



## ARTICLE

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# Find the Time: Creating a Card Game to Showcase Special Collections and Celebrate Institutional History

## ABSTRACT

*Find the Time* is a campus history card game designed to engage students, alumni, and employees at James Madison University (JMU). Inspired by a game developed at McGill University Libraries, *Find the Time* challenges players to arrange cards in the correct chronological order. The cards feature images from JMU Libraries Special Collections, including the digital archives of the campus newspaper and yearbook. *Find the Time* is intended to promote these collections and spark conversations among players about their own experiences and how the campus has changed over time. This article describes the development and implementation of the game and provides practical advice to help other institutions create similar games to celebrate their own history and collections.

## KEYWORDS

Academic Libraries, Campus Engagement, Games, Outreach, Special Collections

James Madison University (JMU) is a large public research university in Harrisonburg, Virginia that was originally established as a teacher's college in 1908. A one-room library opened in an academic building the following year. As the campus grew, so did its library spaces. The first dedicated library building opened in 1939. Originally called Madison Library, it was renamed Carrier Library in 1984. A second dedicated library building, Rose Library (originally East Campus Library), opened in 2008 (see Figure 1). In 2022, preparations for a major renovation of Carrier Library led to increased interest in the building's history.

As part of their outreach about the construction project, the JMU Libraries Communications & Outreach team began work on a virtual timeline of campus library history featuring images from JMU Special Collections. Around this time, the author of this article attended a Serious Play Conference session titled "Thinking Beyond the Stacks: Games in Special Collections" (Sundberg, 2022) about games developed at McGill University Libraries using content from their special collections. This inspired the idea of creating a game to tie in with the virtual timeline. Such a game could introduce newcomers to JMU's history, appeal to the nostalgia of returning students and alumni, and help promote our special collections.

Thanks to digitization projects in the 2010s, [JMU Libraries digital special collections](#) include the complete archive of the student newspaper and every volume of the yearbook. A selection of historic campus photographs is available online, as well as a large collection of images of the local area donated by the wife of a former Harrisonburg City Planner. This content seemed like a promising foundation for a campus history game.

Several librarians at JMU, including the author, have experience using games as instruction and orientation activities. These games have taken a variety of formats, including online games, treasure hunts, card games, and escape rooms, but all were focused on teaching players about the campus library system or information literacy skills (Bayne-Lin & Shenk, 2024; Giles, 2015; Giles & Sullivan, 2023; Giles et al., 2019). The campus history game would have a different purpose: to spark conversation and curiosity about the history of JMU and the materials available in JMU Special Collections.

## Literature Review

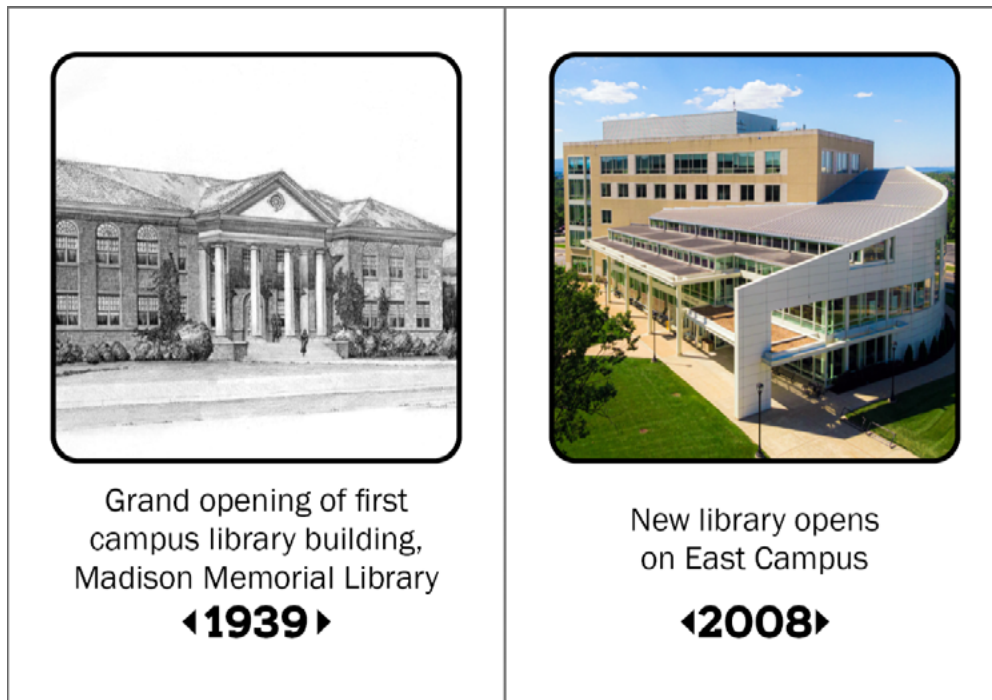
There is now an extensive body of literature on games and gaming in academic libraries. Several books have been written on the subject, including works by Crowe and Sclipa (2020), Harris and Rice (2008), Kirsch (2014), and McDevitt (2011), and there are many articles describing the use of games for library orientation and information literacy instruction. Games that involve library special collections seem to be relatively rare, but there are some notable examples of games that make use of special collections materials or spaces.

