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Team-teaching: Trends among Business Reference Librarians

As a second-year graduate student in the MLIS program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, I served as an intern to Steve Cramer, Business Librarian at UNCG's Jackson Library. In addition to familiarizing myself with the business databases and working with students via email, chat, and in person and with professionals on a business discussion list, I was invited to shadow Steve as he attended or facilitated a variety of committee meetings, including Business Librarians in North Carolina (BLINC) gatherings, taught one- and two-session business literacy courses for a business communications course, and team-taught an upper-level marketing course with Associate Professor, Nicholas Williamson, of UNCG's Bryan Business School, accompanied by the Executive in Residence, Sam Troy.

The marketing course evolved from Steve's early departmental liaison work. Williamson had designed and previously taught a class focusing on UN trade data, International Marketing, (MKT 426), which is required of all marketing majors. Over the course of the semester, students work with real companies and try to make an international sale on their behalf. They sometimes succeed! At the time, Steve was teaching a trade-data class and asked to attend Dr. Williamson's class so he could tailor the types of reference materials he presented to students. Williamson later asked him to watch the final presentations and assist with evaluations, and now introduces him as his teaching partner.

When Steve first began working with him, Dr. Williamson's book, *Export Odyssey*, had been in use for a few years. To incorporate the most up-to-date business references sources, Williamson asked Steve to help write the new version. Steve felt that this was an incredible opportunity to assist the faculty member as he developed specific learning objectives, and to provide more in-depth, ongoing instruction than he would have done in a typical single session BIL class or his longer trade data class. The combination of information and application Steve and Williamson could offer as a team made for better learning outcomes just as (Ellis and Beck 298) had found.

TEAM TEACHING IN THE LITERATURE

Team-teaching with business faculty (and those in other disciplines) is nothing new for reference librarians. Such collaboration might be one of several types:

- Short-term limited involvement such as provision of the ubiquitous one-shot class offered as part of a business management course (Ellis and Beck 298),
- Having a librarian embedded or participating in the development of a faculty member's online courses (Kingie uwex.edu);
- Team-teaching a reference plus application course with business faculty (Ellis and Beck 300); and
- Collaborating across disciplines with two or more faculty (Feeney and Martin ucsb.edu; Boudreau and Bicknell-Holmes 153).

Despite the number of articles, which appears to have increased in the last eight years, including a recent American Libraries article, (McAdoo 40), there are no statistics indicating the number of courses that are team taught by a librarian and a business faculty member. Likewise, there is very little about the nature of such courses, nor the number of schools in which these courses are taught. A survey of the literature found no information on the trend towards increased levels of collaboration with business faculty either. Of course, at the institutional level, administration may not know that this is going on. Arrangements may be made between faculty and librarians, with little mention made outside of their respective departments.

THE SURVEY

To explore the experience of a (predominantly statewide) group of librarians, I created a brief preliminary survey of 10 questions (nine close-ended, one open) in which I hoped to get a sense of the trends toward team-teaching among business reference librarians, primarily in North Carolina. A message requesting participation was sent to all members of BLINC, via their list serve. This was followed by a request sent to members of BUSLIB-L, another professional list serve. With over 90 responses, an interesting picture emerged.

LIAISON WORK

In each case a majority of the respondents reported that:

- If they took the initiative, faculty responded with questions and requests for student reference instruction;
- They had contacted faculty purposely to ask about teaching a reference class;
- Business faculty actively sought them with requests to teach reference classes;
- They teach one or more reference sessions within a faculty member's course.

TRENDS

Among the respondents:

- One-quarter noticed more interest in team teaching with business faculty in the professional literature;

- Two thirds have had an increase in requests to teach specialized reference courses for undergraduate business students;
- Half have had an increase in requests to teach specialized reference courses for graduate business students;
- Only one-tenth have had an increase in requests to team-teach courses with faculty;
- Less than one –tenth have written or co-authored books or other texts with business faculty.

RESPONDENTS

Information about the respondents and their work included the following:

A majority worked at 4-year colleges or universities; most of the others worked at separate business school libraries;

A majority held the MLIS, and was hired specifically as business reference librarians. A smaller group provided business reference services in addition to other duties, which may be a reflection of college or student body size;

Less than one-tenth held the MBA (or an undergraduate business degree) in addition to an MLIS. Several mentioned having previous business experience;

A majority had worked as a business reference librarian for 5 years or more; and

An overwhelming majority had taught single or multiple reference sessions within a faculty member's course.

EXPERIENCE WITH TEAM TEACHING

While many respondents noticed an increasing interest in team-teaching in the professional literature, and reported an increase in requests from faculty to team teach, very few had contacted faculty to suggest such collaborative work. Even fewer had co-authored teaching materials with business faculty.

Why would team-teaching be so rare, given the possibilities it offers for depth of instruction, assessing student learning, and creating librarian visibility among business (or other) faculty? Respondents provided a number of explanations, including:

- Too many assignments overall;
- Too many other liaison responsibilities (in addition to business);
- Current one-shot reference assignments do not leave time;
- Faculty lack of interest;
- Elimination of all liaison responsibilities by administration; and
- Business/library liaison relationship needs time to develop.

I let Steve know about the survey results. Why, I wanted to know, hadn't he run into the same kinds of problems, particularly lack of time, that other librarians mentioned. How did he manage to make the significant commitment of time spent with business faculty given all the other responsibilities that he has?

First, he explained, library administrators at all levels relevant to his job are keenly interested in

seeing the amount of team-teaching and other interaction with faculty increase. Second, the professor has to be interested. Williamson was very open and heartily welcomed Steve's willingness to play a greater role in MKT 426. Finally, administration offered a degree of flexibility in performance of reference librarians' duties (not only his, but those of others as well). For example, Steve does not spend a great deal of time at the reference desk. Instead, he actively markets his services to business students, answers chat and email questions, and provides face-to face individual or group consultations. Interactions with faculty for instructional planning take precedence over Steve's other duties, including committee meetings.

CONCLUSION

Team teaching shows a great deal of promise for many reasons. To make it possible, however, the right resources have to be committed: librarians need time and flexibility to work with faculty. Faculty need time to work with librarians. Faculty and administration need education on the value of collaboration beyond one-shot reference classes. New developments do not come without a cost. In strategic management, we like to think that a certain percentage of the annual budget will go to R & D for innovation and improvement. Are we doing this in the library?

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