Just Get a Job!
Collaborating with the Campus Career Center

Elise Ferer*

For many students and parents the mark of a successful college education is the ability to successfully find a job and enter the workforce shortly after graduation. At the same time, Project Information Literacy and other studies have identified that employers value information literacy skills in their employees and in recent college graduates they hire.[1] Librarians know that current students and alumni are using information literacy skills in searching for, applying to, and interviewing for jobs and that these skills can make them more successful in this process. Considering this information raises many questions. How does librarian-led information literacy programming impact the information literacy skills that students and recent graduates bring into the workforce with them? Should librarians be addressing more than the information skills required for successful academic work? And how can librarians work with campus partners to help students develop information literacy skills that can be used in job search and career exploration?

Librarians understand the value of information literacy skills and lifelong learning in the workplace, the value of which has been recently confirmed by studies done by Project Information Literacy and Hart Associates. Having determined that employers value the abilities of their employees to obtain and process information,[2] Project Information Literacy has observed that recent graduates lack persistence in the search process, rely heavily on conducting simple online searches, and often do not extend their search for information past their computer screen to traditional information seeking, such as asking a coworker or expert.[3] It is valuable to note that Project Information Literacy only included employers during the early qualitative data gathering and that it is based on the perceptions of both students and employers.

Hart Associates conducted a study of employers of higher education graduates and current college students on workplace readiness.[4] Of the employers, 85% rated critical thinking and analytical skills as very important[5] and 68% rated skills in locating, organizing, and evaluating information as very important.[6] The corresponding college students also rated these skills highly; 79% rated critical thinking and analytical skills as very important and 73% rated locating, organizing, and evaluating information as very important.[7] While both groups saw these skills as very important, they disagreed on how well prepared recent graduates and current college students are in these areas. 66% of current students rated themselves as well prepared in critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills while only 26% of employers agreed that recent graduates were prepared in this area.[8] In finding, organizing, and evaluating information 64% of current students considered themselves well prepared, while only 29% of employers agreed.[9] Like the study by Project Information Literacy this study focused on perceptions and did not measure how well recent graduates are using these skills.

Just as librarians can lend their expertise to research in academic coursework, their skills in searching, accessing, and evaluating can also be used when the searching becomes focused on a job or career. In many cases, job seekers are focused primarily on where to find job listings or the right connections to make to promote

_____

* *Elise Ferer is Librarian for Undergraduate Learning, Library Academic Partnerships, at Drexel University Libraries, Drexel University.*

themselves to prospective employers and librarians can help find these things. But that is only the beginning, as it is just as important to know about the job and the company or organization you are applying to, first in application materials and then in an interview. When candidates prepare materials or an interview with this knowledge they become more desirable sometimes simply for the fact that they have shown an interest in the job and organization and independently sought out information, which communicates initiative on the part of the candidate.

Even the critical thinking and evaluation skills that librarians promote can be useful in helping potential job seekers interpret what they find in their search and what information they gather as they are interviewing. Yet at many colleges and universities links between information literacy and career research is overlooked in favor of supporting academic endeavors. Aiding students at the end of their college career or midway as part of internship seeking can add to the value of information literacy skills for many students. As most librarians acknowledge, students do not learn information literacy skills from a single experience. This can be an excellent opportunity for librarians to add to information literacy education as well as another way to help students see the value of information literacy skills, especially if a student fails to see the value of research in an academic setting.

Academic libraries have become increasingly interested in demonstrating how library programs and services contribute to student success. College and university leaders generally consider high employment rates of recent graduates to be a strong indicator of student success. Through information literacy programming, libraries are teaching and promoting skills that studies have shown graduates will need to be successful in the workforce. How can libraries help students apply information literacy skills in job search? How can the value of this work be communicated to others? And how can libraries work with campus partners, such as the career center or career counselors to prepare students for the workforce?

Drexel University, a private research university enrolling over 15,000 undergraduates, has a strong cooperative education program with over ninety percent of undergraduates completing at least one six-month work experience, co-op, during their undergraduate career. Because of the co-op program, Drexel tends to draw students who are more focused on prospective career paths and the practicality of their education than students at other institutions. Drexel University Libraries has a long-established collaboration with the university's Steinbright Career Development Center (SCDC). Additionally, students complete a co-op 101 course before they begin their search for their first co-op. With Drexel's focus on co-operative education and the large number of staff at SCDC (which students use to find co-ops as well as jobs after graduation) the library has a longstanding relationship with SCDC.

In the recent past, Drexel University Libraries and SCDC split a staff position, which did not require a Master's degree but was filled by a graduate student enrolled in Drexel's MLIS program. This position was responsible for the Libraries' career collection (physical and virtual), conducting workshops on job search, and meeting one on one with students about job search. When this position lost funding, some of these duties returned to SCDC, namely running workshops, and the Libraries' Librarian for Undergraduate Learning absorbed the liaison activities and maintenance of the career collection, and the subject liaisons took on more reference queries about job or co-op search.

