

MARKETING EDUCATORS AND BUSINESS LIBRARIANS: ALLIES IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' RESEARCH

Jeanie M. Welch, University of
North Carolina at Charlotte, J. Murrey Atkins Library
Charlotte, NC 28223; (704) 687-2757

ABSTRACT

Business librarians can be valuable allies for marketing educators in developing students' research skills. Through collaboration on the selection of resources for research assignments in marketing, the design of student research assignments, library instruction sessions, and the creation of subject-specific Web sites and handouts, business librarians can assist marketing educators with introducing students to the critical thinking skills and methodologies necessary for successfully completing research assignments. This paper discusses the roles that business reference librarians can play in enhancing marketing education. An example of collaboration in an undergraduate international marketing course is given.

INTRODUCTION

The marketing educator does not have to work alone when attempting to strengthen students' research skills. Business reference librarians can enhance the classroom experience and demonstrate critical thinking skills and research methodologies to improve student performance in research projects. Areas in which business reference librarians can successfully collaborate with teaching faculty include collection development, input into the design of student research assignments, library instruction in locating and using research materials, and the creation of subject-specific Web pages and handouts. Such a collaboration has the potential to improve students' performance in research projects and provide them with research and analytical skills that they can use in their business careers.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

The importance of having access to appropriate research materials in the business curriculum cannot be overemphasized. According to the *Standards for Business Accreditation* of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (1993):

The school should provide and manage resources to meet the instructional responsibilities created by the programs offered. ... Schools with heavy emphasis on graduate programs or applied and basic scholarship must augment library resources, databases, and information technology

appropriately to support those mission elements.

Collection development includes the selection and management of both print and electronic sources. Print sources include such standard titles as advertising rate publications from Standard Rate & Data Services, the *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas*, and *Survey of Buying Power*. Traditional electronic sources include periodical indexes and abstracts (e.g., *ABI/INFORM Global*), proprietary databases such as *Choices II* (the electronic version of *Simmons Survey of Media and Markets*), *GLOBUS (National Trade Data Bank)*, demographic databases, and GIS software. The selection of sites from the World Wide Web that are useful in research has also become another aspect of collection development. The location and analysis of appropriate Web sites involve more than mouse clicking and Web surfing. Librarians use the following criteria in analyzing the content of electronic databases: reliability of the author or content provider, the accuracy of information, the currency of information, depth of coverage, and impartiality or lack of bias. These criteria can be applied to the analysis of Web sites as to their appropriateness for students' research.

INPUT INTO THE CREATION OF RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

Input from business librarians can be useful in the creation of research assignments that can be met through library resources. According to AACSB (1993): "Students should have access to and be required to make use of library and computing facilities."

Working with the business reference librarian, the marketing educator can create research assignments that match library resources accessible either in print or electronic form. A research project that includes the goal of teaching students to do research in all formats would require students to use at three types of resources—print sources (e.g., directories and statistical sources), proprietary electronic databases (e.g., periodical indexes, statistical and full-text databases, and demographic databases), and World Wide Web sources. Parts of an assignment which cannot be done with library-based resources (e.g., personal interviews and surveys) could be clearly labeled. An additional area in which the business librarian can be helpful in determining if a student is guilty of plagiarism. If the instructor suspects that the student has not submitted original work, the business

librarian can check sources listed in the student's bibliography or list of works cited in order to ascertain if the student has listed sources that were locally available.

LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

Library instruction has been a regular part of the reference librarian's mission for many years. Professors who assume students have basic library or research skills may be surprised by students' lack of such skills and by the improvement in the quality of students' research after integrating library instruction into a course syllabus. Library instruction sessions usually are comprised of one class period and include discussions and demonstrations of appropriate print sources, proprietary electronic databases (e.g., periodical indexes), and World Wide Web sources. Discussing and demonstrating resources in various formats in one class period usually provides only enough time to give a quick overview and a few examples. However, it can make students aware of what is available, where to find it, how to cite electronic sources in bibliographies, and where to go for assistance.

Library instruction requires the instructor to give up at least part of a class period, and some faculty may be reluctant to do this. However, a four-year study done at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, an AACSB International accredited institution, demonstrated that library instruction reduced library use anxiety and increased student confidence in using library resources (Prince and Helms, 1993). In addition, the author conducted a survey of students in an international management class on their perceptions of the usefulness of a library instruction session that the author has just presented. Of the responses received at the end of the session, all stated that they perceived the session to be very useful (n=23) or somewhat useful (n=4) and the handouts provided and Web sites demonstrated to be very useful (n=24) or somewhat useful (n=3). They found the most useful information to be how to find articles in magazines and journals, how to access databases off-campus, and the correct formats for citing sources in their bibliographies.

