

# Academic BRASS

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Published by the  
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 12 (1), Spring 2017

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## **Interview Intelligence: Teaching Students to Demonstrate Their Passion by Doing Their Homework**

As a business librarian I sometimes suffer from tunnel vision, barely noticing there's a campus beyond the school of management. But a few years ago I began receiving requests for library instruction from an unexpected source: clinical faculty at the university's career and advisement centers. At first they wanted an introduction to library resources themselves. Soon they were inviting me to visit their classes. Students from every discipline take these career strategies courses, with learning outcomes related to finding a career path and presenting themselves as professionals.

I soon realized the approach I take for teaching company and industry research in the business school is overkill in this context. These psychology, humanities, and public health students don't need to understand a company the way a finance or marketing student does. All they want to know is how to get a job after graduating. But I didn't want to simply talk about tools for finding a job—the career center already covered that better than I could. For a while I wasn't sure what my role should be.

I also teach a course in management communications for the business school, and inspiration came one day as I gave one of my favorite lectures: "Nobody Cares About You." The point I was making is that human beings experience the world through the lens of "what's in it for me?" or "what does this mean for me?" Any successful communication must be framed so that the audience can see an answer to this question. The point isn't that the person you're talking to is a bad person, always thinking about themselves. The point is that you need to stop thinking about yourself. Effective communication isn't "me" focused, it's "you" focused.

My epiphany was that the career strategies students needed to hear this, and that helping them take a "you" focused approach in their job search was also the perfect way to make the research tools I was teaching relevant. Now I present these concepts to them as "interview intelligence," emphasizing that by doing their homework they can have an intelligent conversation with recruiters, rather than just a "me" focused interview.

(View the infographic: <https://t.co/ePzwJJvPwD> or download a printable version: <http://net.lib.byu.edu/business/6q3s1r.pdf> )

First, I tell students when preparing to interview for that dream job they should research six questions about the organization and its environment:

1. **What or who is it?**  
Who are the people, where is it located, and what is its history, culture, and brand?
2. **What does it do?**  
What is the core business or value proposition?
3. **Who does it do it with?**  
Who are the customers, suppliers, and competitors?
4. **How well does it do it?**  
What is the competitive, financial, and strategic outlook?
5. **What's happening to it?**  
Consider strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Also consider other factors or models, like PESTLE, Porter's Five Forces, disruptive innovations, etc.
6. **What's your role?**  
How do the previous five questions affect the job you're applying for?

Second, to research these questions they should take three steps:

1. **Do the obvious.**  
Explore the organization's website and social media. Google them.
2. **Go beyond the obvious.**  
Anyone can read the organization's Wikipedia entry. Differentiate yourself as a candidate by digging deeper using your library's business and news databases.
3. **Talk to people.**  
Use and expand your network. Learn from people in the organization and industry.

Obviously, step two is where I spend the bulk of my time with these students, asking for examples from volunteers and moving through the six questions using key library resources or advanced web searches. This requires some quick thinking on your feet and can lead down interesting paths, such as what role might there be for a corporate anthropologist at ESPN in today's cord-cutting environment.

Finally, I finish with one reminder:

1. **You don't actually need to know the answers.**  
The point isn't to show off how much homework you've done. The point is to be able to have an intelligent conversation, and sometimes this is more about uncovering questions than finding answers.

Students can stand out as job candidates when they demonstrate their passion by doing their homework. For example, at the end of the interview when the recruiter invariably asks "do you have any questions for us?" rather than just asking about salary or starting date, the candidate can begin a substantive conversation: "I've been following the news stories about the decline in ESPN's subscribers. I know that ESPN is exploring alternative delivery methods, but I would guess these will require a significant organizational or cultural shift. I've done a lot of work with change management from an anthropological perspective, so I'm curious what kinds of culture assessment instruments ESPN has employed."

Interviews are not tests, they're conversations. By preparing for and engaging in intelligent conversations with recruiters, students will naturally move from a "me" focus to a "you" focus, and recruiters will see them more like professionals already involved in the industry rather than just as students looking for jobs. Placing library research in this context reveals its relevancy for students. This is one way librarians can apply a "you" focus to our instruction.