

Information Literacy: Conversations with Business Faculty

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Background

In fall 2019, I started a new position as Business and Faculty Services Librarian at the West Chester University of Pennsylvania (WCU). WCU is a public university and the largest of the 14 state universities of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. The School of Business (SoB) is part of the College of Business and Public Management, is AACSB-accredited, and offers undergraduate programs in four academic departments: Accounting, Economics and Finance, Management, and Marketing, and an online MBA program. For the 2019-2020 academic year, WCU had a total enrollment of 17,660 students, of which 3,879 were business students (3,267 undergraduate and 612 MBA students).

WCU is a teaching-oriented university with a unique culture that is centered around student success. Student success dominates conversation between library faculty and classroom faculty and becomes the universal language of our communication. Teaching pedagogy is discussed widely on campus via workshops and faculty interest groups. To my surprise, the SoB has great awareness of the concept of information literacy.

Information Literacy at WCU SoB

As I reviewed the business school's [AACSB Continuous Improvement Review Report](#) in 2016, I found "information literacy" was mentioned many times in the document. Information literacy is recognized as one category of the learning outcomes in parallel with communication skills, knowledge, teamwork, ethics, business tools, and process and decision making. The SoB has continuous assessment of students' information literacy at the department level. Departments have assigned assessment coordinators responsible for ensuring the department assessment efforts meet all appropriate accreditation criteria. This includes Middle States accreditation standards and information literacy.

Department	Information Literacy Outcome as described in 2016's AACSB report	Information Literacy Component as described in 2016's AACSB report	Information Literacy Library Assistance in Fall 2019- Spring 2020
Accounting	Students will identify and access appropriate information to solve accounting issues.	ACC403 (Federal Taxation) - Researching tax and financial issues on the IRS website and providing evidence of their research with appropriate citations. ACC301 (Intermediate Accounting) - Research project requiring students to research specific transactions using the FASB Codification. A brief will be written by each student describing	The Accounting department did not request library support on accounting research while the department chair expressed the need to enhance students' tax research ability.

		the issue, discussing alternative treatments, and recommending an appropriate accounting treatment for the transaction and supporting the recommendation with appropriate citations from the Codification.	
Economics	Students will critically analyze an economic issue with appropriate information sources and develop a clearly supportable position on the issue.	<p>ECO340 (Intermediate Microeconomics) - Literature/data review project; As part of the assignment students must find appropriate information, sources and data.</p> <p>ECO400 (Research Methods-Business & Economics) Thesis paper graded with a common rubric in ECO400. As part of the assignment students must find appropriate information, sources and data. Students will develop an economic position based on the information.</p>	<p>Lower-level economics classes do not have a research component, while ECO251 (Business Analytics) faculty requested a library orientation.</p> <p>ECO400 (Research Methods-Business & Economics) requested a library information literacy session on finding statistics and data and economics literature review.</p>
Finance	Students will demonstrate an ability to acquire and evaluate information necessary to analyze a financial issue and develop a clearly supportable position.	<p>FIN375 (Contemporary Financial Issues) - Thesis paper in FIN375 graded with a common rubric. Students must find appropriate literature and valid references that support a constructed thesis statement and make at least three arguments that will clearly support the position.</p>	<p>FIN346 (Equity Asset Valuation) has a research project that requires students to perform financial analysis to value a stock. The Finance department did not request a library information literacy session. Finance faculty teach students to use Mergent to find financial statements and calculate industry-average financial ratios. Library assistance was provided on creating a research guide on Edgar search.</p>
Management	Students will be able to identify, explain and appropriately apply methods to acquire and evaluate information necessary for managerial decision making.	<p>MGT498 (Seminar in Management) - Quantitative Reasoning Exercise in which students will be given a premise and conclusion based on data and they will need to evaluate information needs and limitations in decision making.</p>	<p>MGT321 (Organization Theory and Behavior) requested library sessions on critical evaluation of web sources and how to find quality articles.</p> <p>INB 300 (Introduction to International Business) requested a library session on country research.</p>
Marketing	Students will identify and employ the methods to acquire and evaluate information necessary to solve a marketing problem.	<p>MKT 330 (Consumer Behavior) - students must access appropriate segmentation information to complete a project and use citations</p>	<p>MKT425 (Marketing Strategy and Planning) requested a library session for situational analysis for the marketing plan.</p>

