

# Academic BRASS

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Monica Singh  
EWMBA Librarian  
Long Business & Economics Library, Haas School of Business  
University of California, Berkeley

## **Evening MBA Programs and the Library**

Evening MBA Programs and the Library By Monica Singh EWMBA Librarian Long Business & Economics Library, Haas School of Business University of California, Berkeley Evening and weekend MBA programs enrolled 46% of all students getting an MBA in US business schools, while traditional two year MBA programs enrolled 23%, and various other kinds of programs enrolled the remainder (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business AACSB, 2007). The future for evening MBA programs is uncertain as business schools see declining enrollments in evening MBA programs due to declining sponsorship of employees by companies (Damast, 2009). Still, evening MBA programs may well continue to enroll a significant population of MBA students and the need to provide library information resources and services to this population will continue.

At the University of California Berkeley (UCB), I work as a half time business librarian for an evening and weekend MBA (EWMBA) program at Haas School of Business - Haas also offers fulltime (daytime) MBAs, PhD and undergraduate business programs as well as executive education programs. In 2008-2009, EWMBA program at Haas School of Business enrolled 773 students, surpassing enrollment in the fulltime MBA program of 480 fulltime students ( <http://www.haas.berkeley.edu/haas/about/facts.html>. Last accessed 4/15/2009). Students in the EWMBA program are fulltime working professionals - they attend classes two evenings a week for three years in order to get their MBA. A majority are employed in Silicon Valley high technology firms and commute a long distance to the UCB campus – one-plus hour commute one-way (on good traffic days).

The EWMBA program provides exceptional student services to allow their student population to focus exclusively on their academic career – services that are not provided to students in regular programs. Services such as purchasing and delivering textbooks, recording classes for those unable to make it to a particular class, providing specially chartered buses and shuttles to bring students to and from campus, parking permits for those who drive, and workshops to improve communication, leadership, writing, presentation skills, etc.

My job, as part of student services, is to assist students and faculty in navigating their way through the maze of information available to them and to advocate for evening student needs to the Business Library director. I also see my job as an opportunity to advance an appreciation of the value of libraries in future captains of industry, and in UCB faculty and administration. I work 4 evenings a week from 3-9pm, Monday-Thursday, to provide librarian support to the EWMBA program.

The Business Library is part of the University Library and is open 72 hours per week during Spring and Fall semesters, with reduced hours between semesters and during the summer. There are two fulltime librarians in addition to myself (.5FTE), two fulltime library staff, and over a dozen student employees. The Business Library is located in the Haas Business School building, though they are separate entities administratively, operationally and budget-wise.

The library's information environment is vast and labyrinthine – even to the initiated regular user it can be daunting at times. UCB libraries hold over 10 million volumes – in addition, the library subscribes to numerous databases to support research and study in its 130 academic departments. There are two major and several minor library catalogs of holdings for all the libraries and collections at UC Berkeley. The Business library houses over 150,000 volumes and an extensive microfiche collection. In addition, the Business library lists 96 relevant databases on its Complete List of Business Databases page ([http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/BUSI/databases\\_A-Z.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/BUSI/databases_A-Z.html)) - 23 databases are available in a menu of Most Frequently Used databases. In academic research business libraries, collections must cover all aspects of business and industry to serve research needs of faculty and doctoral students, MBA and undergraduate business students – thus our rather large collection of both digital and print.

As an academic librarian my mission is to ensure that students are information literate – that they develop a process for locating relevant information, can find key resources in their fields, develop a thoughtful and critical approach to using information resources, and are reasonably knowledgeable about negotiating their way through a complex information environment. As librarian for the EWMBA program, my mission is to ease students' library experience while they become information literate. This means providing as much handholding as a student needs to use the library, much as I would in a public library environment.

It is particularly vexing to students and faculty that the business information environment is fragmented across numerous databases from different vendors, each with its own user interface, with significant overlapping coverage. 10 years ago, our library had a short list of less than 10 most popular databases – a specialized investment analyst reports database, a marketing reports database, a company information database, a business periodicals database, a business news database, a general news database, a country information database, and an economics periodicals index database. Today, we have 23 databases listed in the Most Popular Databases menu.

Each database has its strengths and quirks – for example, one database vendor provides coverage of a major business magazine such as The Economist as soon as it is published, another lags for several days. One provides full text coverage for Harvard Business Review and abstracts of the Wall Street Journal, the other provides full text coverage of the Wall Street Journal and abstracts of the Harvard Business Review. It gets tricky when someone wants the latest Economist articles as well as the latest Harvard Business Review articles - one has to go to 2 different databases. Or which of the 5 or more databases that provide company profiles should one use? A frequent request from users is for that one database for most or all their business information, and if not, a search across all databases at the same time. “Can I search the library’s entire information space in one go?” – federated search engines that would search all library databases and present clustered results are being discussed at the library system-wide level as are changes to bibliographic services so that information retrieval will match information seeking behavior. Until then, I think business librarians may have some job security!