Jack and Jonathan (2014) describe a game designed to attract undergraduate students to Wilson Library, the special collections library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Undergraduates tended to avoid Wilson Library, saying they found the grand architecture and silent atmosphere intimidating. A *Clue*-inspired live-action mystery game brought students into Wilson to explore the building, interact with staff, find hidden objects, and answer trivia questions about the library.

At the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, a murder mystery game by Davis (2019) introduced new students to library spaces and services as well as basic research tasks such as finding a book by call number. The game's narrative is based on a real 1922 murder trial and requires players to find clues in the trial transcript and other primary source materials from the library's special

**Figure 1**

*Cards about the openings of the two campus library buildings*



*Note.* The images on these cards are *Madison Memorial Library* [Architectural Drawing], by J. Binford Walford, 1938, JMU Historic Photo Collection, Oversize #303; and [Untitled Photograph of Rose Library], 2021, courtesy of James Madison University.

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

collections. Another historic murder was the topic of a multimodal exhibit at Haverford College Libraries, *Who Killed Sarah Stout?: A Participatory Exhibition* (Rajchel & Snyder, 2016). Haverford's Special and Quaker Collections holds documents related to the 1699 trial of Spencer Cowper for Stout's murder. Visitors to the exhibit could see these documents on display, handle facsimiles and replicas of objects from the period, and interact with a digital game that allowed them to question people associated with the case.

Kretz et al. (2021) developed an online escape room with a time travel theme as an introduction to Stony Brook University Libraries. The game used photographs of the campus from the Libraries Special Collections and University Archives to illustrate players' visits to different periods in history. Some puzzles also required players to consult information on the Libraries Special Collections and University Archives website, such as a list of concerts held on campus in the 1960s.

An in-person escape room at the Archives of Contemporary Arts at the University for Continuing Education Krems was created with the goal of "using aesthetic means to foster a curiosity for arts & culture and, more specifically, archival work in the field of arts" (Koenig et al., 2022, p. 298). The escape room, which was held in an exhibition space at the Archives of Contemporary Arts, included reproductions of materials from their collections and presented players with "an abstracted version of archival problems that urges them to employ basic archival procedures, while still allowing them to do so in a playful manner" (p. 302). For instance, one puzzle required players to examine reproductions of documents to determine which artist they were associated with, then place them in the correct archival storage boxes to reveal a code (p. 303).

Sampson (2019) worked with a game-design student to develop an escape room that would serve as an engaging introduction to the University of the Arts London Archives and Special Collections Centre (ASCC). The ASCC collection includes the Stanley Kubrick Archive, and the theme of the escape room was inspired by the Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (p. 41). The escape room was originally designed to be played in the ASCC space, but this limited the number of players who could participate at once. A portable version of the escape room was developed to allow it to be played in larger spaces, with multiple teams competing against each other (p. 42).

Information about the games developed at McGill University Libraries is available through their website (McGill University Libraries, n.d.). *Raising Spirits* is a two-part virtual escape room in which players investigate a ghostly disruption on campus, searching for clues and solving puzzles using digitized documents from McGill's special collections. *Quiz That So?* is a trivia game combined with a virtual tour of the campus. *Moments in Time* is a card game in which players attempt to place historic events in chronological order. Each card is illustrated with an item from McGill's collections, ranging from a cuneiform tablet to an issue of the student paper *The McGill Daily* (McGill University Libraries, 2022).

Games can be used not only to promote special collections but to gather information about these collections. Metadata Games, an open-source platform developed by Dartmouth College's Tiltfactor game lab, included a suite of online games intended to facilitate and incentivize crowdsourced tagging of archival images (Flanagan & Carini, 2012). In their pilot study, Flanagan and Carini (2012) found that Metadata Games players generated more tags per image than participants in the Library of Congress Photos on Flickr Pilot Project (p. 532).

For a game to succeed, players must feel motivated to participate. Much of the research on player motivations for engaging with games has focused on digital games (for example, Malone, 1981; Nacke et al., 2011; and Yee, 2006). Some of this work is also relevant to other game formats, such as Malone's (1981) identification of three categories of intrinsic motivations to play computer games: challenge, fantasy, and creativity. The increased popularity of board and card games in recent years has led to research specifically about motivations for playing tabletop games. Kosa and Spronck (2019) developed their tabletop gaming motivation inventory (TGMI) based on previous literature about video gaming. After surveying tabletop gamers, they identified several motivating factors including Escapism, Aesthetics, Relationship, Arousal, Autonomy, Customization, and Socializing (Kosa & Spronck, 2019, p. 65). Martinho and Sousa (2023) developed the CSSII model for player motivations based on data from their own survey of tabletop gamers. This model is named for its five components: Competitive Interaction, Social Challenge, Sensory Experience, Intellectual Challenge, and Imaginative Experience (Martinho & Sousa, 2023, p. 6).

