



The evolution of a story-driven, puzzle-intensive, competitive library orientation through design, revision, reflection, further redesign, and success

Original Design (2018-2020)

Overview

In 2018, librarians at Longwood University decided to create a new orientation activity for new students. Modeled on an escape room, our initial design was complex and challenging, attributes that we found exciting. Unfortunately, many students quickly became discouraged by the difficulty and gave up. Contrary to our goal of relieving library anxiety, we had increased student struggles with cognitive load. Coupled with low turn-out, Expedition Library needed a reboot.

Program Learning Objectives

- By the end of this activity students will be able to:
- Navigate the library easily
 - Locate service points
 - Locate study spaces
- Identify resources within the library
 - Find a print book by call number
 - Locate specific collections
- Ask for help from staff and librarians

Design

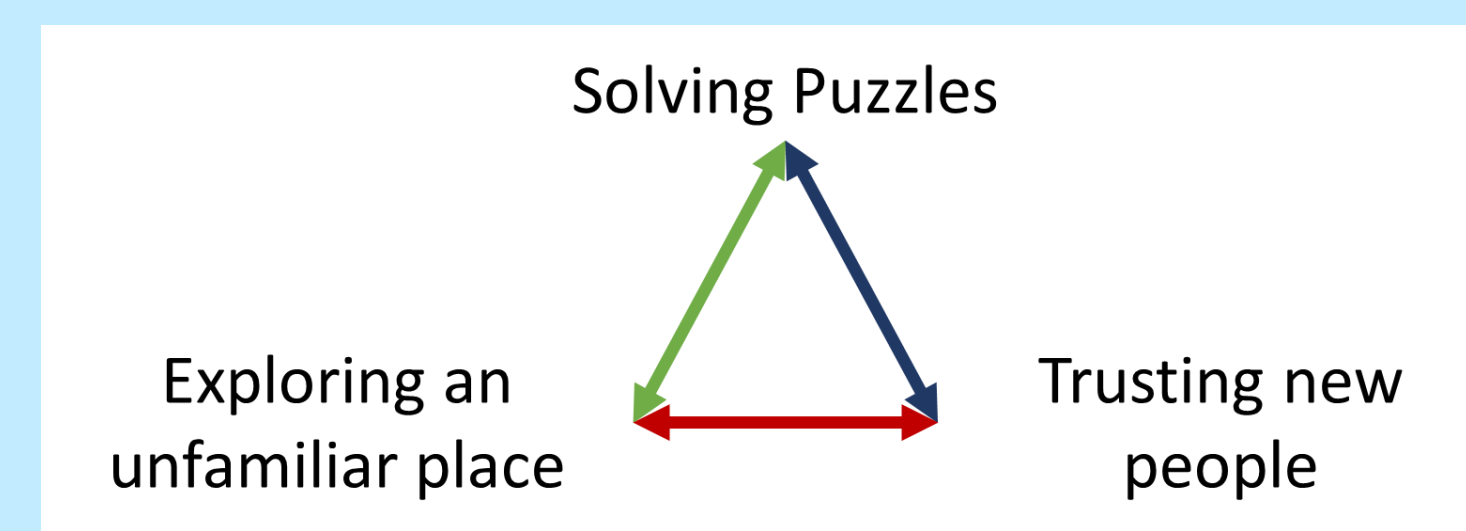
- Complex (and Fun!)
- 6 locks on 3 boxes
- 7 clues and puzzles
- Multiple steps & variety of tools
- Up to 1 hour to complete

Marketing

- Student groups, voluntary participation
- Revised —> campus-wide competition

Challenges

- Overburdened student cognitive load



- Substantial downtime/waiting for groups to finish
- Little or no time for discussion or assessment
- Solving puzzles preferred over comprehension
- Poor attendance
- Time intensive set-up and break-down for librarians



Redesign (2021-2022)

Specific

- 5 clearly defined activities
- Straightforward, uniform instructions



Watch our video introduction

Measurable

- Visually confirmed task completion
- Kahoot assessment following review discussion

