

## **Making a Case for Librarians Setting Expectations for Subject Faculty During Instruction Sessions**

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### **Learning from case studies**

This academic year, the Capital Area Business Academic Librarians (CABAL) have experimented by creating mini case studies about scenarios we might encounter in our work as business librarians. Business school faculty swear by the case method, so we decided to see what we can learn about the practice of business librarianship from this tried-and-true pedagogy.

Each one-page case study is based on our steering committee's varied experiences in business librarian roles. The author also includes 3-5 questions at the end of the case to help frame small group conversations. In CABAL, as we talk through the scenario and questions, more experienced librarians are able to reflect on how their approaches might have changed over their career, and newer librarians can float solutions without feeling like their performance is being critiqued. It has proved an engaging way to collectively learn about or re-examine some of the more practical aspects of our work as academic business librarians.

Both of the case studies we discussed at our January meeting examined difficult instruction scenarios that business librarians might face – one about navigating a last-minute request for library instruction (Krupar, 2024) and another involving a disruptive student in the classroom (Price, 2024).

Throughout our conversations that day, one point that emerged was whether our individual libraries establish and/or communicate expectations for subject faculty's conduct during our visits to their classrooms.

For one of the authors, the library offers a suggested time frame for requests – “To allow us to best assist you, please submit your request at least 3 weeks in advance” -- and then states that “Making a request does not guarantee instruction” (JMU Libraries, n.d.).

In practice, the library leaves it up to the liaison librarians to develop their own personal guidelines and communicate them to faculty as needed. This freedom does not offer much guidance or protection to early career and/or non-tenured librarians who might not have enough experience to know what is reasonable.

The other author's institution has even fewer guidelines. The only guidance provided is that First Year Experience classes should be requested two weeks in advance (Virginia Tech Libraries, n.d.). There are no limits on any other instruction requests. In fact, this author has received at least three *same-day requests* to teach classes. All were refused and scheduled later.

### **What do other libraries say?**

With little guidance from our own institutions, we wanted to see if other libraries had articulated expectations for subject faculty regarding scheduling and attending library instruction (IL) sessions.

The best example, even without defining exact timeframe requirements, was posted by the Feinberg Library at SUNY Plattsburg. The library outlines what both instructors *and* librarians should do to prepare for IL instruction sessions (Feinberg Library, n.d.).

The library asks instructors to:

- *“If the session is synchronous, attend the session; if not, study the library materials as you expect your students to. Your attention motivates the students to become more engaged in the learning experience being provided. Should questions arise about an assignment, your presence at these sessions provides an invaluable opportunity for students to receive clarification and direction in conducting their research.*
- *“Thoroughly explain to students the requirements of the assignment for which the librarian is providing library instruction.*
- *“Schedule a session to be held with a librarian after the assignment requirements have been discussed with the students, but prior to the assignment due date.*
- *“Communicate your content expectations to the librarian well before the session.*
- *“Encourage students’ preparedness for the session, including formulating and testing research questions and/or research strategies prior to the session and noting difficulties encountered during the research process.*
- *“When applicable, provide the librarian prior to the session with specific examples of research difficulties students are encountering in the course of the assignment.*
- *“Fill out the online faculty session evaluation, which will be emailed to you after the session.”*

And then the library states that librarians are expected to:

- *“Request a copy of the syllabus and/or assignment from the professor at the start of the scheduling process if the professor has not sent the documents along with the session request.*
- *“Consult with instructors about assignment specifics and the instructors’ desired content well in advance of the scheduled session.*
- *“Communicate with the professor to establish the students’ information needs/research difficulties, preferably including difficulties from the students’ perspective.*
- *“Tailor the session to the specific assignment.*
- *“Produce appropriate materials for the session (LibGuides, PPT, handouts, tutorials, etc).*
- *“Review student and faculty evaluations after they are tabulated in order to discern areas for improvement.”*

This library is clear about what both parties will contribute to any library instruction collaboration. This transparency will benefit both newer librarians and more experienced librarians that might appreciate having a policy to reference if they need to reset a relationship with a “challenging” faculty member. Another aspect of library instruction that this policy addresses is the timing of the instruction in relation to the assignment due dates. One of the authors just taught three

classes the week *after* the final assignment had been submitted for grading. While it was of limited use to the current semester's students for that specific assignment, the sessions were taught as a relationship-building exercise with the professor to persuade her to agree to schedule the sessions earlier in subsequent semesters.

### **What about classroom management?**

We also observed that none of the guidelines talked about expectations for classroom management during library instruction sessions. The second case that sparked this informal inquiry focused on managing a student who took issue with the content of the IL session. The scenario was loosely based on the experiences of one of the author's colleagues while teaching a diversity, equity and inclusion-themed lesson.

Discussion of this case study surfaced further questions about teaching potentially sensitive topics and whether IL sessions could lead to online intimidation or abuse. Librarians who weren't in tenure-track positions expressed concerns about whether their universities would protect their academic freedom if the content of an IL were publicly scrutinized. Those fears aren't unreasonable. At one author's institution, video taken surreptitiously of a social justice training session during the university's first-year orientation program drew national attention and led to the departure of a staff member who had co-facilitated it (Campbell et al., 2022).

While those are certainly worst-case scenarios to ponder, even our "ordinary" IL sessions can occasionally be derailed by inconsiderate students. One librarian shared a recent experience with grad students who were chitchatting and not paying attention to the library orientation. The librarian was grateful that a faculty member in attendance noticed the students' behavior and intervened, ensuring that the lesson could proceed smoothly for the other attendees. But that experience proved more of an outlier than the norm for most of the librarians. Many shared examples of distracted faculty who wouldn't have realized that they needed to intervene or overly "helpful" faculty who kept interrupting the lesson to agree with (or disagree with) what the librarian was teaching.

The discussion prompted one of the authors to consider whether librarians should be asking, when scheduling session dates and asking for assignments or syllabi, for detailed information about the instructor's classroom behavior policies and how they are enforced.

Both of the authors have encountered disruptive students in the classroom, ranging from the relatively passive sleeping, the marginal scrolling on phones, or the loud disagreement with the content or necessity of the session. In the moment, it is often hard to determine if it is the faculty member or the library instructor who should address misbehavior and to what extent the intervention should take.

Library school curriculum might not offer much training in classroom management skills (Blackburn & Hays, 2014; White, 2018). That can put the onus on individual librarians to take the initiative to learn them in the classroom or through costly professional development opportunities. We wonder if academic libraries can perhaps relieve some of that burden through more explicit policies, shared expectations, or more focused training opportunities on those "worst case" scenarios. Doing so could ensure librarians are collaborating as equal partners with subject faculty in order to provide a positive classroom experience for everyone.

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