Academic BRASS

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Making the Business Instruction Work and Improve: Introducing a New Collaboration Model with Business Faculty

In fall 2014, I worked with a management faculty in the Business School in the University of Maine and assisted her BUA 325 Principles of Management and Organizations class. We developed a more in-depth collaboration model which would potentially help librarians better understand their users, find the gaps that the librarian could help fill to improve students' performance and continuously improve their instruction sessions.

Background of Library Instruction for BUA 325

BUA 325 Principles of Management and Organizations is a core business course. The session provided by Dr. Terry Porter in fall 2014 had forty students enrolled and the class had a team project that required extensive research. Students were divided into ten groups and each group needed to choose a module theme, an industry, a non-household name company, an issue/question/problem that the company is involved in and a management topic that has some bearing on the issues and then they were required to write a 2,000-3,000 word research paper with preferably 10 citations.

The Collaboration Model

The collaboration include multiple components: (1) collaborative library instruction session and assignment design (2) in-class instruction on using Business Source Complete to locate the company, NAICS industry code and articles; (2) ten group consultations specifically for the research topics that students proposed to work on, which helped students find their companies and industries; brainstorm keywords for searching articles; (3) student presentation observation; (4) in-class surveys to seek students' feedback on the library instruction; (5) student

assignments review; (6) librarian reflection: writing reports and reflections for further improvement.

The in-class survey was handed out in the last session of the class, which included four questions: (1) was the library in-class instruction worthwhile, why or why not? (2) was the group consultation worthwhile, why or why not? (3) what were your challenges during the research? (4) what are your suggestions to the librarian? A total of twenty-eight surveys were returned and students' evaluation and expectation of librarian support was analyzed accordingly. In addition, about seven research papers were reviewed and analyzed by the librarian in order to find the gaps that the librarian could help fill to improve students' performance.

Reflection for Future Librarian Supports

The students' survey found that most of the students realized that the librarian group orientations could help them quickly get going and understand the project, zero into specific areas of study, and brainstorm ideas and keywords to find related articles. Some students mentioned the librarian also helped students come together as a group. Some students said the conversation was informational and they were able to find enough information to work on. When asked what challenges students encountered, most students said they met the challenges of how to find articles related to a specific topic and the challenges in finding enough articles about the company. As suggestions to librarian, they expect the librarian would be more familiar with the guidelines and know the detailed expectations from the professor and provide more follow-up sessions.

Based on the assessment of students' assignments, we identified many aspects that students are in great need of help and librarians would be able to help. Giving such help would not only improve students' performance in such a report writing project, but also potentially improve their overall information literacy skills. The aspects that librarians could help include:

(1) Help students understand the natural research process, expect the challenges they would encounter during their research and help develop the strategies to cope with these challenges;
(2) Raise students' awareness of their information need; help students develop the skills for comprehensive research, especially for finding different opinions;
(3) Enrich students' experience of using various information sources and critically evaluate the information sources; recognize the prejudice, deception or manipulation;
(4) Introduce resources for writing reports and help students understand how to construct a research report and how to write concisely and clearly and reduce biases;
(5) Introduce citation styles and basic formatting knowledge to students and help them understand when to cite, how to cite and apply proper formats and styles.

Based on the analysis of students' feedback, we realized that following efforts can be made to improve the library instruction sessions and students' experience:

(1) Provide more support for above identified aspects which students need help;
(2) Communicate with the professor and understand the specific requirements of the assignments and the expectations from the professor;
(3) In each library instruction session, clarify the expected learning outcomes to students;
(4) Provide multiple sessions if possible to guide students through the whole research and report writing process.