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<https://github.com/JeremyMGibson/verbose-garbanzo/raw/master/118068/773102>

Professional development with Librarians and Dragons, rawr!

By [Madelin Medlycott](#) Liaison Librarian at QUT Library & [Michael Hawks](#) Liaison Librarian at QUT Library



Introduction

Starting your library career, particularly in a specialist library like law, can be difficult. This is especially so if you haven't worked in the Library and Information industry before, as is common with library students who are often starting new career trajectories. Librarians and Dragons is a transferable skills workshop we developed and presented at the New Librarians Symposium 2017 (NLS8). It is aimed at showing new and existing library professionals what transferable skills they already have and getting them to think about how they can use these skills to progress their careers. As new law librarians we have had to use our own transferable skills in order to be successful in our roles and we wanted to share some of what we had learnt with others. This is why we decided to write our very first proposal and become first time presenters at NLS8.

According to the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Employment Trend Report 2017¹, only 14% of new graduates are employed within the same occupation as their studies. This statistic highlights many of the insecurities new graduates can face. There doesn't seem to be many library jobs so how could we possibly get a job in a library, especially a specialised one, when we haven't worked in one before? Even if we do manage to get a job in our chosen field we may feel like we are there by fluke and fall victim to the imposter syndrome. What skills can we offer a library when we are new to the industry or a specialised area?

¹ Australian Library and Information Association, *ALIA LIS Education, Skills and Employment Trend Report* (2017) <<https://www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/alia-lis-education-skills-and-employment-trend-report>>.

This imposter feeling is something we bonded over when starting as law librarians at QUT Law Library. Neither of us had law degrees or had studied anything remotely similar to law. So between the two of us we had zilch legal experience. Nada. We felt that we wouldn't be able to do our jobs as law librarians effectively with such little legal knowledge. But then we had a light bulb moment. We realised that we did have a lot of skills to bring to the table that could enable us to work successfully in the Law Library. Not necessarily legal skills, but other ones we had developed throughout our career and life. We both had customer service skills from retail jobs, interpersonal skills from working in teams previously, research skills from our studies and a willingness to get out of our comfort zone and embrace new things. So while neither of us had any legal knowledge, by focusing on our transferable skills, we were able to be successful law librarians.

We wanted to share our light bulb moment with other Library and Information professionals. By focusing on those who are new to the industry, trying to get into specialised fields or who want to shake up their career, we could show them that they had skills already that would enable them to progress their career forward. Everyone's past experiences have given them skills, that when used and shown off effectively, can be used to become the Library and Information professionals they want to be. And thus Librarians and Dragons was born!

Librarians and Dragons is an interactive workshop built around the game mechanics of role playing games, such as Dungeons & Dragons and Escape Rooms, to offer a different way of viewing our professional development and our professional identities. Within the workshop, using pre-developed characters, players were lured into a haunted library at midnight by the fearful Demogorgon, and tasked to use their transferable skills to escape. To navigate through the quest, players were given tokens with their skills, and needed to think creatively about how they could be used to overcome obstacles as they appeared. Once everyone escaped (if they were able to escape...) players used character templates to develop their own characters/professional identity, using their own skills and experiences.

Making the Game

Librarians and Dragons gave us the space to reflect upon our professional development through the playing of the game, but also through our experiences in designing it. The journey from conception to development was a difficult one at times, as we knew what we wanted players to get out of the game, but not how to get them there.

The first step was figuring out how to play role playing games. We had our proposal accepted before ever having actually played a game such as Dungeons & Dragons ourselves. Luckily, we had some friends who were willing to walk us through the process of playing the game. Through this we learned that it actually takes hours to create your own characters. We needed to develop a way to simplify the process in our own character template, while keeping it recognisable as a role playing game character template.

The character template was a lot easier to create than the quest itself. Having just binged the first season of Stranger Things, we knew wanted the Demogorgon to feature as the 'big bad' and we

knew that we wanted the setting to be in a haunted library, but turning those basic ideas into a full narrative was a lot more difficult than we had initially anticipated. Complicating the process was having to include obstacles with clearly defined problems that players needed to overcome. They also had to be open ended enough to allow for the players to use their own creativity in coming up with solutions. The only way to figure that out was to bring in some willing guinea pigs.

