

Academic BRASS

Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 13 (1), Spring 2018

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The Future of Entrepreneurship Course Readings: Library Resources as an Alternative to a Textbook

Background

In the fall of 2017, the lead faculty for National University's undergraduate Entrepreneurship concentration approached me, the Library's Business & Management Liaison, with his goal of eliminating the course text and replacing it with library resources. At the time, National University was just starting to embark on its journey of transitioning the synchronous online courses to an asynchronous format. This format will free students from the limitation of designated lecture times, thereby improving the flexibility of our online programs. The Bachelor of Business Administration, including the Entrepreneurship concentration and other programs, was under review due to its part in the first round of the asynchronous pilot. Along with asynchronous offerings, National University specializes in accelerated courses, a majority of which are online. The four courses that constitute the Entrepreneurship concentration are each online and four weeks long. The pace of these courses is a crucial factor when planning for student success.

Purpose for seeking an alternative

Due to this review, faculty were encouraged to examine their current content in relation to best asynchronous practices and create new or additional content. This encouraged an interest in utilizing additional library resources to assure quality course design. Alongside these priorities, the lead faculty for Entrepreneurship mentioned his concerns regarding his students' research abilities. He had noticed previous students were only finding their information from doing Google searches and not utilizing the Library. The sources cited in their papers were not relevant or authoritative enough. The other issue brought to my attention regarded the course textbook. Not only was the textbook expensive, but also, despite a recent publication date, it was outdated for the constantly changing field of entrepreneurship. It lacked details in areas of student interest and was not suitable for the accelerated four-week course format. Also of concern was the new asynchronous format, which places a need for increased audio-visual content and improved strategies for increasing student engagement.

Result

The result of our collaboration was a weekly assignment titled "Resources Review." This assignment not only eliminates the textbook by substituting library e-resources, but also

encourages the development of information literacy skills as students search for and evaluate their choices of readings or video content that fall within the instructor's weekly parameters.

Tools & Assignment Design Process

When designing this assignment, my role was to recommend the appropriate library tools and e-resources based on the students' existing research skills and knowledge of the library. Referring to the ACRL's Information Literacy Framework, I found the course learning objectives and the needs of the students aligned well with the frames of "Searching as Strategic Exploration" and "Authority is Constructed and Contextual." Keeping these frames in mind, I considered appropriate scaffolding to encourage information literacy skill development over the four weeks of the course.

Methods

Each week the instructor gives the students parameters for their search that include a primary search term to get them started, the type(s) of source to use, publication date requirements, the tool to use to find the source(s) and evaluation criteria for their required analysis.

Week 1. Students are encouraged to use Smart Search, NU's federated, multi-disciplinary search. This tool provides the students with a large number of results, which may include e-books, reference entries, and audiovisual selections. Smart Search is also a logical first stepping-stone when introducing students to the library, as it is easily accessible on the Library's home page and embedded in Blackboard for the students.

Week 2-3. Students move from using Smart Search to discipline-specific databases, such as EBSCO's Business Source Premier. Here students continue to practice using the variety of filters, first introduced to them when using Smart Search, to narrow their results. The database provides access to not only peer-reviewed journals, but also trade publications, newspapers, and magazines. These resources are important to the lead faculty because they are relevant to the business discipline, up to date, provide real-life examples, and can be chosen/limited based on students' personal interests. At this point in the course, students have declared and narrowed their topic for their final projects.

Week 4. Students are now demonstrating information-literate dispositions described in the ACRL frame "Searching as Strategic Exploration," such as using the databases' filtering options to effectively manage their search processes and results, using different types of searching language and matching information needs to appropriate search tools. The students also demonstrate behaviors described by the frame "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" through their ability to critically examine various sources and differentiate between discipline-specific sources of authority found within the Library's databases. These abilities are evidenced in their selection and evaluation of at least two sources per week and reading and commenting on their classmates' posts.

Conclusions

"Resources Review" was positively received by students, as evidenced in the feedback they gave as a required discussion board response the last week of the course. Many of the students admitted that they had never used the library before or had not realized it was available to them. They appreciated saving money by not buying the textbook and finding sources each week that were relevant and related to their interests. By being required to select

sources each week, students were better able to manage their research time and find resources of higher rigor. As we continue forward with this activity, we are planning to implement formal assessment to evaluate entrepreneurship and information literacy skill development.