

ARGOSI: Alternate Reality Games for Orientation, Socialisation and Induction

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Running from September 2008 to March 2009, the JISC-funded ARGOSI project used an Alternate Reality Game (ARG) to support the student induction process, with a particular focus on library and information skills. An ARG is a form of blended games-based learning, which combines a series of challenges, an underlying narrative, and a collaborative community to deliver activities. This small-scale pilot was a collaboration between MMU and the University of Bolton and aimed to provide an engaging and purposeful alternative to traditional methods of introducing students to university life. This article documents the ARGOSI project and outcomes.

ARGOSI had four key objectives:

1. to enable students to meet the intended learning outcomes of the library and InfoSkills level one;
2. to create social networks during the induction period;
3. to improve student confidence in navigating the city and university campus;
4. to encourage students to engage in, and enjoy, the induction experience.

In addition to the initial funding to develop and pilot the game, the project was awarded extension funding for additional dissemination work in collaboration with the MMU LearnHigher Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in Information Literacy and The Centre for Research in Library and Information Management (CERLIM). This involved the production of a manual and workshop, which enables teams at other universities to reuse and more easily develop their own ARGs reflecting their locality and areas of curriculum interest. The following outputs are currently being produced for course teams or other groups with an interest in running an ARG of their own:

1. A handbook/resource kit enabling other teams to develop and run ARGs in their local area. This focuses on:
 - a. How to redesign the ARGOSI narrative, orientation and socialisation tasks for a different city.
 - b. Developing challenges and resources for additional learning outcomes.
 - c. Technical implementation options.
 - d. Guidance and recommendations for facilitating games of this type.
2. A workshop for teams wanting to implement the ARGOSI model.

As part of the extension funding, workshops are currently being delivered to five other CETLs (Manchester, Liverpool Hope,

London Metropolitan, Leeds and Bradford and Bournemouth) following a 'train the trainer' model. The aim of these workshops is not only to encourage development and deployment of the ARG, but to build further banks of learning outcome sets that can be reused elsewhere. The ARGOSI project responds to many of the weaknesses in the 'traditional' induction process for new students. Induction is typically an extremely intensive first few weeks where students are overloaded with information from across the University. This information often lacks any real context because their studies have not really begun. The HEA funded Shock Absorber project indicates that, "being overwhelmed by induction" along with isolation are some of "the most common causes of student drop out in the early stages of undergraduate programmes." (MMU, 2007). Many social activities are heavily alcohol-focussed, according to the University of Leeds:

"student culture resolves around drinking. Pubs, clubs and house parties were forums for social interactions and networking, providing students with a means to create their own social capital ... Drinking to meet people often starts in first year, when many students are trying to establish themselves within a new group of friends." (Carpenter *et al*, 2007).