Before leaving for the conference, we needed to put our game through a number of test runs, to make sure the game was clear and actually worked in the way we expected. Through trial runs with fellow librarians and with friends and family from outside the library world, we used comments and feedback to improve the game and simplify how it functioned. We introduced images and sound effects to help immerse the player in the game experience, and created tokens to represent the skills each player had available to use. In particular, the addition of sound effects made a significant impact on the players' engagement with the game .

Presenting at NLS8

As first time presenters we had no real expectations about what it would be like attending a conference and presenting at it. Throughout the conference we found that being a speaker was a great ice breaker for when we met new people. They would often see our speaker badge and enquire about our presentation. This made networking a lot less awkward as it was easy to engage in conversation with this as a starter. As new librarians, and working in a specialist library, we sometimes feel that we don't have anything worthwhile to contribute to our profession, but at NLS8 everyone we spoke to was encouraging and appeared interested in our ideas.

Leading up to our presentation the first time presenter nerves kicked in hard. We kept practicing in the breaks and went to set up early to make sure the technology worked but the nervous thoughts still plagued us. To overcome these nerves we spent five minutes psyching ourselves up with power poses, group hugs with our NLS8 support committee member, jumping up and down and very loudly saying phrases that inspired us. This really helped us focus and get energised for our workshop and we were slightly less nervous than before.

We found that offering badges to our players was a great marketing technique. Swag allowed for players start talking at their tables and after our workshop, other people approached us asking about the badges that they had seen their friends wearing. This afforded us another opportunity to network with our peers, and to talk about Librarians and Dragons. Along with Twitter, the badges really helped spread our name around the conference attendees.

Thanks to all of our preparation the workshop went without a hitch. Some would say it was super effective! This became our catch phrase and helped us to engage with players in the workshop and on Twitter. We shared our Twitter handles and the hashtag #librariansanddragons at the start of the workshop. Players posted photos, thoughts and created hashtags resulting in a fun online conversation. The engagement online was very beneficial to us, not only to further promote our workshop, but it also helped us make connections within the Library and Information industry, which has since led to further collaborations. This has enabled us to expand our online network

and was humbling to see so many people supporting, enjoying and getting something positive out of Librarians and Dragons.

Key Takeaways

Creating and presenting Librarians and Dragons taught us many things. Some of the most important things we learnt were -

1. It takes a lot longer than you think. Just putting our proposal together took about four times longer than we expected. If you want to make something from scratch and put together something attention grabbing, be prepared to spend some time on it.
2. Preparation is key. Doing multiple test runs was crucial to our game development and definitely contributed to the success of our workshop. To make something super effective practice, practice and practice some more.
3. Easier to network and can lead to collaborations. Being a presenter in the conference gave us an icebreaker when meeting new people, and the made networking process less painful. Being on Twitter throughout the conference, and using Twitter when promoting our workshop, made us identifiable. It was a crucial tool, leading to discussions with others that continued even after the conference had ended.
4. Working as a team is ace. Especially as first time presenters, having a friend to go through the whole process with made every step of the journey easier, and more fun. Working together, we were able to come up with an end product that was way more successful than if we had tried to do it individually.
5. It's not as scary as you think. Although it was nerve wracking to present our workshop at a conference it wasn't quite as scary as we anticipated. Our industry is very supportive and your peers, mentors and colleagues just want to see you grow.

By putting together and presenting Librarians and Dragons at NLS8 we have been able to grow as Library and Information professionals. By sharing our knowledge and experience with others we have been able to form stronger connections with people and provide some advice and guidance. From a law librarian perspective, we hope that Librarians and Dragons shows new librarians that working in a law library might be an option for them, even if they don't have a Law degree. Overall, this was a great professional development experience for us. We hope to continue to support fun professional development within our industry and take Librarians and Dragons on an Australia (if not the world!) tour.

You can view our presentation and further details about Librarians and Dragons here -

<https://www.librariansanddragons.com>