## Methodology

### Objectives

For this project, I wanted to explore whether a game about campus history could serve as an effective library outreach activity and promotional tool for JMU Libraries Special Collections. First and foremost, the game would need to be fun to play. A game can be effective even if it is not "fun" in the sense of light-hearted or amusing; Jacobs and Janz (2021) explain that "In our research, we found that there are other elements to the experience of a persuasive game that are measurable and offer far better predictive validity of the appreciation of these games" (p. 194). However, unlike my previous game projects, the campus history game would not be offered as a course assignment or as part of an orientation session. Without a built-in audience, this game would need to appeal to players as a recreational activity.

If the campus history game succeeded at attracting players, it would essentially be a portable, interactive Special Collections exhibit. By featuring images from our campus and local history digital collections, it could raise awareness of these resources and inspire curiosity about our special collections. More broadly, the game could promote the image of JMU Libraries as an important part of the campus and honor the history of Carrier Library and our other library spaces.

Jacobs and Jansz (2021) advise that "In cases where there is not already a testable criterion or an attitudinal benchmark that the game is meant to achieve, we encourage researchers...to determine what its attitude goal state is...[This] is linked to the game's design, describing the attitudes that a game is built to convey to its players" (p. 187). I hoped that learning about JMU history in a relaxed social setting could help campus newcomers feel more welcome at the university. While a large majority of our students are from in-state (James Madison University, 2025), nearly half of our first-time freshmen are from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, about 130 miles away (State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 2024). The smaller city of Harrisonburg and its more rural environment can seem isolated to newcomers. A campus history game could show that JMU is not cut off from the rest of the world, and that national and global events have always influenced campus life. A game that encouraged conversation could also serve as an icebreaker when meeting new

“Games can be used not only to promote special collections but to gather information about these collections..”

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

people. I anticipated that the cards would inspire players to share their own memories or stories about campus history that they had heard from others.

During the game development process, I formed an additional objective inspired by Tiltfactor's "Embedded Design" model, which uses a "'stealthy' approach of embedding persuasive messages within a game's content or context" (Kaufman et al., 2016, p. 173). I wanted the game to encourage players to think about and discuss how social changes, especially related to gender roles and advances in civil rights, have affected the lives of JMU students in both the past and present. Although this objective would influence which events were included in the game, I did not want an obvious message to overshadow the other content or detract from the entertainment value. "Such overtness can ruin a game whose aim is to engage controversial or sensitive issues. A game that players do not wish to play or complete should not be made" (Seidman et al., 2015, p. 6). As Seidman et al. (2015) and Kaufman et al. (2016) found with their work on persuasive games, a subtle approach was more likely to produce a game that was both fun and effective.

I intended to have the game ready to play at the party to commemorate the closing of Carrier Library for renovation in May 2023. Noise, distractions, and a lack of privacy would make it difficult to recruit survey participants at this event. I was concerned that even asking partygoers to fill out a feedback form would be more likely to drive them away than to produce useful data. I would instead use my own observations to make an informal assessment of how well the game met my objectives, identify areas for improvement, and decide whether the game would be worth using at other events.

### **Game format**

Although I considered developing a virtual escape room game like McGill's *Raising Spirits* (McGill University Libraries, n.d.) or Stony Brook University Libraries' *Study Room Time Machine* (Kretz et al., 2021), I decided that a card game like *Moments in Time* (McGill University Libraries, 2022) would be easier to develop and better serve my objectives. I wanted to use the game at in-person social events, and I hoped that it would inspire meaningful conversations among players. As Marchetti and Valente (2015) found, card games also have an advantage over digital games in that players can easily develop their own rules and modify or interact with the game materials in ways that may not have been anticipated by the game designer.

Creating a customizable multiplayer online game with a chat feature was beyond my technical skills, but I did have experience making card games. An *Apples to Apples*-inspired card game called *Put Up Your Dukes* (Giles et al., 2017; Giles et al., 2019) had served as a successful orientation activity for several years, providing players with the opportunity to learn about JMU Libraries while socializing with new acquaintances. The card game format made it simple to add or update content, and the campus print shop could print the cards at a reasonable price.

### **Audience**

The intended audience for the campus history game, which I named *Find the Time*, was primarily current JMU students and employees. While *Put Up Your Dukes* was designed as an introduction to the library system for new students, I hoped that *Find the Time* would appeal to a broader audience, including upperclassmen, graduate students, and university faculty and staff. I also anticipated that there might be interest from alumni and the families of current students. Since I did not expect to attract players from beyond the

JMU community, I could design *Find the Time* with the assumption that players would already recognize our mascot, team name, and campus landmarks.

### Scope

McGill University's *Moments in Time* includes events from around the world, from ancient times to the 21st century. Only a few are related to the history of McGill or Montreal. The game instead provides an interesting sample of the materials in the McGill collections, which include not only rare books and archival photographs but also objects such as a 19th-century zoetrope. (McGill University Libraries, 2022) To suit our own collections and the objectives of this project, I wanted *Find the Time* to focus primarily on the history of JMU and the local area. Yet strictly limiting the game's content to our campus's history would not serve the goal of showing how JMU is connected to the rest of the world. I decided to include national and world events if they could be illustrated with images from our campus or the digital yearbook and student newspaper archives. For instance, a card about the end of World War II uses a 1945 yearbook illustration of a globe with the flags of the Allies (see Figure 2).

