

# PLAY TO LEARN

## GAMIFYING THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY

**R**OWAN MANGAN tells us about pioneering an e-learning game, *Library Quest*, and reminds us that playfulness is at the heart of innovation – and thousands of students agree.

Library Quest is an interactive online game originally developed for RMIT students. In the style of ‘choose your own adventure’ stories, it takes students on a journey from calamity to triumph as they develop their information-seeking skills.

Students interact with key library concepts and services in order to proceed to the next level. In one level students conduct a simple search that demonstrates how the discovery layer differs from Google and, in another level they have to click through tabs to find a clue hidden inside a dummy LibGuide. The ‘Ask a Librarian’ service teaches them that a live chat service is available when they run into trouble.

The most popular activity is the Assignment Planner, which generates a plan for research and drafting assignments based on the due date. Throughout the game, videos expand on the learning material and include the RMIT-produced video *What’s a library database?*

Feedback from over 4,000 students overwhelmingly suggests that Library Quest’s story and humour make it a highly effective and enjoyable way to learn.

I began developing Library Quest when I was the Communications and Marketing Coordinator at RMIT University Library in 2013. It was intended to be elearning disguised as a light-hearted diversion. I thought students

would be more likely to use library services if they were genuinely engaging. A prize draw for the orientation campaign proved to be a considerable incentive. In its first year, Library Quest increased student participation in library orientation activities by 212 percent.

### Students’ responses

‘Lolz! So many lolz! And learning ... so much learning. A good reminder of how to go about research for my assignments.’

‘... entertaining as well as educational and informational ... a great quest which helped me to learn the basics of the library while trying to catch the villain! :)’

‘Makes me feel more confident with my search and I have peace of mind now that I will get more informative searches for my studies. Best videos I have ever seen ...’

‘Super clever way to trick me into learning about the library ... 10/10 would play again.’

‘I actually learned stuff!! ... it was actually fun! :P’

‘Now I need to get back to my assignment which I know is due because of the assignment planner and all the info I have gained using the subject guide.’

‘Very well done! Sweet art, useful learning info and a clever self-referential sense of humour. You really DID trick me into learning!’

### GAMES WITH AN AGENDA

'Gamification' is the term used to describe 'games with an agenda' – games that educate, inspire, inform or promote. In the past five years, multinational companies like Volvo and Microsoft have created games as tutorials or marketing tools, and the potential of games for learning has caught the imagination of the education sector. Still, as with so many developments in technology, hard research lags significantly behind innovation.

In the analysis of Semester 1, 2014, nearly 90 per cent of students gave positive feedback on the game. Comments from subsequent semesters are equally enthusiastic.

RMIT's University Librarian, Dr Craig Anderson, is a champion for library innovation. Reflecting on the impact of the past two years, Craig says, 'Library Quest certainly transformed library orientation here at RMIT. We went from the usual emphasis on classes and tours that weren't always well attended to an explosion of enthusiasm from the students towards the library and its services.'

'Students who have played Library Quest come into the library with the expectation that we are approachable, knowledgeable and tuned in to their needs.'

That alone is valuable, but what's priceless are students' own assertions about how much they'll use our services in future after learning about them through Library Quest. And with thousands of students playing every year, there's no question this will have a cumulative impact.'

In a time when universities are abuzz with terms like 'student engagement' and 'graduate outcomes', the library needs more than ever to be at the centre of innovation. By speaking the students' language and bringing fun to the learning process, libraries can meet student needs while also contributing directly to these greater institutional aspirations.



Library Quest creator Rowan Mangan

# LIBRARY QUEST

ADVENTURE. ROMANCE.  
EFFECTIVE USE OF LIBRARY SERVICES.



### MORE INFORMATION

If you'd like to provide Library Quest to help introduce students to their university library, you can order a fully customised version for your institution. Early-bird rates now apply and you can find out more at [www.libraryquestgames.com](http://www.libraryquestgames.com).

#### ROWAN MANGAN

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Rowan Mangan is currently on extended leave from her role as Communications and Marketing Coordinator at RMIT University Library. She is developing a new version of Library Quest for academic libraries across Australasia.

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