MBA	Information Literacy/Critical Thinking - Students will appropriately identify and apply information resources to analyze and identify business problems and opportunities.	MKT699 Changing curriculum and details are not available.	MBA699 (Strategic Management and Planning) requested library tutorials and a research guide on company strategic plan research; MBA611 (Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation) requested library assistance on new venture research. HRM602 (Employment Law & Labor Relations) requested a library guide.
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Conversations with Business Faculty

Since joining the WCU FHG Library in fall 2019, I have contacted business faculty to promote information literacy and offer library support to enhance students' information literacy skills with flexible solutions. I met with faculty and department chairs, participated in the Management department meeting, and had intensive collaboration with two management faculty on designing and integrating information literacy sessions in their classes.

Generally, faculty members' perceptions on the needs for information literacy instruction varies. Some faculty feel the urgency to teach information literacy, especially to critically evaluate web sources, while some faculty did not feel the need for library assistance. Most faculty understand the ability to search scholarly literature and create proper citations as a major part of information literacy, but relatively fewer faculty realized that company, industry, market, and international business research are essential parts of business information literacy as well. Even though many classes have research components that require students to search for company information (including both private and public), industry information, and market information, many faculty were not aware of the value-added services provided by the library.

Professor Kelly Fisher and Professor Jennifer Bozeman from the Management department were very interested in integrating information literacy sessions into their classes. We met several times to discuss what they really wanted students to learn. Their understanding of information literacy was more related to critical thinking skills and they were especially interested in teaching students how to evaluate web resources. Although their class projects required students to find business articles and give presentations on a related business topic, students were struggling to find high quality articles.

During the conversation with both faculty members, I mentioned the **ACRL Information Literacy Framework** and shared the threshold concepts such as Scholarship as Conversation and Information has Value. Both felt the concepts were too abstract for students to grasp and did not feel we could include these ideas into our information literacy modules. However, in the process of developing a source assessment strategy (https://library.wcupa.edu/mgt321/source_assessment), I tried to integrate metaliteracy and disposition aspects from the Framework and encouraged students to pierce the filter bubble, examine their own biases, question their own assumptions, keep an open mind, and suspend their judgement, and these ideas were welcomed by both faculty. The PDF version of the infographic is available at the [ACRL Sandbox](#) and can be used and distributed under a Creative Commons License.

What is Still Challenging?

Building students' information literacy skills needs continuous effort. One-shot instructions pose great challenges for business librarians to scaffold students' learning. Besides collaborating with faculty and offering support when needed, it is important for us to develop our own curriculum to bridge the information literacy gaps. Some business librarians tried to do their own curriculum mapping and identified the areas that the information literacy instruction could help fill the gap. However, without a comprehensive knowledge system and a scalable approach, it is hard to achieve the desired outcome. Fortunately, the newly released [Business Research Competencies](#) can provide a blueprint for librarians to build a knowledge system.

Evaluation of information sources is a critical part of information literacy skills. Business information assessment is much more challenging than other disciplines. In addition to scholarly literature, business deals with a variety of information sources, such as company profiles, industry reports, market research reports, financial data and ratios, and economics data, with each type of source creating different evaluation challenges. Because of the constraint of one-shot and project-based instruction sessions, librarians lack opportunities to go in-depth with the evaluation of different business sources.

Experiential learning places students in such an information dynamic that research is not constrained by prescriptive project descriptions and assessed by assignment rubrics – it must respond to the needs of a real-life situation. It creates an excellent opportunity to apply the ACRL Information Literacy Framework, since the goal of the Framework is to teach students adaptability and flexibility in this dynamic information ecosystem. Exploring ways to integrate the ACRL Framework has been a challenging task for business librarians. I am hopeful that with diligent effort from business librarians, we will inspire each other with more creative ideas to address these challenges.

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