Another important consideration was what span of time to cover in the game. I initially planned for the earliest card to be about the founding of the school in 1908, but this would have excluded notable local history events such as the founding of the city of Harrisonburg. I settled on the birth of our namesake, James Madison, in 1751 as a starting point for the game's timeline. This would also allow the inclusion of cards about Madison's accomplishments, illustrated with photographs of the statues of him that are prominently displayed on our campus (see Figure 2). There would be no set end date for the game, allowing for the inclusion of events from within the lifetimes of current students.

I created an informal "No myths, no murders" rule when selecting content for the game. While the cards have space only for brief, and thus simplified, descriptions of events, I wanted the information to be as accurate as possible. I would include only events that I was confident had actually occurred and could be accurately dated. Our campus, like many others, has its own ghost stories and urban legends. While these stories can be entertaining for students, I did not want to present them as factual. Since the game was intended to be a fun and welcoming activity, I also wanted to avoid content that was likely to upset players or trivialize real tragedies. I

**Figure 2**

*Cards about the end of WWII and James Madison*



Note. The images on these cards are [Untitled Illustration of a Globe with the Flags of the Allies], *The Schoolma'am*, JMU Yearbooks Collection, 1945; and [Untitled Photograph of James Madison Statue], courtesy of James Madison University, 2022.

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

did not create cards about the deaths of individuals affiliated with the campus, the COVID-19 pandemic, or past disease epidemics such as the Great Influenza of 1918–1920. I also chose not to feature examples of the racist imagery that appeared in yearbooks from the early decades of the school, such as depictions of blackface minstrels. While such images could potentially inspire meaningful conversations, they seemed more likely to make players uncomfortable. There are other opportunities for JMU students to learn about these images, such as from the JMU Special Collections digital exhibit [\*Black & White on Bluestone Hill: JMU's Racial History in the Archives\*](#). This is not to say that potentially disturbing content should be off-limits for all games. The games described in Rajchel and Snyder (2016) and Davis (2019) involve real-life murders, but the victims were not affiliated with their campuses, and the format of these games allowed them to deal with the murder cases in greater depth than would be possible on a single card.

### **Research and image selection**

While researching events and images to include in *Find the Time*, I benefited from previous campus history projects. The Centennial Celebration website (James Madison University, n.d.) and an annotated historical timeline of the first 50 years of the school (Crowley, 2006) provided information about major events in our history. More recently, the Campus History Committee has done valuable work to “present unfamiliar, untold, and unacknowledged aspects of this institution’s past” (James Madison University Campus History Committee, 2018). Their website includes faculty and student research projects covering topics such as campus protests, fashions and social change, and the history of JMU athletics.

I also browsed through our digital special collections looking for notable events and images. I learned about famous musical acts who had performed on campus from the yearbook archive and added cards about several of these concerts to the game. Some cards were created especially to make use of eye-catching images. For example, the 1985 yearbook features a photo spread inspired by *The Breakfast Club* (released earlier that year) with students dressed as “The Rebel,” “The Athlete,” “The Nerd,” and “The Prep.” The Nerd, wearing taped-up eyeglasses, posed next to a computer and a box bearing a prominent IBM logo. This inspired a card about the introduction of the first IBM personal computer in 1981.

Many images from the campus newspaper archive were not of suitable quality to use for the cards. Photos tended to be murky, cartoons and drawings were often too small, and text from the other side sometimes showed through the thin newsprint. A few newspaper images made it into the game, but I typically used the campus newspaper archive to pinpoint the date for an event and then checked the yearbook archive for a better image. The James Madison University Marketing & Branding online photo collection was a good source of contemporary images of our campus, including buildings, statues, and other landmarks.

Since the game project was being developed in tandem with the campus library history timeline, I was able to borrow from their research. I returned the favor by sharing references to campus libraries that I discovered in the yearbooks.

### **Designing the cards**

*Find the Time* required a more complex design than the previous *Apples to Apples*-inspired card game, *Put Up Your Dukes* (Giles et al., 2019). While each *Put Up Your Dukes* card had unique text, there were only two images: one for

the question cards and one for the answer cards. Each *Find the Time* card would have a unique image, caption, and year. The Microsoft Word template created for *Put Up Your Dukes* seemed insufficient for this project. A search of the forums on [BoardGameGeek](http://BoardGameGeek.com), a website devoted to tabletop games, produced advice and resources for making more complex card games. This included a tutorial on creating cards in Adobe InDesign using the data merge feature (Berg, 2020). JMU Libraries subscribes to Adobe Creative Cloud, but Berg also suggests some less expensive alternatives.