Collaboration and developing relationships have become more important after the joint staff position was lost. As a result, both units continue to work to find better ways to collaborate and serve students. New opportunities have developed in the current climate based on several different factors. The most important factor has been the people; both units are staffed by people who are willing to work together and maintain flexibility, which in turn allows the relationship to grow and expand into new services and improvements. The libraries have used specific strategies to collaborate with and outreach to both SCDC staff and students who are looking for co-op or

full time employment. Some of the strategies that have been successful have been deliberate, such as developing and maintaining resources collaboratively, communication and regular meetings, and educational interventions. Some strategies have been the product of unforeseen opportunities, such as a joint assessment project and new database.

The Librarian for Undergraduate Learning also serves as liaison to the First Year Writing Program, a three-course series that each first-year student completes. The Libraries' information literacy programming for undergraduates begins in the First Year Writing Program under the leadership of the Librarian for Undergraduate Learning and is continued in the majors, under the leadership of the discipline-specific liaison librarians.

Both SCDC and the Libraries support current students with resources to help them succeed in their education and then later as a Drexel graduate. Although the units have different approaches to programming, they have found common ground and ways to complement each other, especially provision of information resources for job search and virtual resources such as library guides. Some may see SCDC and Libraries as supplementary support services, since they provide services across disciplines and these services and resources are not mandated for use by students. Like SCDC the Libraries support recent graduates, though database usage is restricted depending on vendors librarians try to offer as many of the same resources to alumni that are available to current students. Recent graduates are encouraged to use library guides, which include a large number of free resources for career exploration and development and have been reviewed by SCDC to provide timely and authoritative information for each field. Looking at the similarities in what students are offered and how they can be better served has helped foster collaboration and partnership. Some of the results and the qualities that aided the results are discussed throughout the remainder of this paper.

When the current librarian for undergraduate learning started in December 2014, they were introduced to a staff member from SCDC who would become the designated liaison. While the staff member would change, having a designated liaison has been important, as there are over forty staff members in SCDC.[10] Working with and specifically meeting on a quarterly basis the designated liaison(s) have allowed the librarian to keep resources on the career guides current, develop new guides and resources, conduct assessment, and brainstorm new ways to reach students as they prepare for co-op and/or job search. The career guides are the most used and successful way for librarians to assist students with job and career exploration. Currently, the libraries maintain 48 guides on their LibGuides platform that are exclusively related to job search. As of December 1, 2016, these guides have been viewed a total of 5639 times since they were moved to the LibGuides platform in 2014 and they are promoted as the first point of contact for the Libraries when being referred to SCDC. This is for a number of reasons, mostly due to the physical distance between the Libraries and SCDC and that fact that most of the Libraries' resources do not require special training in order to use them and there is no requirement that students wait to meet with a librarian to use the resources. Librarians especially do not want to create an extra step or barrier to resources that can help students. SCDC and the Libraries have created videos and tutorials that will walk students through the resources, can be accessed at any time from any location, and do not require any special training. The Libraries has been proactive in stressing that jobseekers should contact a librarian at a point of need, i.e. when they have gotten "stuck" or are confused by the process or search for information.

The liaison relationship is also important to continue in order to refine the process in which students are referred to librarians from SCDC. It has been important for the librarian to continue to promote and define what the libraries can help students with, especially because of the distance in location and time in which students come to the Libraries from SCDC. It has been observed that students have selective hearing when being referred in that they hear that Libraries can help them with job search as librarians will find you a job. Even as SCDC and the librarians stress the fallacy of this statement, it is likely that it will continue to persist.

As stated above, all students take a Co-op 101 course in anticipation of their first co-op experience. One recent result of the liaison relationship with SCDC has been the development of a separate relationship between the librarian for undergraduate learning and the Co-op 101 faculty, which began with the faculty contacting the librarian with common questions they had about the resources for job search that are provided for students. The librarian realized that this course had been a neglected point of contact students and has made it a priority to develop resources, specifically a FAQ guide and a database tutorial, that the faculty can use in their sessions with students or place in a learning management system. While this has not and may never develop into instruction sessions with Co-op 101 students, if this means of promoting and practicing information literacy skills is effective then it may be expanded.

Recently the Libraries acquired Mergent Intellect in anticipation of the retirement of D&B Million Dollar Database. Immediately, the strengths of Mergent Intellect for potential job seekers were apparent and as SCDC had been users and promoters of D&B, it was important to involve them in this change and promoting Mergent Intellect. It is not possible to track usage of D&B for this group specifically, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is important and helpful to those proactively searching for jobs and to connect to specific employers. Based on this knowledge, the librarian who works with SCDC contacted their liaisons to alert them of the coming change and the strengths of Mergent Intellect.

