



# CAN YOU ESCAPE THE LIBRARY? ESCAPE ROOM?

*Matt and Alex from Triple J radio playing Escape Room at the Library as part of their O-Mazing Race.*

**O**rientation, or O-week, is the time for first-year students to get to know their university environment, to make friends and to learn how to navigate through an avalanche of information. The challenge for university staff is to make sure orientation activities stay relevant to new students. **ENG UNG and FIONA SALISBURY** let us in on a few secrets.

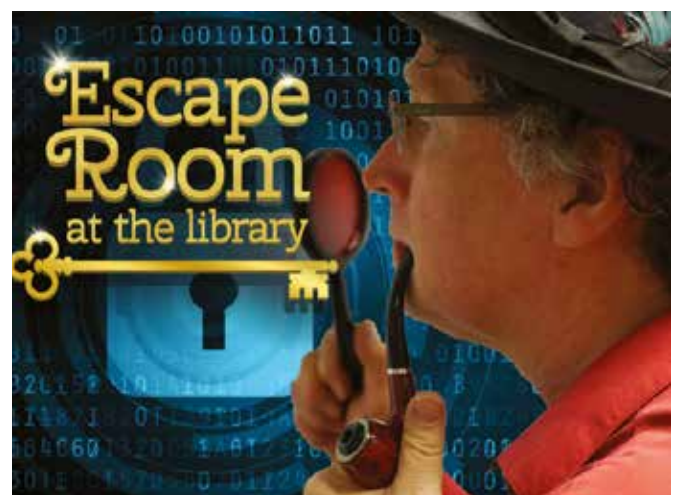
So how does one offer an orientation activity that's fun, memorable, and turns passive learning into active learning? Tours, classes and information sessions are all well and good, but could there be a more engaging, interactive way to help students get to know key parts of the university? In 2016, the La Trobe University Library piloted a new orientation activity based on Escape Rooms, the internationally popular game.

In this live puzzle game, players are locked in a room and have to find clues and solve puzzles to escape. It is consistently ranked #1 in TripAdvisor's Fun Activities and is often utilised by businesses to help with team building. La Trobe University Library took the concept and transformed it into Escape Room at the Library, a blended online and physical orientation game for students who want to try something different and learn about the library's facilities and services in their own time.

The popularity of Escape Room at the Library completely exceeded the Library's expectations. A total of 222 teams of two players or more registered to play the game during O-week and it continued for a total of four weeks with over 350 registered teams. Matt and Alex from radio station Triple J played the game as part

of their O-Mazing Race, which gave national exposure to La Trobe University and the Library. This popularity was an unintended by-product of our goal to design an activity similar to a library tour that required minimal staff facilitation, immersed students in the digital and physical worlds, could be done at any time and which would maximise student engagement.

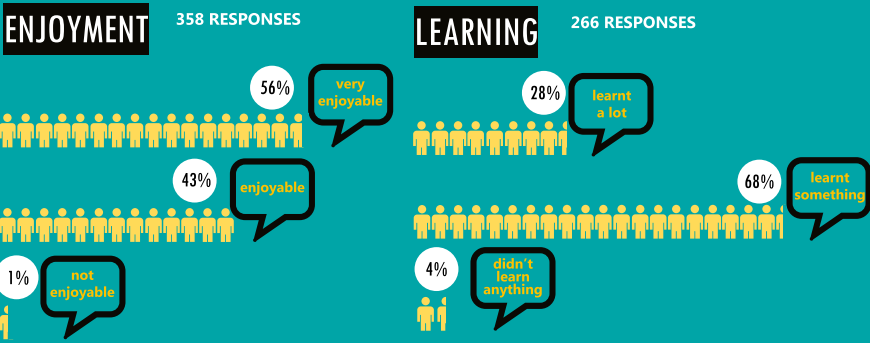
It's not easy to apply game design and theory to learning. Puzzles could not involve any moving of objects, especially as there could be over 20 teams playing simultaneously, and channelling students through the physical library space without congestion was another consideration. Incorporating an online element helped



*Do you have what it takes to escape from the library?*



**LIBRARY ESCAPE ROOM FEEDBACK**



with game design; players used their mobile phone to access online clues to solve four puzzles placed strategically around the library. The immersive nature of the story and how the puzzles are woven into the storyline contributed to the theatrics of good game play.

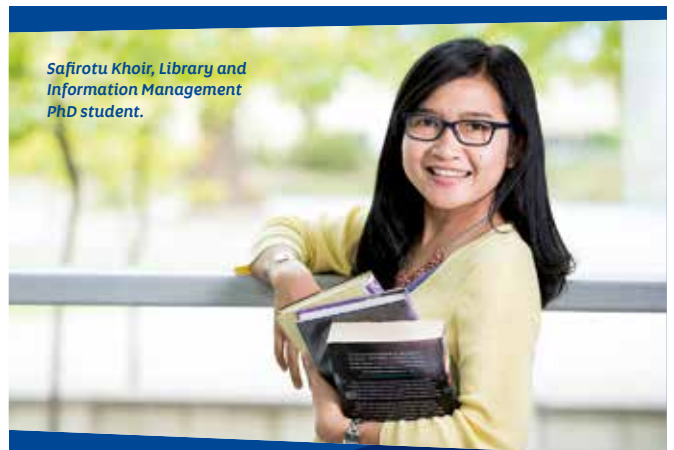
Library staff observations of students playing the game have given valuable insight into how such games can help students connect with their peers while learning about the university. This game has helped new students (especially from overseas), those with no friends at the same university, or those who relocate to study, to make friends as they work together in a fun and relaxed way. A group of students who met when forming a team to play the game had lunch together the next day and appeared more relaxed. The O-Week calendar does not usually include activities designed to help students make friends, but it's an important part of feeling comfortable on campus. Games like Escape Room at the Library can help students make friends while learning about the library in a creative way. 🌀

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