When it comes to teaching the Web, students need to be made aware of the critical thinking skills to determine whether the information on any Web site is relevant to their research topic. Teaching students to use the World Wide Web for research presents its own set of challenges. There are two approaches of teaching students to find information on the Web. The first is teaching them to use search engines (e.g., Yahoo! or Google) by demonstrating the selection of search terms and the use of Boolean operators. The second is the business librarian searching the Web for appropriate Web sites and creating subject-specific Web pages ("Webliographies") with links to

Web sites that the librarian considers appropriate. Whichever approach is taken, it is necessary to impart critical thinking skills. More and more students are thinking that "everything is free on the Web" and "if it's on the Web, it must be true." One of the most comprehensive studies of teaching the World Wide Web to business students was done by Arnold and Jayne (1998). It discusses the practical challenges, including:

- Handouts and worksheets becoming outdated because of the rapidly change nature of the Internet
- Students' different levels of computer expertise and differing learning styles
- Students' difficulties in weighing relevancy and worth of sources

An additional challenge is to warn students about "skimming"—assuming that information found on Web sites (e.g., statistics) is all that is available. Many Web sites mount only summary data and lack the depth of data of print or proprietary electronic sources. Another approach to library instruction used successfully by a government documents librarian and the head of the marketing department at Auburn University was the creation of an intensive workshop and worksheet exercise to instruct international marketing students in using sources from the U. S. government (e.g., *GLOBUS* and various databases available free on the Web such as the *Country Commercial Guides* and the *Country Study* handbooks). The authors concluded that the students liked learning about these sources and trying practical applications (Tims and Judd, 2001).

SUBJECT- OR COURSE-SPECIFIC WEB PAGES AND HANDOUTS

In conjunction with library instruction, subject- or course-specific Web pages and handouts can reinforce the library instruction session and provide students with references for future research. Creating handouts with titles and call numbers of print sources has been a staple of reference librarianship for many years. These handouts can be pathfinders to locating books and articles on a specific topic. Web pages take handouts into the electronic era. They can be accessed at any time and are especially helpful to distance education students. As previously mentioned, librarians who take the approach of finding and organizing Web sites that are useful in students' research have created "Webliographies"—Web pages that are portals to useful Web sites, arranged by category (e.g., demographics, consumer surveys, or market share).

A CASE STUDY OF FACULTY/LIBRARY COOPERATION IN AN UNDERGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING CLASS

One of the growth areas of the business curriculum in recent years has been globalization. Business schools have integrated international business and economics courses into their curricula at an increasing rate. Marketing students themselves believe that international marketing will become more important in the future (Turley and Shannon 1999). The typical undergraduate international marketing class includes an assignment of preparing a plan for marketing an American product or service in a foreign country. At the University of North Carolina at Charlotte the undergraduate international marketing course, MKTG 3215 (Global Marketing Management), includes such an assignment. The instructor requires students to use a mix of sources—books, articles, reports from *GLOBUS* (*National Trade Data Bank*), and Web sites. The business reference librarian created an international business sources handout (also accessible on the library's Web site) that listed print sources (e.g., *International Marketing Data and Statistics*), electronic periodical indexes and full-text databases (e.g., *ABI/INFORM Global* and *Investext Plus*), and *GLOBUS*. *GLOBUS*, a full-text database created by the U. S. Department of Commerce and marketed by STAT/USA, is one of the most important electronic sources in international business and includes full-text reports on business and economic conditions in foreign countries and marketing U. S. products and services in foreign countries.

The librarian also created a portal—*VIBES: Virtual International Business and Economic Sources*—with links to over 1,600 Web sites of free, English-language information on international business and economic conditions (Welch, 2001). The course includes a one-hour library instruction session with the business reference librarian. During this session, the librarian uses an example of a product and country (e.g., soft drinks in Argentina) to demonstrate how to find information in the sources that the instructor requires. The handout of sources is distributed in class along with a step-by-step guide to using the major files in *GLOBUS*, finding articles in periodical indexes and in *Investext Plus*, and using *VIBES* (Welch, 2000). A statistical analysis of the bibliographies of research projects done by students in 1998 demonstrated that by far *GLOBUS* (then known as the *National Trade Data Bank*) and the Web were the most frequently cited sources of information.

CONCLUSION

The collaboration between the marketing educator and the business reference librarian in the areas of collection development, research assignment design, library instruction, and handouts and Web pages can improve students' research skills, the quality of their research projects, and provide them with skills that can be carried over into their careers.

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