Students at Haas are generally eager to use their library and to learn more about what is available to them – many choose to attend the formal 40-minute library orientations I hold at the beginning of the academic year and are generally surprised by the range and organization of information available outside of Google searches. I discuss technical aspects of Boolean searching in databases (not yet available in Google) and the use of advanced search techniques available within most databases. Print reference materials are a hit in these workshops and in reference transactions – structured substantive content, indexes and ease of use of print materials are appreciated by the extremely tech savvy students.

As the semester goes on, I maintain individual contact with students through email, phone, and face-to-face contact before classes begin at 6 pm or during students’ dinner break. Students have lamented over the years that as fulltime working professionals with challenging course loads they don’t have “enough time” for a full appreciation of the library.

I also offer 40-minute library workshops on various topics such as Marketing Resources, Statistical Resources for Business, Company/Industry Information throughout the year, usually coordinating my workshops with the core classes being offered to the first year students. These are well attended because students see the limitations of searching Google and Google scholar and are genuinely interested in knowing about the information universe. These 40-minute workshops, however, don’t lend themselves to having a hands-on class. In recent years I have been incorporating some active learning strategies to engage students in a more active learning process. I ask them to tell me how they would play detective and find a key piece of information; for example, I want to find out about e-learning possibilities in the US and need to know how many teachers are in the US. We discuss search strategies for finding information, and I can introduce them to a statistical source such as the Statistical Abstract or Statistical Reference Index, which can then provide me with references to who collects this information whom I can follow up with.

Over the years, I have shifted from showing too much information and too many databases in a workshop to providing less information but seeking more involvement from students and

encouraging follow-up after the workshop. Along with detailed handouts, I work with media services to tape the workshops and make screen and sound recordings (in Camtasia) of workshops, but I think the recordings are a poor replacement for actual attendance and face-to-face teaching. This has implications for distance learning - one needs a different set of media skills to create a successful library training video versus conducting a live interactive face-to-face class.

The majority of my contact with students is through email. With email reference, my first response is to state back the question as I understand it, and to provide highly detailed information on which resources to use, search terms and strategies, and a reminder about off-campus access procedures for electronic resources. Even with questions that are not adequately formulated, I make a guess and tell them that I'm guessing about what I think they are looking for, and the resources to use. I encourage them to respond with more detail about what they are looking for, how they want to use that information, what that information would look like, and to call or email me. Email reference gives me time to think in greater depth about an information need and I can be more thorough in selecting resources. It also requires writing long winded and pedantic emails with details about how to use specific resources – a much appreciated and necessary step. If needed, I will fax documents from the library's print or microfiche collection, or work to get materials to them from other campus libraries that are closed in the evening – not a service we typically provide in the library.

I offer to conduct in-class library resource trainings for faculty, but I haven't actually been in one of their classrooms in many years. I have limited contact with faculty – I send them topical bibliographies for their classes to distribute to their students, and I inform them about upcoming library workshops so that they can recommend them to their students. Faculty seem satisfied with this level of involvement and have not actively sought any more than this.

Working late afternoons and evenings means that I don't participate in most professional activities or trainings within the library because they are invariably held in the early mornings before 10am. Nor do I participate much in library-wide councils or meetings or see other librarians. I see my library colleagues at the Business Library for a few hours every week. Working part time doesn't allow as much flexibility to be away from my primary job of providing library services to the EW MBA program and participating in other campus programs. Thus, in some way, I can relate to my primary client group, the EW MBA students, who are also part time and not part of the daily campus life.

My contact with students suggest that to serve a fulltime working commuter students in part time evening MBA programs requires several things:

1. Library hours have to extend into the late evening – classes end at 9:30 pm, our library stays open till 10 pm.
2. A dedicated library liaison is essential – though students are extremely tech-savvy and highly educated in our program, they also realize that Google and Wikipedia can only take them so far,

and they need library research skills to go to the next step on their research journey.

3. E-resources, e-books/journals, and especially reference materials are in much demand – a small but excellent print reference collection that is duplicated electronically is ideal.

4. Library orientation and workshops are absolutely necessary and need to be promoted by the library, faculty and program administration.

All my suggestions are anecdotally based on my contact with students – I have not conducted a formal survey. The EW MBA program's annual surveys of student satisfaction show that library resources and services are generally well appreciated. I have often wondered if students who noted that they were not satisfied with library resources ever had actual contact with a librarian.

#### Cited References

*Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). 2007. Overview of US Business Schools – Data from the 2006-2007 Business School Questionnaire, p. 16, Table 36*

*Damast, Alison (1/30/2009). "Financial Woes Force B-School Cutbacks". Business Week Online, p4*