Data merge works much like using mail merge to personalize written documents. I created a card template with InDesign and a spreadsheet listing the caption, year, and image filename for each card. The data merge tool pulled the information from the spreadsheet and generated individual cards. Changes to the shared layout, background image, or font could be made on the template. The text or image for individual cards could be changed by editing the appropriate entry on the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet also served as a master list of cards. Since it can contain information that does not appear on the cards, I used the same document to keep notes such as the source for each image.

The template for the front of the cards (see Figure 3) includes a square placeholder for the image and a text box for the caption. The back of each card has the same image and caption as the front, plus a text box for the year. I designed two different backgrounds for the cards, one with a striped border in the school colors and one with a thin black frame around the image. The first version of *Find the Time* uses 2.5 by 3.5-inch cards, which is the standard size for poker cards and trading cards. I refer to this as the poker-size or sit-down version of the game, since it's typically played while sitting around a table. A second version of the game, discussed later in this article, uses bigger cards. I refer to this as the oversize or walk-up version of the game.

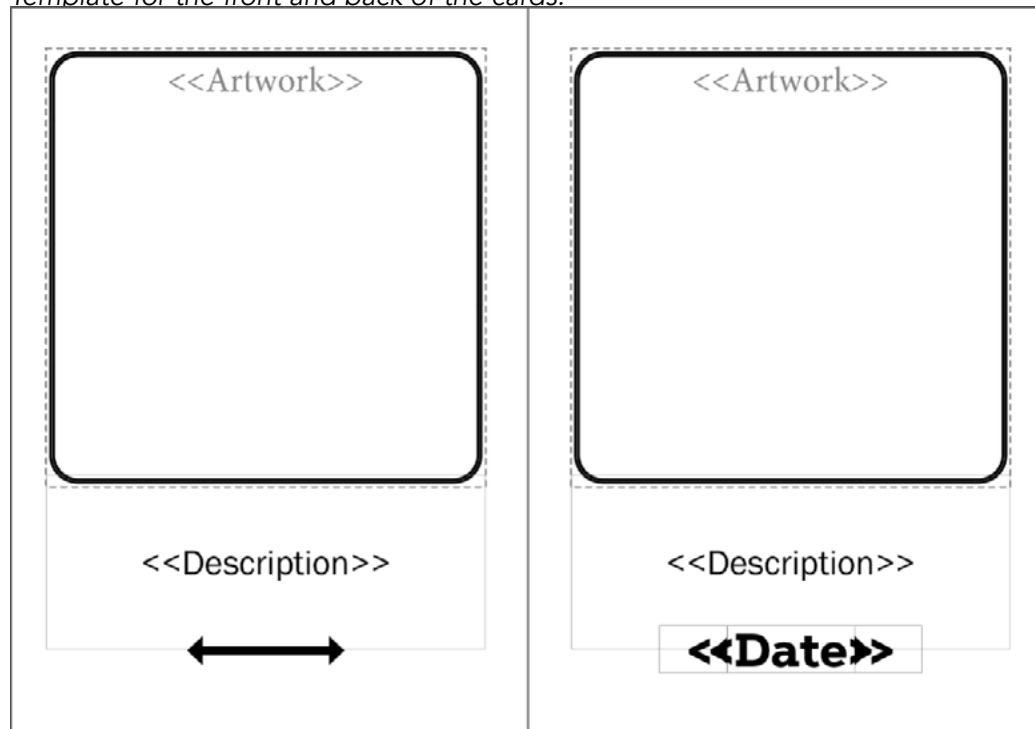
Nine poker-size cards can be printed on an 8.5 by 11-inch piece of paper. Each card has an internal margin of 1/8 inch to allow for ink bleed and paper misalignment, leaving 2.25 by 3.25 inches for the card content. This includes a 2-by-2-inch space for the image. Captions are in a 12-point font, with a 16-point bold font for the year.

Decks were printed and cut by the campus print shop. Both the 80 lb. and 100 lb. cardstock offered by the print shop proved to be of suitable thickness for playing cards. The 100 lb. cardstock bends less during gameplay and may better withstand repeated handling.

For the poker-size cards, digital images of only 600 by 600 pixels were sufficient to print at a standard resolution of 300 dpi. Somewhat smaller images were often still of acceptable quality. Items in our digital collections had typically been scanned at a high

**Figure 3**

*Template for the front and back of the cards.*



**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

resolution from originals that were larger than 2 by 2 inches. If the proportions or composition of the original photo were not ideal for a card, I could usually crop it to the most relevant portion without any noticeable loss of print quality.

Cropping, contrast correction, and other image editing were done with Adobe Photoshop. Although I aspired to historic accuracy, I did alter some images to suit the needs of the game. I blurred anything that would give away the correct year, such as dates on historical markers. In a few cases, I made edits to fit important elements of an image onto the card. The 1975 yearbook included a landscape-oriented photograph of a Fleetwood Mac concert, and I digitally moved Stevie Nicks closer to the rest of the band rather than cropping her out entirely.

