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**ALTERNATIVE SCHOLARSHIP THROUGH ROLE-PLAYING GAMES: A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION**

**Abstract or Résumé:**

Research can take many forms, especially in a field as diverse as library studies. This panel will

bring together several emerging scholars as they navigate current Library and Information Science issues through the medium of role-playing games. It is our hope that this panel will illustrate how alternative scholarship can be used to teach and explore emerging issues in the field of LIS.

**Discussion Topic:**

There are many impending challenges to be faced in Library and Information Science (LIS). For example, the ALA has identified future trends such as privacy, changing copyright, automation, and environmental disruption. How are LIS practitioners to respond to these circumstances?

Our panel will explore these issues by playing through a custom designed role-playing game (RPG). The participants will face imagined interpretations of modern LIS challenges by taking on various ‘roles’ of LIS practitioners: the Librarian, the Archivist, the Educator, and the Researcher. In the style common to RPGs, each participant will wield in-game skills and abilities relevant to their roles, allowing them to work as a team, address challenges, and weave a compelling narrative.

Included in this panel proposal, we will use the example of confronting fake news to demonstrate how each of the participants may use their character-specific abilities. This will showcase how we will play the game during the panel session. This presentation demonstrates how alternative scholarship, such as gameplay design, can be used to explore challenges, scholarship, and cooperation. Rules for the custom designed RPG will be made available so that interested audience members can later play the game themselves.

**Player Roles**

**The Librarian**

Chantale Pard plays the role of the Librarian. Chantale Pard is a LIS PhD student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western University, and a practicing Youth Services Librarian with Halifax Public Libraries. Having written two practice-based books for Rowman & Littlefield’s *Practical Guides for Librarians* series, she is now interested in questions that are unable to be answered through practice alone. She plans to research the fandom generated information practices of youth in online

*In reality*

Librarians are community touchstones and knowledge organizers. They connect the public with old classics, the latest releases, and with each other.

*In game*

Librarians start with the widest possible Reach of all the roles, and are able to increase the Reach of other characters through their Advocacy skill. They have a high Credibility score. They are one of the roles that are able to generate Novel Research, though the Librarian’s use of this skill must be balanced with their Public Service skill.

*Example Game Play*

The Librarian encounters fake news on their shelves, in their collections, and through their patrons’ requests. The librarian can use the Advocacy skill, to increase the Influence of another player’s skill, such as the Researcher's Novel Research skill. For example, the Researcher uses Novel Research to create a computer algorithm that can detect fake news, alone the researcher cannot get this idea adopted as their Reach is limited. Through the Librarian’s Advocacy Skill the librarian can increase the Reach and Influence of the Researcher’s Novel Research skill allowing the computer algorithm to be adopted by the public and used to combat fake news.

### **The Educator**

Yimin Chen plays the role of The Educator. Yimin Chen is a PhD candidate in Library and Information Science in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. His research examines the communicative practices of online communities and cultures, with a focus on internet trolling behaviors and the controversy surrounding them. His previous projects range from fake news and deception detection, to library automation, to the impact of political memes on social media.

*In reality*

Educators inform the public and educate them on various issues of concern. Educators connect people with new ideas and provide new clarity of thought. They can often only speak to one classroom at a time, but that allows them to tailor their message to be more effective. Some educators, namely public intellectuals, sacrifice some of that personal connection in the process of having a wider reach.

*In game*The Educator has several abilities: one is to Restore Credibility to fellow players. Another is to use their Amplify skill to increase other players’ Influence. They could also focus on the Novel Research skill and generate solutions. Later in their career an Educator can choose to specialize as the sub-class of Public Intellectual. As a Public Intellectual the Educator has new options, such as helping the Archivist give the weight of history it’s widest possible Reach.

*Example Game Play*

The Educator encounters fake news in their classroom. The Amplify skill can be used here to get particular stakeholders to listen to the Researcher’s findings. The Educator can use Restore Credibility to help fellow players who may have stumbled in their attempt to combat it the last round.

### **The Archivist**

Arielle VanderSchans plays the role of The Archivist. Arielle VanderSchans is a LIS PhD student in the Faculty of Information Science at Western University. She has a MLIS (2016), a MA in Linguistics (2015), and BA (2013) in English and Linguistics. She is interested in storycrafting and communities of practice. Currently she studies bookbinding through the Canadian Bookbinding and Book Arts Guild of Canada.

*In reality*

Archivists strive to preserve the past and make it accessible to all who might need it. They perform the essential task of maintaining records of our past. Archivists also maintain the delicate balance between the benefit to the public and the encroachment on the privacy of individuals that their records represent.

*In game*

The Archivist is able to retain the records of previous encounters, leveraging the player’s previous victories into future options. Mechanically, the Archivist is the most diverse role; they start the game with one Victory to use for their Previous Encounters power.

*Example Game Play*  
The Archivists encounters fake news more indirectly than most, their strength lies in helping the team and their power comes from past encounters that were defeated. For example, if the Archivist decides that their character backstory involves facing a challenge dealing with Anonymity, they can grant their team Anonymity in a later encounter. Anonymity means the players can’t be targeted as easily, preventing them from losing Credibility.

**The Researcher**

Alex Mayhew plays the role of The Researcher. Alex Mayhew is a LIS PhD candidate in FIMS. He earned an MLIS in 2016 also at FIMS. Before that he earned an Undergraduate degree in Philosophy at the University of Ottawa. He is interested in thinking tools and philosophical engineering, particularly knowledge organization.

*In reality*

Researchers pursue knowledge and push boundaries. They discover and articulate new theories and concepts, which ideally generates media for information professionals to manage.

*In game*

The Researcher’s Reach can be magnified by other players. They can provide additional Credibility to other players. Their Novel Research skill allows them to increase the likelihood of success in any given challenge. Their skills are particularly reliant on cooperating with the rest of the team to be successful. Successful applications of their Novel Research skill allows the team to gain Credibility.

*Example Game Play*

The Researcher encounters fake news in misleading headlines about their field. The Researcher can spend time using the Literature Review skill to understand and determine what the encounter is and how to overcome it. They can use Novel Research to combat the specific challenge, for example by creating a fake news filtering algorithm. The adoption of their Novel Research solutions is very dependant on cooperation with the rest of their team. The Researcher alone cannot save the day, but relies on their teammates to amplify, or advocate for greater reach.

**The Game Master**

kirstyn seanor plays the role of The Game Master and acts as the panel moderator . kirstyn seanor is a PhD candidate in Library and Information Science in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western University. Their dissertation work on the user tagging of pornography centres virtual artefacts - such as user tags and website design elements - as evidence of trends in sexual content, user behaviours, and popular discourses.

Like in many Role-Playing Games a game master (GM) is required. The GM’s role is to facilitate the game by playing the part of the encounters, the stakeholders, and in creating the world in which the game play happens. A game master is in some ways very similar to a traditional moderator. They ask the panel participants to focus on a particular issue for a period of time, they try to elicit novel and interesting responses to the issues of the day, and they are responsible for maintaining a semblance of order. GMs are also unlike traditional moderators in a couple of important ways. They tell the players the consequences of their actions within the game world. They have final say over the legality of a player’s actions. And, on those occasions when the players are busy consulting with each other the GM will take this time to address the audience about some of the facts of the encounter at hand. Our in-game GM will tell the story of our brave adventures as they journey on their simulated career paths.