

Academic BRASS

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Challenges Faced by a New Academic Business Librarian

I recently attended my first Academic Business Reference Committee meeting in San Antonio and I was asked if I could share some of my experiences as a new academic business librarian. Having just completed my first year in my new profession, a few challenges definitely stand out.

Technical Subject Knowledge: Becoming intimately familiar with a wide range of business reference resources has been my biggest challenge. Unfortunately, my otherwise-excellent library science school did not offer a course in business information sources while I was a student and so I entered my new job scarcely knowing SIC from SEC or S&P from E&Y. My internships and professional business background helped to a certain extent, but there is clearly a large body of technical knowledge that must be mastered before one can ably answer at least fair proportion of reference desk questions. Reference work appears to be highly accumulative in nature: unfamiliar questions often take a long time to answer while familiar inquiries can be dispatched quickly. Two key BRASS resources, the Best of the Best Business Websites (<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaourassoc/rusasections/brass/brassprotools/bestofthebestbus/bestbestbusiness.htm>) and Core Competencies for Business Reference (<http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/rusaourassoc/rusasections/brass/brassprotocol...>), have been invaluable in helping me get up to speed.

The Mechanics of Acquisition: Collection development has presented its own set of challenges with its own specialized vocabulary. Such concepts as “slips” and “desiderata” initially sounded much more thrilling than they often turned out to be. I often think a year spent in a technical processing “boot camp” would be great experience for a new reference or instruction librarian. Although business materials have their own quirks, many of these issues would confront anyone entering the field of librarianship.

Scholarly Output: As an academic librarian with faculty status, the admonition to “publish or perish” is part of my mandate and it has taken some time to reconnoiter the landscape of academic publishing. With some advice from my colleagues and the help of very supportive editors, I have started out with book and web site reviews and am slowly working my way up to

full blown journal articles. I have found, however, that the selection of interesting topics of enduring scholarly merit is more difficult when one does not have a great deal of experience upon which to base “how we did it here” type articles.

Outreach to Faculty: Some of my more cynical colleagues refer to outreach as “romancing the stone” and it is true that our faculty status has not automatically opened the gates to the supposed inner sanctum of our teaching faculty. Our business teaching faculty members are quite independent and relatively few of them request bibliographic instruction or research assistance. Constructing a network of good working relationships is a slow process based on trust earned through positive experiences. Clearly, investing in strategic marketing and outreach efforts could pay substantial dividends over time.

Starting a new job in a new profession is never easy, but I believe my membership in ALA, RUSA and BRASS, in particular, will help provide me with the tools and support network needed to meet these challenges. With a judicious blend of luck and perseverance, I may yet become a wizened veteran of business academic reference.