The complete deck for the sit-down version of the game includes 63 cards. Roughly three-quarters (49 cards) are about JMU history, including six cards about the libraries, seven about athletics or the marching band, and seven about performances on campus by famous entertainers. Of the remaining cards, five are about world history, six are about US history, and three are about local history. Twelve cards relate to diversity or social change. Nine of these are specific to JMU history, such as the first Black student to graduate from the school, and three are about broader events, such as women's suffrage in the US.

### **Containers**

I initially created custom card boxes by using the [Super Deluxe Tuckbox Template Maker website](#) to generate a template of the appropriate size. I added a cover design and descriptive text in Photoshop and printed the boxes on cardstock. These boxes looked good but were not very sturdy. Cutting, folding, and gluing or taping them together also took several minutes per box. This was manageable for the first batch of six decks, but after having another 25 decks printed, I decided to look for less labor-intensive containers.

There are many commercially available card boxes, although most are sized to hold either a standard deck of poker cards or the much larger decks used by players of collectible card games such as *Magic: The Gathering*. I eventually settled on stackable clear plastic crayon boxes, available for about \$1 each from big box stores. These crayon boxes are big enough to hold a 63-card deck, instructions, and a cover card, with enough space left to allow for adding more cards later.

### **Rules of the game**

There were advantages to developing a game that resembled existing commercial games. McGill's *Moments in Time* is similar to the popular card games *Timeline*, published by Zygomatic, and *Chronology*, published by Buffalo Games. These games have somewhat different rules, but they all involve attempting to place cards in the correct chronological order to form a timeline. While it is helpful to know the exact year in which an event occurred, this is not essential. The player merely needs to guess where a card should go relative to the other cards already on the timeline. For instance, a player might deduce that the birth of James Madison must have occurred before a university was named in his honor, even if the player does not know when Madison was born. The image on a card may also provide clues, such as clothing styles, to help the player identify the approximate year or decade. As the game progresses, it becomes more difficult to guess where a new card should go, although there is an element of chance involved. A player may be lucky enough to draw a card depicting an event that obviously happened either before or after any of the cards already on the timeline.

Adapting the rules of these established games greatly reduced development time. With the earlier *Put Up Your Dukes* library orientation game, we also found that many players were already familiar with either *Apples to Apples* or the similarly structured adult game *Cards Against Humanity*. These players could help teach other students the rules of the game, allowing the orientation session facilitators to focus more on answering questions about library services, collections, and policies.

To allow a choice of play style, I borrowed from the rules of *Timeline and Chronology* to create three sets of rules for *Find the Time*: multiplayer with a single timeline (*Timeline* style), multiplayer with separate timelines (*Chronology* style), and a solo version that I invented. A sheet explaining the rules is included with the card decks (see Appendix A).

### **Playtesting**

Because the rules for *Find the Time* are based on successful existing games, I decided to forgo extensive playtesting. I shared the cards with our circulation desk and makerspace managers and asked if staff and student workers could try the game out during slow times. I also provided feedback forms that I collected a week later. No major changes were recommended, but I received several suggestions for clarifying the wording of captions as well as some ideas for new cards.

### **Implementation**

*Find the Time* made its debut at the Carrier Library closing party, held the evening before renovations began. The party was open to university employees and guests, with most attendees being current or former library employees. One room was designated for the card game, with two large tables and six decks of cards available for players. I remained in the room for most of the event to facilitate the game, answer questions, and observe player reactions.

Perhaps due to the allure of hot hors d'oeuvres in another room, there were only a few attendees who were interested in playing a full round of the game. Yet the cards themselves attracted considerable attention even from attendees who only stopped in the game room for a few minutes. Many attendees lingered for longer, sorting through the cards and discussing them with their colleagues and family members. Some even took pictures of their favorite cards. Afterward, the JMU Development & Philanthropy Librarian described the game as "a hit" and expressed interest in using it for future events.

A few months later, she contacted me about offering *Find the Time* at the JMU Libraries' booth at the campus homecoming carnival. This outdoor event, with many competing attractions, substantial background noise (including a performance by the marching band), fading daylight, and potentially breezy weather, seemed far from an ideal setting for a traditional card game. As I had learned at the Carrier Library closing party, people at a festive event also might not want to sit down to play a 15- to 20-minute card game.

Fortunately, I had prior experience with a game intended as a casual, walk-up activity. For several years, JMU Libraries celebrated Constitution Day (September 17) by hosting a Constitution trivia game. Question, answer, and category cards were attached to a large whiteboard with magnets to create a *Jeopardy!* style game board. Students passing by were invited to test their knowledge of the U.S. Constitution by playing the game. I had helped facilitate these game sessions, which were enjoyable for students (one was overheard offering the high praise "That was actually fun") and relatively easy to set up and run. Inspired by the Constitution trivia game, I decided to create a walk-up

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

version of *Find the Time* with bigger cards and simplified gameplay.

### **Walk-up version**

The cards for the walk-up version of the game use the same design as the original poker-size cards, but on a larger scale. The 8.5 by 11-inch template includes a 6.4 by 6.4-inch box for the image. The caption is in a 36-point font and the year in a 48-point bold font. Since each card is printed on a separate page, only cards featuring color images had to be printed in color. Others could be printed more cheaply in black and white. The oversize cards were printed by the campus print shop on 80 lb. cardstock and did not require cutting.

