# Guiding questions

Iterative design and development of a science communication board game.

## Questions for rapid assessment

- If you think about university: What comes to your mind?
- Do you feel that a game can represent student life: in a narrow or broad way?
- Do you perceive the "university" as a welcoming space?
- What could be the worst/most frustrating part in the game and in the university?
- If applicable: When you remember back to your first time on campus – what would present-you tell you past-you? What single kind of knowledge would you have preferred to have back then?
- What was confusing about university?
- If you could change one aspect of the university, what would it be?
- What kind of aspects of student's life should be included in the game?
- Have a look at the figurines: To what specific research disciplines do they belong?
- Have a look at the game's cards: In your personal opinion: Are any events/cards uncomfortable, stereotyped, or minimizing real issues?
- Does the game assume a specific culture/financial background/ability/discipline?
- What perspectives are missing? (e.g. international students, first-gen, disabled students, working students, etc.)

These guiding questions were used when the game was not played but used as a requiste for object elicitation.

Implicit goal: "Get people to talk" and collect a general understanding how the game and especially how the "university as a system" is perceived. Collect knowledge regarding opinions about the university as an academic space.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS WHEN THE GAME CAN BE PLAYED

### Warm-up / participant context (pre-game)

- If you think about university: What comes to your mind?
- What kinds of board/deck-building games do you usually play? Which ones?
- How familiar are you with university/student life? (current student / alum / staff / not familiar)
- What fields of study are you in? Any experience with research/science communication?
- What do you expect this game to be about, based only on the game plan?
- What would make this game feel "true to student life" to you?

The following guiding questions were used, when the game was played by the participants.

Implicit goal: understand who's playing and what they bring "to the table". If the players do not know each other: "break the ice"

### First impressions & onboarding

- After the rules explanation, how confident did you feel about starting? (1–5)
- Which parts of the rules felt unclear or too dense?
- What did you think you were trying to achieve in the game in the first 5 minutes?
- Did the theme come through immediately? What did you notice first?
- What, if anything, made you feel overwhelmed early on?

Implicit goal: check clarity and hook before game complexity kicks in.

Observation prompt (documented via field notes): Where do players pause, re-read, or ask "wait, what?"

## Narrative, theme & "university life" authenticity

- What is the "story" of this game in your own words?
- Which moments felt most like real student/university life? Which felt fake or off?
- Are the characters/events/locations relatable? Any clichés or missing perspectives?
- Which card/event surprised you in a good way? Which broke immersion?
- (If the university theme were removed, would the game still make sense? (Why?))

Implicit goal: does the story land and feel meaningful?

## Science communication & learning goals

- What scientific ideas or messages do you think the game is trying to communicate?
- Can you name one concept you understood better after playing?
- Did the "university as a system" feel integrated into decisions, or tacked on as flavor text?
- When did you notice the research content most? (cards, events, cooperation, outcomes...)
- Did you ever ignore the flavour text/game's backstory because it wasn't useful for winning?
- What felt most engaging: learning, strategizing, role-playing, or social interaction?
- Was anything confusing, misleading, or too simplified?
- If you were explaining this game to a friend, what science-related thing would you mention?

Implicit goal: are people actually absorbing/interacting with the "university as a system"?

## Core mechanics & deck-building

- How would you describe the core gameplay loop?
- At what point did you feel you "got" how to play?
- Did choices feel meaningful, or did you feel railroaded?
- Were there moments you felt stuck or that your deck couldn't improve?
- Did the deck-building create a sense of growth over time?
- Were there any dominant strategies or cards that felt too strong/weak?
- How often did luck vs strategy decide outcomes?
- Were turns quick enough? Any downtime?

Implicit goal: do the systems feel fun, fair, and strategically rich?

Observation prompts (documented via field notes): Which cards get picked every time? Where do players stop discussing strategy and start just executing?

## Cooperative + competitive balance

- Did you understand when you should cooperate vs compete?
- Did the coop/comp mix feel:

    - mostly cooperative
    - balanced
    - mostly competitive

- Were there incentives to "free-ride" on others' cooperation?
- Did you ever feel punished for helping the group?
- Did competition create excitement or frustration?
- Did you feel you could still win after falling behind?
- If someone played selfishly, did it ruin the game for others?
- Would you prefer more cooperation or more competition? Where?

Implicit goal: hybrid games break easily; test if the tension is "good tension."

## Game structure, pacing & length

- Did the game feel too long, too short, or about right? Why?
- Where did pacing drag or feel rushed?
- Did difficulty ramp in a satisfying way?
- Did you feel the game had a clear beginning–middle–end?
- Was the endgame exciting or did it fizzle out / feel sudden?
- Were objectives clear throughout?
- If you could cut one phase/step, what would it be?

Implicit goal: is the arc satisfying?

## Visual design, components & usability

- What components were easiest/hardest to understand at a glance?
- Were icons intuitive? Which ones needed text or redesign?
- Did card layouts make it easy to know:

    - what the card does
    - when it triggers
    - why it matters

- Was the board readable from all seats?
- Did anything look too similar (colors, shapes, symbols)?
- How did the theme/art style feel—serious, playful, academic, confusing?
- If you could change ONE visual thing, what would you change?
- Give the visual design a rating (1 to 5 stars)

## Emotional experience & social dynamics

- What emotions did you feel while playing? (choose all + explain) curiosity, stress, pride, frustration, connectedness, boredom, surprise...
- What moment felt most memorable?
- Did the game encourage talking/negotiation/storytelling?
- Did anyone feel left out or steamrolled?
- Would you play this with your classmates/friends or familiy? Why/why not?