voyage



Higher Ed Background

Student services veteran



Academic Counselor

Guiding student journeys



Second-Career Librarian

Charted a new course



25+yrs / 8 yrs

In higher ed / as librarian



SWIM BREAK!

How Many of you offer a workshop program?



The Research Roundtable Series





Charting the Course: The Research Roundtable Series



Plotting the Voyage — Sessions Focus On

- Research skills
- Academic success strategies
- Professional development
- Navigating graduate school

Smooth Sailing — Designed to Be

- Informal & welcoming
- Discussion-oriented & practical

Clearing the Waters — Removing Barriers

- Offering food (GSO Sponsor)
- Accessible, comfortable spaces
- Partnering with campus units
- Relevant & timely sessions

All Hands on Deck — Audience

- Primarily graduate students, but open to undergrads, faculty, and staff.

⚠️ Rough Seas Ahead: The Challenge

- Attendance has drifted off course — down nearly 50% between 2023–2025.
- Most participants only came aboard once per semester (out of seven sessions offered).
- Few signals from the crew — low rate of participant feedback and survey data.



Headwinds students reported:

- Competing priorities · Zoom fatigue · Scheduling barriers · Desire for flexible engagement

Why This Matters: Our North Star

THE NORTH STAR

Graduate students benefit from repeated exposure to research support.

One-shot workshops often fail to create:



**Ongoing connection with the
library and librarians**



Confidence building



**Finding their scholarly
community**

Charting the Course: Asking the Right Questions



01

How do we move from one-time attendance to ongoing engagement?

02

How do we increase participation across a recurring series?

03

How can we gather richer assessment data?

So, I did some digging.

SWIM BREAK!

How Many of you offer a struggle with attendance?



Setting Sail with Gamification



Gamification uses low-stakes game elements to encourage participation.

Backed by research.



Visible Progress



Motivation



**Repeat
Engagement**



**Stronger
Assessment**



**Interactive &
Rewarding**

Anchored in Research



Incentives and gamification have been shown to boost engagement and academic outcomes.

Incentives and gamification have been shown to increase student engagement by formally recognizing co-curricular achievements. Austin, K., Thompson, A., Coyle, J., & Chicharo, J. F. (2020). Learning outside the classroom: A distinctive approach to co-curricular recognition in the Australian context. In 6th International Conference on Higher Education Advances (HEAd'20). Universitat Politècnica de València. <https://doi.org/10.4995/HEAd20.2020.11062>

Programs that formally recognize and reward student participation in co-curricular activities, such as a Learning Passport program, have seen significant engagement. Approximately 40% of Business and Tourism students actively participated in the program, which awarded certificates and prizes for involvement. Blotnick, K., Cormier-Macburnie, P., Hicks, E., & Mombourquette, P. (2016). Evaluation of a learning passport program on student engagement at Mount Saint Vincent University. *International Journal of Business Research*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.18374/IJBR-16-1.6>

University of New Haven: Their Undergraduate Student Government Association introduced a points-based system where student organizations earn rewards, such as voting rights and funding considerations, based on event attendance tracked via the Campus Labs Engage Event Check-in App. This approach not only increased event participation but also encouraged student leaders to actively market their events and take ownership of attendance tracking. campusintelligence.com

Wake Forest University: The "Link Loot" program allows students to accumulate points by attending designated events, which they can later exchange for prizes like electronics and campus merchandise. This initiative led to a 572% increase in student participation over three years, demonstrating the effectiveness of gamified incentives in enhancing event attendance. campusintelligence.com

Engagement Strategy #1: The Passport Program



*A simple layer of **gamification** added to the Roundtable Series.*

How It Works

- 1 Students receive a physical “passport” at their first session
- 2 Each attendance earns a stamp
- 3 Stamps unlock small prizes and raffle entries

Goals

Encourage repeat attendance & build momentum

Make participation feel fun and rewarding

Create a visual reminder of progress

Charting the Course: Design Principles



The program is built around four guiding principles.