Some of the images already selected for the game were not of high enough resolution to print at this larger size without noticeable loss of quality. To maintain image quality and save on print costs, I chose 38 of the full set of 63 cards to include in the walk-up version. Thirty of these cards are about JMU history, six about US history, and two about local history.

The walk-up version of the game is suitable for indoor or outdoor events. It can be played on a tabletop, but a whiteboard with magnets to secure the cards is preferable. The game should be facilitated by a host who is familiar with the cards. An assistant can be helpful, as cards will need to be moved around on the board to fit new cards in the appropriate spots. To begin the game, a single card is placed on the board with the year side up. The host shows the player a card (keeping the year side hidden) and asks where it should go. Players often need to be assured that they do not need to know the exact year, only the correct chronological order. After the player makes their guess, the host flips the card over to reveal the year. If the player guessed correctly, the card is added to the timeline. If not, the card is added to the discard pile.

When a group approaches the game, they typically prefer to work together. If they want to compete instead, the host can facilitate turn-taking. There is no official way to win the walk-up version of the game, although at some events we have offered prizes for players who placed cards correctly five times in a row. I usually allow players to continue playing until they decide to move on, removing cards from the table or whiteboard as needed to free up space on the timeline. One librarian who assisted with the game observed that most players fall into two categories: those who guess one card then walk away, and those who keep going until the board is full. If necessary for crowd management, the host may declare the round over once the timeline is full or limit players to a certain number of guesses.

The walk-up version of *Find the Time* was featured at the Libraries booth at the JMU homecoming carnival in October 2023, 2024, and 2025. The large cards remained legible even in low light, allowing gameplay to continue after the sun went down. Wind presented a greater challenge. The first card placed on the board immediately blew off, but using two magnets per card prevented this problem.

After presenting *Find the Time* at a meeting of the Campus History Committee in late 2023, I was invited to partner with several campus history organizations for a game break during spring finals week in 2024. We set up two game stations, one in the lobby of Rose Library and the other across campus in an outdoor commons area. Students from the Madison Historians club and Phi Alpha Theta history honor society volunteered to help facilitate the game. The Campus History Committee provided funding to print a second set of oversize cards and 25 poker-size decks to give away as prizes.

## Impact

Snyder Broussard (2014) offers a two-part measure of success for library games: “(a) Was the game completed and marketed to its intended audience? (b) Were the supervising librarians satisfied that its goals were met?” (p.31).

*Find the Time* is a complete game that has been played at several events by the intended audience of JMU students, alumni, and employees. Based on my own observations, the game has succeeded as a form of entertainment, a library outreach activity, and a way to encourage players to share their thoughts and memories about campus history.

When *Find the Time* was first offered at the Carrier Library closing party, I was somewhat disappointed that few attendees wanted to sit down and play a full round. This feeling was offset by the obvious enjoyment that people found in looking through the cards and talking about them. I was pleased that the cards were considered interesting and produced the kinds of reactions that I had hoped for. At the party, I heard many anecdotes from university employees, some of whom were also JMU alumni, related to events depicted in the game. I also answered questions about campus history and the sources for the images. Several attendees were excited to discover that yearbooks from their time as students were available online. The cards served as conversation starters, encouraged the sharing of personal experiences, and sparked interest in our digital collections even among people who did not play the game.

The walk-up version of the game proved to be better suited to large events, and attracted current students, alumni, and their families. While facilitating the game, I often heard players sharing memories prompted by the cards. Sometimes this happened even before they began playing. At the homecoming carnival, an alumna standing several feet away shouted “I was there!” when she saw the card depicting the 1975 Fleetwood Mac concert. She rushed over to the booth with her friends, then pointed to a card depicting a 2008 Barack Obama campaign rally on campus and added, “And my daughter was there! She shook his hand!” Members of the Marching Royal Dukes were excited to see cards about notable past marching band performances, such as at Bill Clinton’s 1997 inaugural parade. This card, and others relating to US or world history, also allowed the family members of students and alumni to participate in the game even if they hadn’t attended JMU themselves.

At the finals-week game break, the volunteers from Madison Historians and Phi Alpha Theta were enthusiastic co-facilitators and helped draw players to the game. Some students were clearly preoccupied with exams and silently shook their heads when invited to play, but others welcomed a distraction from their studies or were curious about the cards. This included a graduate student who had attended JMU as an undergraduate in the 1980s. She told us that she wanted to see if we had any cards featuring events that she remembered. She was also interested in seeing what notable events had occurred between her time as an undergraduate and graduate student. Most of the other current students who participated in the game did not have personal memories of many events on the cards. However, they seemed proud to demonstrate their knowledge of campus history to their peers. I also heard several students express interest in new things they learned, especially when the cards were about past traditions or famous visitors to campus.

