

Chess for STEM: Development of Mind and Discipline in
Study and at Leisure

Mangala Krishnamurthy – University of Alabama

John H. Sandy – University of Alabama

Mary Ann Robbins – University of Alabama

Citation of published version:

Krishnamurthy, M., Sandy, J.H., and Robbins, M.A. (2015). Chess for stem: Development of mind and discipline in study and at leisure. *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, Number 82, Fall 2015.

DOI:10.5062/F4TM784H



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons [CC-BY-NC](#) license. © 2015 The authors.

Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship Fall 2015

Tips from the Experts

Chess for STEM: Development of Mind and Discipline in Study and at Leisure

Mangala Krishnamurthy, John H. Sandy, Mary Ann Robbins

Rodgers Library for Science & Engineering
The University of Alabama
Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Chess is a new and innovative service offered by the University of Alabama Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering for students, faculty, and staff. Two chess sets are available for check out at the library for two hours at a time.

Why chess? It is well documented that chess is a powerful tool for developing high order thinking skills, creativity, and memory. Access to a chess set provides students an alternative leisure activity during study breaks while they are at the library. Chess can reduce stress around exam time and help increase concentration in studies. Students can enjoy the social and intellectual atmosphere it offers as well.

Funding for this initiative came from an Innovation Grant supported by the administration of the University of Alabama Libraries. The University of Alabama Libraries Innovation Grant program is awarded "to encourage and enable library faculty and staff to develop new approaches to library services and operations that can serve as models for other units and libraries," according to UA Libraries policy. After submission, proposals are screened for creativity with the aim of developing forward-looking projects.

Grant funds were used to purchase two chess sets for students to use when they need a break. One set is very large and when played, is placed on the floor in the library or on the ground outside the library. The second set is a more conventional free-standing "table" model, used mainly inside the library.

At Rodgers Library, chess is an outreach effort aimed at creating an intellectually-stimulating and welcoming experience in an informal atmosphere. Many students from the Campus community and the Campus Chess Club have used the service since fall of 2014, and it is gaining popularity in a cool way. When engaging with the large chess set, students stretch, stand, socialize, and play the game. The circulation of chess sets is handled from the circulation desk. A survey form is given out at the time of circulation to gather feedback from students.

Libraries commonly reach out to users by offering more than traditional services. At Rodgers Library, the chess sets are an example of innovation and another way to showcase the library. Engaging users with recreational activities, such as chess, is a desirable and strategic outcome for all types of libraries.

Administrative Details of Chess at Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering

Cost

- Plastic Chess Set with 25" King with Chess mat - \$510.00
- Mega Set Gear Bag (2) (Complementary)
- Teak Chess Table with 2 Teak Stools - \$999.00
- Teak Chess Set with an 8" King - \$349.00

Circulation/check-out

- Shallow plastic container holds all table chess pieces upright
- Barcode for the table set is taped inside the center of the container for easy scanning along with a label detailing what the set is comprised of (# of pieces)
- Barcode for the giant set is on the tag on the small mat bag along with a label detailing what the set is comprised of
- Upon discharging a pop up note will appear reminding us to account for all pieces including bags, anchors, etc.
- Two hour check out with renewal option

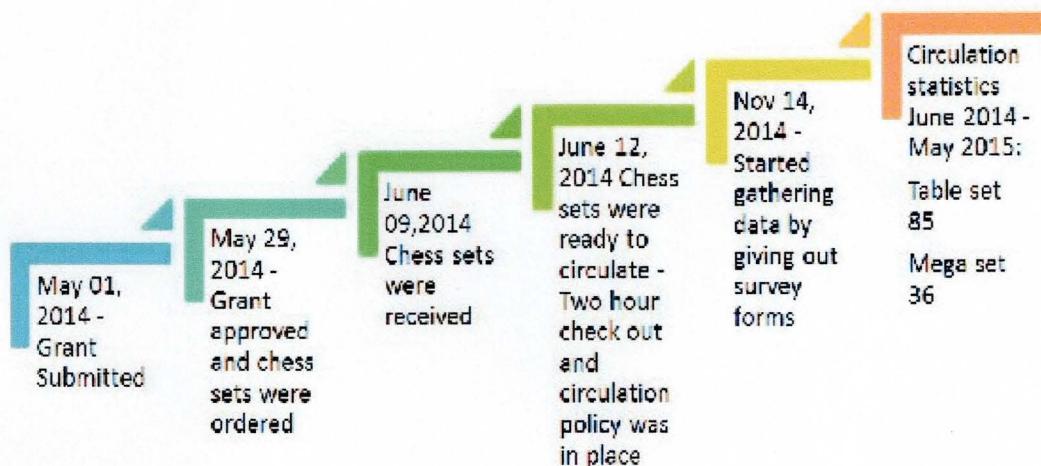


Figure 1. Timeline of New Chess Service

Survey Results Showing Use of Chess Service

After students used the chess sets, they were asked to complete a brief survey. The purpose of the survey was to find out the home department of users and why they chose to use the service.