Additionally, as the Libraries began to implement Mergent Intellect, there were opportunities to view a webinar to train staff and then have a trainer visit campus. The Libraries were able to arrange for a trainer to visit campus and hosted a training session to which staff from SCDC were invited. As some SCDC staff had been major users and promoters of D&B, the libraries knew that they would have in depth questions about what the new database could do and instead of filtering this information through a librarian, the decision was made to invite SCDC staff to the training. This meeting also allowed SCDC staff to express any nervousness over the change, as well as connect library staff to those who worked in SCDC, and added transparency to the switch from D&B to Mergent Intellect. It will continue to be encouraged that SCDC have a voice in resources that will serve them and their users and this training session alone created a stronger sense of connection and goodwill between the two units. Additionally, it surprised library staff who had not realized the size of the SCDC staff and increased awareness of the large role that SCDC plays at Drexel University.

In order to investigate the value of the collaboration between the Libraries and SCDC, Drexel participated in ACRL's Assessment in Action program in 2015–2016. This program allowed a librarian to lead a campus team to assess the relationship between Drexel University Libraries and SCDC. Drexel University Libraries' Assessment in Action team was charged with investigating and developing a method to assess the impact of an information literacy instructional program for students who were preparing for co-op, in order to foster effective collaboration and service improvement. This group developed a survey to ask current co-op students about their interactions with the library during their co-op search and then assess their self-efficacy of information literacy skills. From this the team has a baseline for services and self-efficacy in information literacy skills for students beginning co-op.

The most important gain from beginning an assessment project with SCDC was increased collaboration and the resulting relationship that was built from increased collaboration and awareness. While the initial survey gave the group a baseline to begin to improve, the results have brought both groups together to meaningfully brainstorm next steps for their partnership and potential new areas to assess with the goal of serving students more effectively and helping them succeed in co-op and later in the workforce. The most important part of any assessment project is starting and by working together both units can share assessment data that is being gathered and develop a stronger statement of value that is being provided.

In the future, both SCDC and the Libraries want to help students be more informed and prepared in their job search. In addition to continuing the work that is already being done and specifically the associated assessment, both groups have identified potential new pathways to assist students. From our most recent assessment it can be inferred that students are not necessarily using the Libraries as a career resource. While there are many potential reasons for this, raising visibility and promoting library services, especially in ways that do not create extra work or pull from other resources, is a good idea. An easy touch point that students go through during the co-op process is meeting with their co-op coordinators, all students meet with their coordinator at least once. The Libraries would like to publicize the support they offer during this meeting by administering a paper survey that students can fill out while their coordinator is working on paperwork or reviewing a resume. This survey is currently being planned to begin during the next co-op cycle in April 2017 and will be used to gather simple data about awareness of resources, while at the same time alerting students to the existence of such resources.

There are also segments of the co-op population who have been identified as potential pathways for library interventions, the first being the segment of students who begin their co-op term without a co-op placement. These are students who are scheduled to start a co-op, but fail to find one before their co-op is slated to begin. These students continue to look for co-op placements and complete a specific curriculum that is delivered through a learning management system. While it is not in progress at the time of writing, the libraries have a potential opportunity to develop interventions specifically for this population and assess the effectiveness of the interventions.

Just like any collaboration, both units can be strengthened and pool their resources by working together. Due to the research aspect of job search and career exploration and the shared value of promoting student success librarians can develop a natural partnership with career services on campus, providing that both units are interested and can cultivate a good working relationship. It is worth mentioning that this relationship can be work in itself and just like any campus partnership it requires the partners to leave their associated areas and develop new habits. It can be argued that such a partnership can make both units more valuable and improve the student experience as well as their success post-graduation. The successes at Drexel University in these areas is due to a combination of factors: the collegiality of both units, shared goals, and the career focus of the students and the institution. The Libraries has used these factors to their advantage and has worked to create goodwill with their partners in SCDC, which in turn should be effective in creating graduates who are more likely to have the information literacy skills that employers desire.

Notes

1. Hart Research Associates, "Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success," *American Association of Colleges and Universities*, last modified, 2015, https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research/2015-survey-results., Allison J. Head, "Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace," *Project Information Literacy*, last modified October 15, 2012, http://www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2012_workplacestudy_fullreport-1.pdf.; Alison J. Head, Michele Van Hoeck, Jordan Eschler, and Sean Fullerton, "What Information Competencies Matter in Today's Workplace?," *Library and Information Research* 37, no. 114 (2013):74–104, http://www.lirjournal.org.uk/lir/ojs/index.php/lir/article/view/557.
2. Allison J. Head, "Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace," *Project Information Literacy*, last modified October 15, 2012, http://www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/pil_fall2012_workplacestudy_fullreport-1.pdf., 9.
3. Ibid., 3.
4. Hart Research Associates, "Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success," *American Association of Colleges and Universities*, last modified, 2015, https://www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research/2015-survey-results., 1.
5. Ibid., 4.
6. Ibid., 5.
7. Ibid., 8.
8. Ibid., 12.
9. Ibid., 12.
10. "Contact Us, Steinbright Career Development Center," *Drexel University,* accessed, December 12, 2016, http://drexel.edu/scdc/about/contact/.