My observations provided limited information about whether *Find the Time* affected players’ sense of belonging or caused them to reflect upon social changes during the university’s history. I did hear students remark that they were surprised it “took so long” for certain events to occur, such as the graduation of the school’s first Asian American student in 1946 or the first observation of Martin Luther King, Jr., day as a federal holiday in 1986, but

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

an anonymous survey would be a better way to collect information about potentially sensitive topics.

## **Conclusion**

The response to *Find the Time* has been gratifying. Students, alumni, university employees, and their relatives have all played the game with obvious enjoyment. I have also observed how the game inspires players to share their personal memories and knowledge of history. A more formal assessment of the game is needed to determine how effective *Find the Time* is at helping players to feel more connected to the campus or inspiring them to think about how past social changes affect their lives today. I recently shared the game with JMU HR Onboarding, and structured events such as new-employee orientations may provide a chance to conduct a survey.

In the future, I hope that *Find the Time* will lead to more opportunities for JMU Libraries to partner with other campus organizations. Co-sponsored events, such as the finals-week game break, are one way to build connections across campus. Another idea that I have yet to explore is creating themed expansion packs for the game, with cards focused on a specific academic discipline, athletics, performing arts, or other topics of special interest to different campus groups.

The chronological card game format is easy to adapt and suitable for a variety of different content. The McGill University Libraries' *Moments in Time* game that inspired this project focuses on the items in their special collections. For *Find the Time*, I emphasized the history of our campus. I encourage other institutions to consider creating similar games to reflect their own collections, histories, and communities.

By developing the walk-up version of the game, I was able to make *Find the Time* a more flexible activity that is appropriate for a wider variety of settings than a traditional sit-down card game. Others who wish to adapt this game may find it practical to start with an oversize version. The initial printing may be more expensive, but the large cards do not need to be cut out and can be stored in a folder or envelope rather than a special box. The shorter gameplay for the walk-up version of the game also means that fewer cards are necessary. I used 38, but a dozen or so may be sufficient to start with. Once colleagues or patrons have tried out the game, they will likely have suggestions for more cards. Whether you use poker-size or oversize cards, it is easy to expand or update the game by printing new cards.

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## **Appendix A: Game rules**

### **Game basics**

The cards in this game depict historic events related to JMU. The purpose of the game is to guess the correct chronological order for the cards and organize them into a timeline. The timeline runs from left (oldest) to right (most recent). As players add cards, they must try to find the correct place in time for each card.

Some cards depict different events from the same year. If a card is placed on the timeline next to another card with the same year, then this is correct, and it

does not matter which card is on the left or right.

### **Note on the images**

Images have been edited and cropped to remove dates, improve appearance, and fit the cards. Most are from the same year as the event described on the card, but this is not always the case! Some photos were taken many years later.

### **Multiplayer, single timeline**

- Shuffle the cards. Take one card from the deck and place it on the table with the year facing up. This is the starter card for the timeline.
- Deal 5 cards to each player with the year side down. No peeking at the years!
- The player whose birthday is earliest in the year will go first. This player must select a card from their hand and place it on the table either before/to the left or after/to the right of the starter card.
- After placing the card, flip it over.
  - If the card is in the correct spot, leave it on the timeline with the year side up.
  - If the card is in the wrong spot, put it in the discard pile. Draw another card from the deck.
- The first player's turn ends and play passes clockwise to the next player.
- Continue until a player has no cards left in their hand. Complete the current round.
- At the end of the round:
  - If only one player has no cards left, that player is the winner!
  - If multiple players have no cards left, all other players are eliminated. The players with no cards left each draw one card from the deck and continue playing until there is a winner.

### **Multiplayer, separate timelines**

- Shuffle the cards. Each of the players takes one card from the deck and places it on the table in front of them with the year facing up. This is the starter card for the player's timeline.
- The player whose birthday is earliest in the year will be the first reader. Select a card from the deck and, without revealing the year to the other players, read the description aloud.
- The player to the left of the reader must guess where the card should go on their timeline, either before/to the left or after/to the right of the starter card.
- If the player guessed correctly, they win the card. The card is added to the player's timeline with the year facing up. This player becomes the next reader.
  - If the player guessed incorrectly, continue clockwise around the table. The first player to guess where the card fits in their timeline wins the card and becomes the next reader.
  - If no one guesses correctly, discard the card. The player to the left of the current reader becomes the next reader.
- Continue until a player has 10 cards in their timeline. That player is the winner!

### **Solo player**

- Shuffle the cards. Take one card from the deck and place it on the table with the year facing up. This is the starter card for the timeline.
- Deal 5 cards to yourself with the year side down. No peeking at the years!

**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, *continued***

- Select a card from your hand and place it on the table either before/to the left or after/to the right of the starter card.
- After placing the card, flip it over.
  - If the card is in the correct spot, leave it on the timeline with the year side up.
  - If the card is in the wrong spot, put it in the discard pile.
- Draw another card from the deck.
- Continue in this manner until you have built a timeline with 10 cards. You win!

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**Find the Time:  
Creating a card game  
to showcase special  
collections and  
celebrate institutional  
history, continued**

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