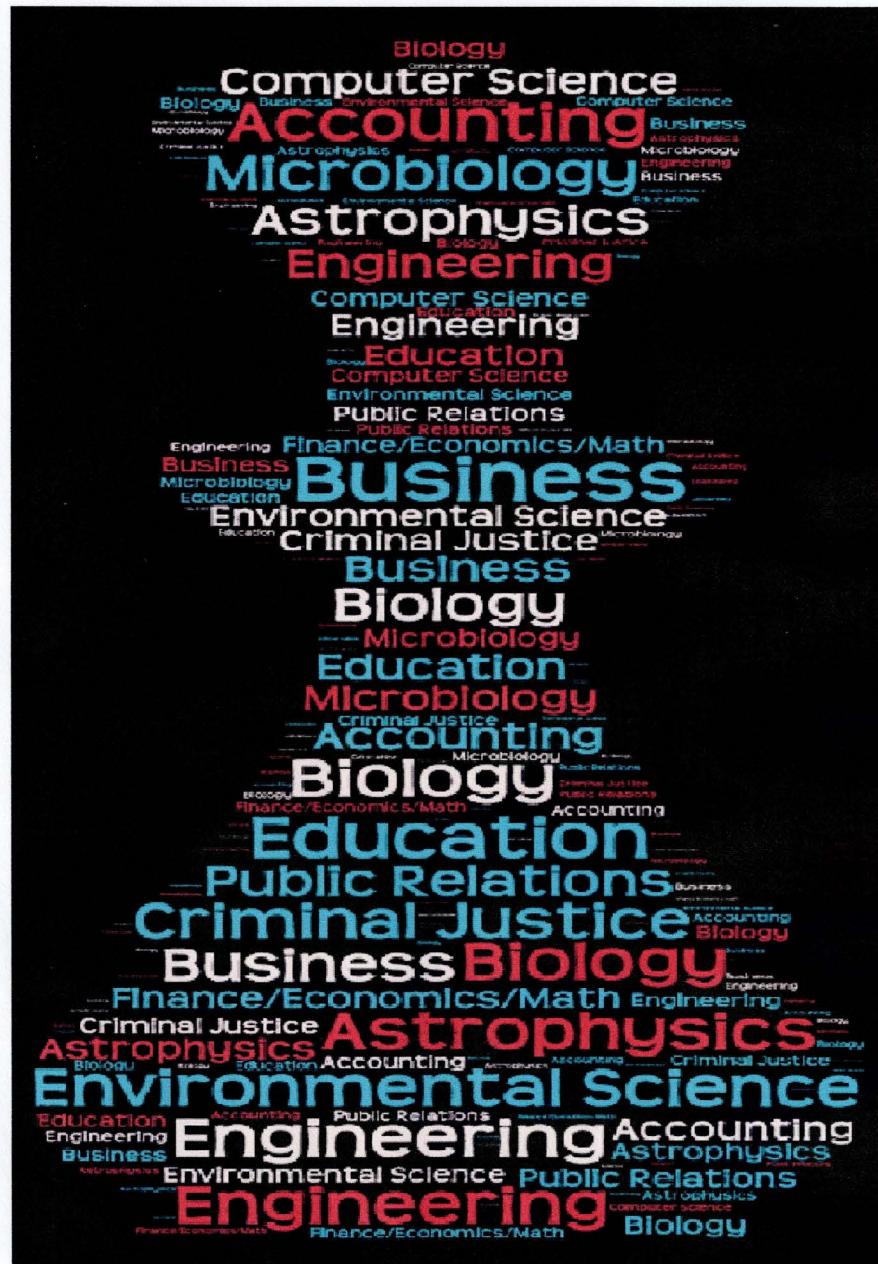


Figure 2. Word cloud of home departments of students and others who used the chess service. While the service is offered by the science and engineering library, users from across the entire campus take advantage of the new service.