Low-Pressure

Show up when you can

Flexibility

Engage on your terms

Visible Progress

See momentum build

Community-Building

Strangers become peers

Setting Sail: Implementation Logistics



Five operational pillars keep the ship afloat.



Marketing & Outreach — spreading the word



Attendance Tracking — logging stamps



Assessment Design — asking the right questions



Prize Coordination — fueling the journey



Campus Partnerships — all hands on deck

Engagement Strategy #2: Reading the Tides — Assessment



Five things we want to learn/achieve from each session.

01

Improve Response
Rates

02

Capture Satisfaction &
Learning

03

Understand Motivation

04

Evaluate Community
Building

05

Gather Real-Time
Responses

Reading the Tides — Data & Assessment



What We Track

- ▶ Total attendance
- ▶ Average attendance per session
- ▶ Growth over time
- ▶ Repeat participation rates
- ▶ Representation across disciplines

Plotting the Course: Target Outcomes for Assessment



EO

Engagement

Increased understanding of library resources tailored to graduate students.

SB

Skill-Building

Attendees apply at least one new research strategy or tool to their work.

CB

Community-Building

Stronger sense of connection and belonging within the graduate community.

PE

Program Effectiveness

High satisfaction with the relevance and applicability of sessions.

Preliminary Results



Riding the Tide: Roundtable Growth



42% Increase

All Aboard Again: Return Participation



2024–2025

3 attendees participated in 1 or more roundtables



2025–2026

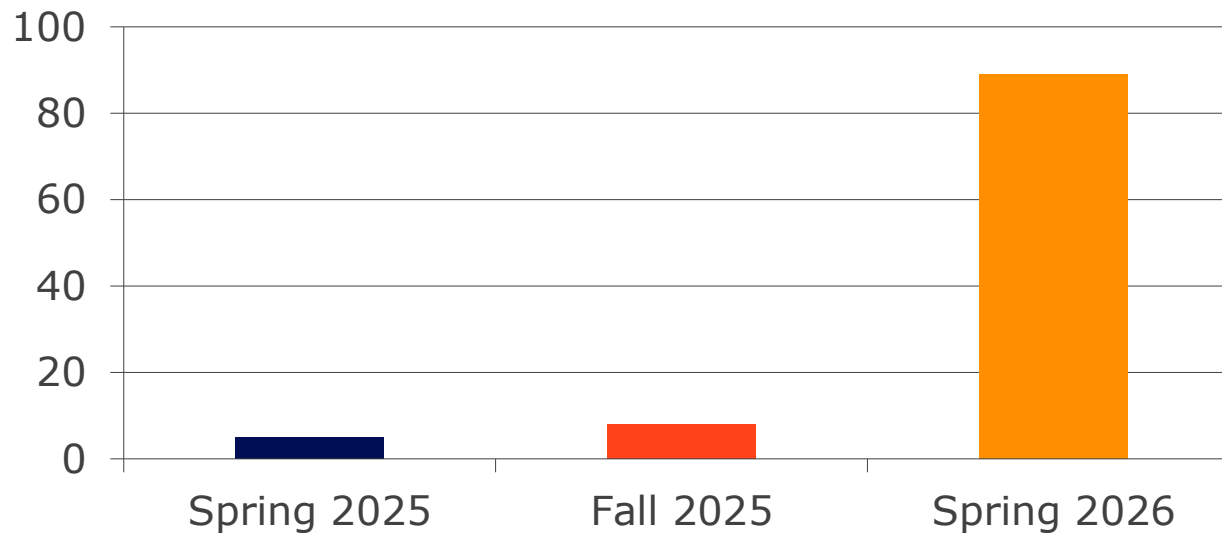
14 attendees participated in 1 or more roundtables

366% Increase

Trimming the Sails: Assessment Improvements



Assessment Completion Rate



Less than 5% to 89% completion

Assessment response rates increased dramatically after introducing:

- QR code surveys
- raffle incentives
- structured completion time

Signals from the Crew: Survey Results



Workshop Satisfaction Scores (out of 5)

Well Organized	4.6
Event Quality	4.4
Increased Knowledge	4.4
Audience Engagement	4.2
Materials Understandable	4.1
Research Skills	4.0
Topic Relevance	3.9
Networking	3.0

4.1 / 5

Workshop Satisfaction

Takeaway: Strong satisfaction across the board — networking is the clearest opportunity to grow.

[SU Libraries-Research Roundtable Attendee Survey](#)

Voices from the Deck: Survey Results

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

"I didn't know the library offered this."

"This helped me realize other grad students had the same experiences, and I wasn't the only one who didn't know how to begin research."

"Lots of great resources for identifying career goals and defining job interests, which is really appreciated."

"More like this! More on how to resist genAI, more on demonstrating the harms of genAI."

"I would love similar events in the future on AI!"

"Great! Lots of valuable resources shared and good questions asked. Grateful for the virtual attendance option."

"I thought it was fascinating to discuss the different ethical frameworks and how each could justify or discourage AI usage."



HEADLINE STAT

Significantly Up

(prior baseline < 5%)

Assessment Response Rate

Spring 2026

Spotted on the Horizon: We Also Observed...



Students started returning not just for stamps...
...but for the community.

- Students began recognizing each other
- Conversations carried over from session to session
- The library became a consistent space to gather
- A writing group formed

In a Nutshell: The Ship's Log



✓ Early outcomes

- ▶ Stronger assessment participation
- ▶ High perceived value
- ▶ Attendance increased from last year
- ▶ Increase in repeat attendance

⚠ Room for improvement

- ▶ Networking
- ▶ Equity & accessibility
- ▶ Broader campus reach

SWIM BREAK!

How Many of you have a budget for workshops?



Choppy Waters: Challenges & Considerations



Considerations to keep in mind as the program scales.

Staff Time

Coordinating sessions, prizes,
and tracking

Tracking Logistics

Stamps, attendance, repeat data

Funding

Budget for prizes and materials

Trim the Sails: Adaptability & Scalability



The model can scale across many crews.

Small Institutions

Run a leaner version with 3–4 sessions per term — one librarian can manage stamps, prizes, and outreach without a dedicated team.

Discipline-Specific Cohorts

Tailor sessions to STEM, humanities, or professional schools. Stamps map to discipline-relevant skills like data management or archival research.

Undergraduate Programs

Pair with first-year experience or honors programs. Lower the stamp threshold and tie prizes to course credit or co-curricular records.

Digital or Hybrid

Swap the physical passport for a digital badge or LMS module. Stamps become unlockable content; prizes become e-gift cards or shoutouts.



What next...

Four areas to explore in the next iteration.

1 Survey attendees on the Passport specifically

Add 3–5 questions focused on the passport mechanic itself — not just the workshop.

EXAMPLES “Did stamps motivate you to return?” · “Which prize tier mattered most?” · “What would you add or remove?”

2 Convert registrants to attendees (55%)

Close the gap between sign-ups and show-ups with reminder nudges and lower-friction entry.

EXAMPLES Day-of email + text reminders · “First stamp” bonus for new attendees · Calendar invites with location pinned

3 Survey those who don't show

Reach the silent majority — ask why they registered but didn't attend.

EXAMPLES Short post-event opt-in form · 1-question SMS poll · Targeted follow-up to repeat no-shows

4 Build in more intentional networking

Design moments where students actually connect, not just sit through a session.

EXAMPLES Icebreaker prompts at sign-in · Discipline-based table groupings · 5-min “research speed-dating” segment

Reaching Port: Impact



The program has helped us:

Strengthen relationships

Between librarians and graduate students

Increase visibility

Of library services across the community

Create a consistent point of connection

A reliable space students return to

Support graduate success

In a holistic, community-centered way

What started as a workshop series has grown into a community-building initiative.



Questions and then Bon Voyage
Thank You!

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