Achievable

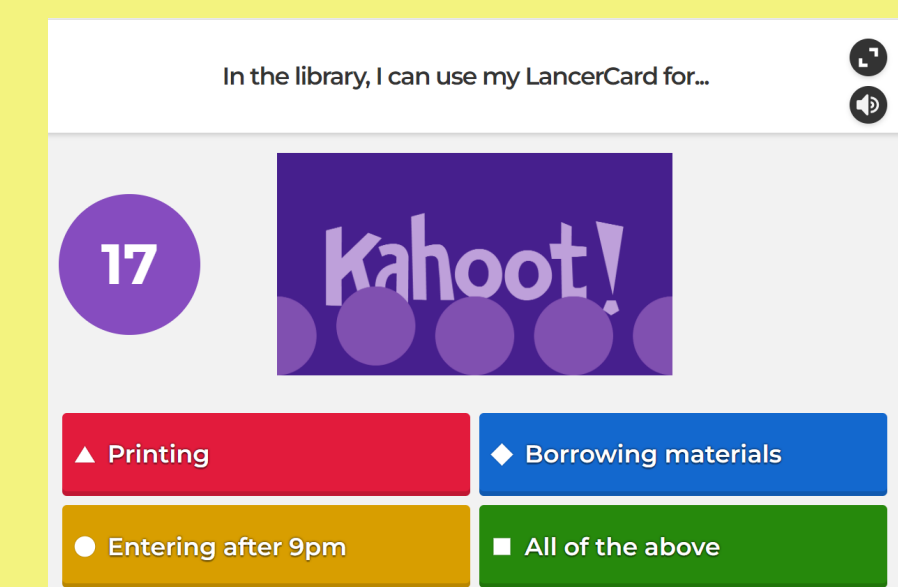
- Simplified progression through tasks
- Reduced difficulty: 5 clues. 2 locks. No riddles. Fewer tools. QR Codes

Relevant

- Alignment with objectives; evident benefit to students
- Consistent outreach to instructors of first-year courses

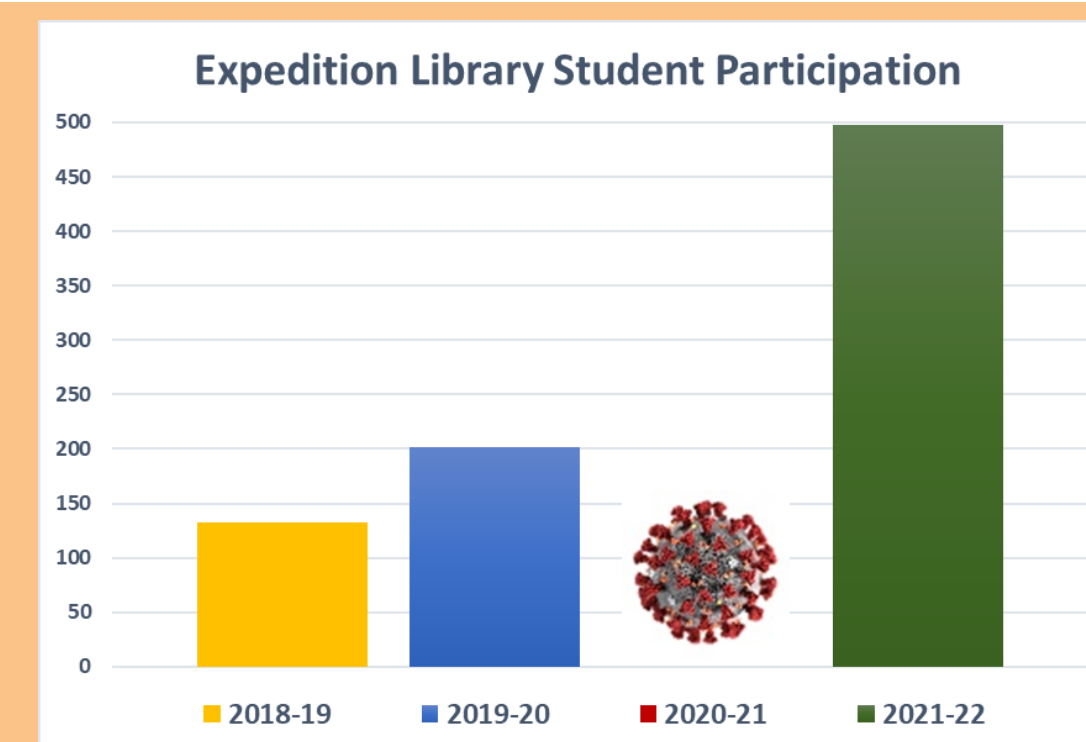
Time-bound

- 20 minutes to complete
- Time allotted for review and assessment



Impact of Redesign

- Increased participation
- Student attendance more than doubled
- Reduced cognitive load
- Participants quickly moved through activities



- Reduced library anxiety
- Increased engagement
- Universal activity completion
- Improved group dynamics

Revelations



- Revisiting objectives is the first step in program assessment
- Kill your darlings! — Loving your creation doesn't mean it works
- Post-activity review discussion is vital
- Switching activities every 10-20 minutes maintains engagement
- Friendly competition and prizes are a great incentive