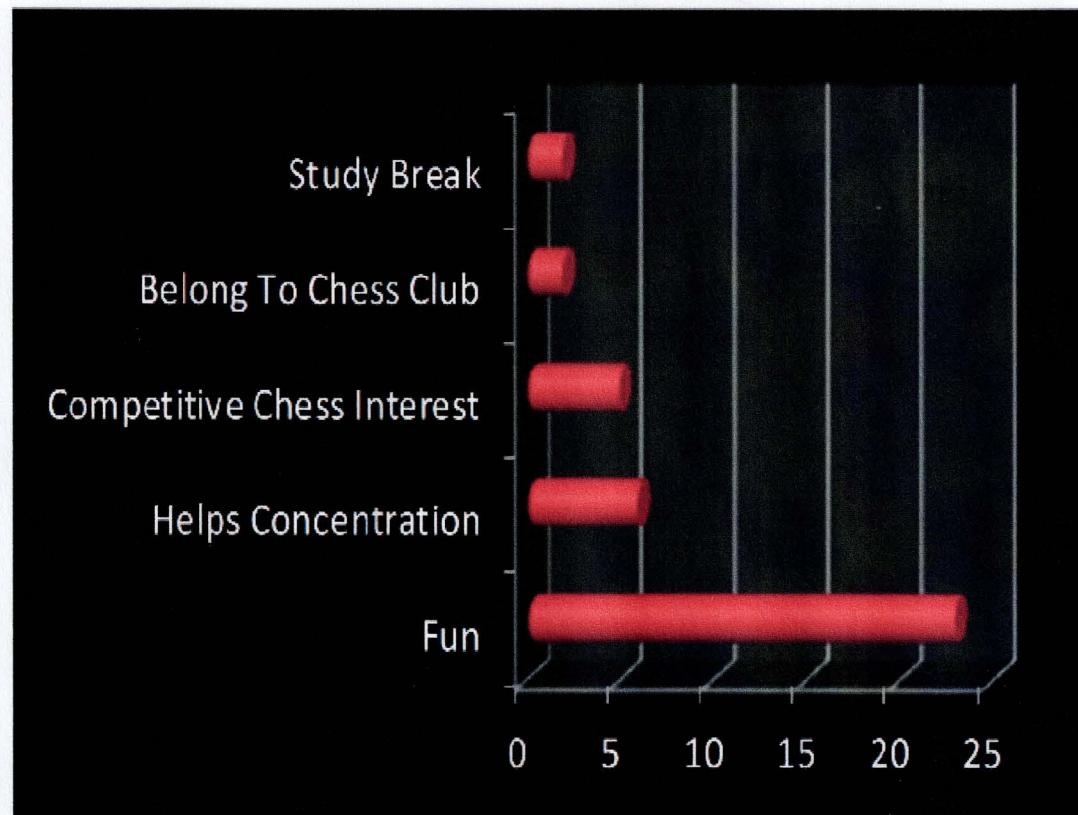


Figure 3. Reasons students and others gave for using the chess service at Rodgers Library

Promotion

Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering promoted this new chess service to the Campus community using a variety of promotional activities.

- Digital signage in STEM Buildings
- Word of Mouth
- Mega set was set up outdoors in front of Library for students to use during special events such as Week of Welcome, E- Day (Engineering Day), International Education Week, UA Libraries Fair
- Social media

Interesting Facts about Chess at Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering

Sets are available 24/5.

Checked out as late as 11:45 p.m & as early as 2:10 a.m.

Popularity of Chess Service

Popularity of chess is slowly reaching various groups on Campus. The following campus clubs and classes/courses frequently checking out the chess pieces:

- Every Move Counts
- UA Honors College students enrolled to teach area school children to play Chess
- WISE Women in Science & Engineering

Conclusion

Overall it was a great experience and excellent opportunity for Rodgers Library to be involved in this grant project. Many professional colleagues in Alabama and from other states have contacted us to learn more about our experience with this service. Students and others in the University of Alabama community regularly check out the chess sets. Rodgers Library continues to promote the availability of the chess sets to new students during orientation at the beginning of each semester.



Figure 4. Two students play chess while seated at the "table" model of chess game located inside the lobby area of Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering, The University of Alabama.



Figure 5. Students engaged in playing chess outside the front of Rodgers Library for Science and Engineering, The University of Alabama

Appendix

Sample Survey Questions User Information

College/area of study _____

Classification (i.e. undergraduate, graduate, faculty,
staff) _____

Chess Set Information

Where did you learn about the chess sets' availability?

- Social media
- The library
- Friends
- Other _____

What is your primary reason for playing chess?

- Interested in competitive chess
- Belong to a chess club/league
- Fun
- Helps to concentrate
- Other _____

Are you an active chess player?

- Yes
- No

Are you familiar with the multiple benefits of playing chess?

- Yes
- No

Additional comments/suggestions: