

My First Year in the Biz

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Introduction

With the end of the Fall 2022 semester, I am wrapping up my first year as an academic librarian, and my first foray into the world of business reference. I wanted to share what I have learned along the way in hopes of helping other new librarians who also enthusiastically jumped in but then hit the wall of “wait, what do I do now?” My undergraduate degree was in history teaching. Business? What do I know about business? How do I connect to this college full of people who have a fond connection with my predecessor but to whom I’m a complete unknown? The faculty will know I don’t know what I’m doing. The students will know I don’t know what I’m doing. Where do I even start?

Turns out, I did know what I was doing, and friend, so do you. The imposter syndrome is real, but so is that MLS you worked so hard for. You can do this. In case you need some more reassurance, here’s what got me through.

Tips for the New Librarian

#1 Scope Out Some Research Guides

One of the very first things I did as I was settling into this new role was to familiarize myself with the business research guide that my wonderful predecessor created to learn what resources we had to support students and faculty, and how best utilize and teach those resources. Then I branched out onto the great wide web and started looking at all the business research guides I could find. This was helpful in discovering new approaches to research and instruction, new ways of presenting information, and additional resources that I have been able to explore with our collections librarian.

#2 Dive Into the Literature

Each librarian at my institution creates liaison narratives that are passed on from librarian to librarian, and the business narrative recommended a helpful book on business research. Even better—we had the ebook version at my library! I devoured this book, noted lots of helpful resources, and felt better armed to direct research questions from students and panicked colleagues who were on chat with a business student. There had to be more like this, right? So I hunted down good books, read the reviews, read the books, repeat. Use your institution's online resources to find new articles all about business reference and instruction (or reference and instruction in general!). Librarians are naturally helpful folk and want to share their knowledge. Read all about it!

#3 Meet With Your Faculty

This is completely out of my comfort zone, but the payoff is immensely worth it. A big part of being a liaison is getting to know your faculty and making yourself an integral part of their day-

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to-day work. This aspect of academic librarianship was one of the biggest surprises to me in starting this role. I'm supposed to network? Wait, what? Honestly, I have enjoyed it much more than I imagined. My faculty are kind, interesting, and interested people. They want to include the librarian. They sing my and the library's praises to their own colleagues. Start with your liaison area's administrative coordinator or head. Ask for a few minutes to introduce yourself and talk about the library at the next department meeting (and stay on the meeting agenda each semester!). Pop in for the retirement receptions, the scholarship awards, or whatever celebration there happens to be. Stop in and say "hi" (also, there are usually tiny cakes, so...). One thing that really helped me was requesting to meet one-on-one with several faculty in my liaison area, particularly those who taught courses that included a research component. This had a positive twofold effect: I learned what my faculty and their students needed from me and the library, and I started a foundation for solid relationships. These faculty are much more ready to ask me questions and are great sources of information for me. Win-win!

#4 Lean on Your Colleagues

I sincerely hope each and every person reading this, new or experienced, has the kind of amazing support system in your colleagues that I do in mine. Our library culture is one that supports ideas and doesn't see "failure" as a negative. We are very open to sharing, collaborating, and just informal drop-in talks whenever you need something. I have learned so much just chatting in our hallway. Colleagues are always ready to offer advice, be it about a lesson plan, scholarship, or difficult research appointment. I was able to observe multiple colleagues teaching library instruction sessions, and this helped me to gather ideas for what I did (and didn't) want to do in my own teaching. Ask your colleagues for their advice, ask to observe or co-teach, ask all the questions! I was also in a unique position of starting this journey with two other new librarians; we were all hired at the same time, and it is lovely to have each other to bounce ideas off of, to commiserate, and to bond with and help. Even if you aren't in this particular situation, find a buddy, in your organization or through networking, and create those work relationships. If you are an experienced librarian, please extend the branch to your new colleagues. There's nothing like being able to plop in someone's chair or in their DMs and bare your soul.

Conclusion

This first year has been a year of learning, a year of exploring, a year of trial and error and trying again. I have leaned on my amazing support system and the skills I didn't even know I had until I was testing them. I hope some of these lessons are helpful to you, too, fellow new librarian. We've got this!