A new business librarian's reflection on teaching for the first time

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Introduction

While it may look different at every university, it is likely the case that a business liaison librarian will be providing instruction for a number of courses per semester. Although I knew this as I entered my first role as a business librarian, and even presented my approach to teaching during my interview, I was not prepared for the feeling of uncertainty and imposter syndrome that hit me. How could I teach something that I was not an expert on? Not only am I new to business librarianship in particular, but I am completely new to librarianship and professional work in general. As I began my career as a librarian in April 2022, I soon found myself faced with a variety of resources, faculty, and classes that I was unfamiliar with and would have to learn fairly quickly. Throughout this process, there were steps I took that I believe were extremely beneficial, and I hope my reflections will be useful for new librarians and those hiring new librarians. I was fortunate that I was hired during a part of the year in which teaching was wrapping up. Therefore, I had a few months to learn, absorb, and prepare before jumping into the next semester. However, I believe these insights can inspire thought surrounding instructional preparation no matter when a position is filled.

Diving into Teaching

In the first few weeks of my job, there were a few steps that I took towards teaching that I now consider crucial. Firstly, I met with colleagues and set up times to observe as many classes as possible before the term ended. I particularly tried to observe ones that I knew I would be teaching in the future, and took notes on both content and stylistic choices. I soon realized that everyone truly does have their own approach to teaching. While some people prepare with notes and PowerPoints, others teach off of LibGuides or do not create any sort of teaching material. I had no idea what my style would be, nor did I know that instead of trying to adopt someone else's style of teaching, I should choose one that suits my personality. Not understanding this made my first class difficult.

Concurrently, I started to learn my resources. I am grateful that I have a wonderful supervisor who scheduled many database training sessions for me with our vendors. I was able to get overviews of the business databases I would be working with the most. This is especially useful as a business librarian, as so far, most of the resources I have been showing students have been databases. For databases that I could not get training for I tried to find tutorials online--usually posted by librarians at other institutions. I also asked colleagues, and faculty that I knew I would be teaching for to provide me with the syllabi or instructions for the assignments that required database use and librarian consultations. It would then function as if I were a student and move through the assignments myself, learning where to look for information to answer the questions. For example, there is a business course at Penn State that has an assignment which

requires students to utilize a handful of library databases. I ran through this project multiple times so I could make sure I could properly help students during consultations.

Along with taking the initiative on database training, I would highly recommend that new business librarians, or those aspiring to be business librarians, enroll in Celia Ross' BizRef 101 course (https://www.ala.org/rusa/business-reference-january-2022). Celia's course is mentioned quite often in the business librarian community, but it is not something I heard about until a few months into my career. While the course is focused on training the business librarian as a whole, I think it is especially crucial for teaching. By becoming so familiar with various resources, you have more to offer and explain to students during class or other teaching opportunities.

Finally, something that very much helped me out with teaching was the type of classes I was able to start off with. As mentioned, I was fortunate to begin my career close to the start of summer, so I had some extra time to get acquainted before a busy fall semester. However, I did do some teaching over the summer of 2022, when I taught for a program we have at Penn State called the Learning Edge Academic Program (LEAP). The program is for incoming first-year students at the University Park campus. Each summer, librarians are assigned to LEAP cohorts based on subject, and can teach an introductory class to the students in which they showcase the library and highlight some resources the students in those subject areas may have to use. It was a very low-stakes way to teach for the first time on very basic, introductory information that I definitely knew and could answer questions about. Since one of my liaison areas is communications, I taught a cohort of prospective communications students. This experience was a wonderful way to discover my teaching style and what did or did not work for me. I realized that unlike some of my colleagues that I observed, I could not teach solely off the website and needed a PowerPoint or at least some notes to fall back on. I fumbled quite a bit during my first session, as I tried to teach the same way as others, which clearly did not work for me. Though I had this moment of fumbling and nervousness, I was glad it was during a class that was low stakes and introductory, so I could reflect, make improvements, and move forward.

The next sessions I taught were in the fall of 2022, and these were freshman year seminars in business, as well as a new faculty orientation in the Bellisario College of Communications. Again, these are sessions that do not require heavy demonstration of databases or other resources, so they were great to further establish myself and find my footing with my teaching style. By the time I taught my last freshman year seminars, I felt like I had gotten a good grasp of myself and how I like to teach, from the initial preparation period and initial contact with the faculty, to the delivery. I am incredibly grateful that it was these types of courses and session formats that introduced me to teaching. I spent the rest of the fall 2022 semester continuing to observe different librarians and slowly teaching more in-depth courses. I have now completed several in-depth database training and content delivery classes, which I believe I was successful at due to the ways in which I was slowly introduced to teaching. I am excited to take on a fuller teaching schedule in spring 2023.

Major Takeaways & Tips for Entry-Level Business Librarians

The main purpose behind my reflection on teaching was to give potential employers and entry-level librarians in business libraries some things to consider. Teaching can be incredibly daunting, particularly in the business disciplines where many resources are multi-faceted, have extensive terms of use policies, and have faculty members who have strong opinions about them. As such, there are a few takeaways and tips for new business librarians that I have after experiencing my first two terms of teaching. Firstly, try to observe as much as you can. Secondly, if possible, try to initially teach low-stakes classes with introductory information so you can place your focus on finding your footing and teaching style. You can also co-teach, which I have also done and found especially useful. This may not be possible depending on the needs and/or size of your department, but libraries could think about creating more opportunities for low-stakes teaching. Additionally, if your institution is putting out calls for people to teach or moderate different types of sessions, even outside of your department, take on those opportunities to boost confidence and expand your capabilities. Finally, take the initiative to learn resources through training and pretend you are the student for assignments. As a new business librarian, I have also started writing book reviews, film reviews, and database reviews for resources in my liaison areas. This is allowing me to become very familiar with specific resources so I can recommend and reference them in classes and can better explain them to users. Every institution and individual are different when it comes to teaching, but there are some steps to be taken and ways to get involved that can ease the process and help grow confidence.