21st century libraries face a rapidly changing landscape of users, services, and collections. That landscape demands new modes of exploration. Library users today have an ocean of digital resources available to them, as well as the multiple and varied physical resources and spaces that the library offers. Libraries must now find relevant and engaging ways to teach users to explore these resources, to engage with the collections both physical and digital, and to see the library for what it can be, not what it has been.

At the McGill Library, we are currently re-imagining our library complex with the Fiat Lux project. Now is the time to explore new ideas surrounding user engagement. Now is the time to play, or, as Thomas Hendricks defines play, now is the time to “explore the limits of the possible.” This is precisely the moment to develop new ideas on learning, research, technology, innovation, health and wellness, sustainability, and community—the seven pillars of our library design initiative. As we look forward to a re-imagined library space, engaging design and design for user engagement are top of mind.

The benefits of play and games for children are now well established; less well developed is the question of where play and games fit in the serious and goal-oriented adult world of the 21st century, and what services libraries do, should, and could offer. Nevertheless, board game cafés abound; popular bars are designed to emulate speakeasies; video games animate classrooms as teachers adopt the techniques of gamification and game-based pedagogy; and games, rightfully recognized as cultural products, find their place on library shelves alongside books, films, musical scores. Libraries are excellent at organizing information but have, historically, been less open to free exploration and playful interaction. What can happen when the Library embraces the potential of play and game? How can play and games enrich library instruction? How can we use games to resource and inspire our staff to meet the needs of 21st century students and researchers? How can games and play change the way users/players engage with their library environment?

The colloquium will investigate the seven themes listed above as they relate to “serious play” and act as a platform for scholars and creative thinkers to:

- share how elements of play can inform the research experience,
- uncover how an academic research library can contribute to academic pursuits that incorporate creative, interactive engagement,
- and explore practical applications of play as they relate to programming and space needs in the library environment.