



Transitioning to the Embedded Librarian Model and Improving the Senior Capstone Business Strategy Course

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ABSTRACT

In collaboration with a strategy professor, a research librarian at a four-year SACS and AACSB-accredited Southern college transitioned from the one-time library instruction model to the role of an embedded librarian within a senior-level capstone course over a multi-year transition period. Through the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative assessment instruments, as well as anecdotal comments, and finally pre- and post-test student satisfaction and learning surveys, the library instruction and course requirements were revised. This course's implementation formed the basis of a campus-wide effort to embed librarians within on-campus and online/hybrid courses. Conclusions, discussion and areas for future research are included.

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INTRODUCTION

In collaboration with a strategy professor, a research librarian at a four-year SACS and AACSB-accredited Southern college transitioned from the one-time library instruction model to the role of an embedded librarian within a senior-level capstone course over a multi-year transition period. Through the use of multiple quantitative and qualitative assessment instruments, as well as anecdotal comments, and finally pre- and post-test student satisfaction and learning surveys, the library instruction and course requirements were revised. This article outlines the process stages and continuous improvements over a four-year implementation period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The model of the embedded librarian is based on the concept of the embedded journalist frequently implemented during war time. The embedded journalist integrates within a military unit, gains a better comprehension of military vocabulary and maneuvers, develops camaraderie with the troops and enriches news reports with first-hand information. In the same way the embedded journalist's close proximity to the military unit provides an insider's vantage point, [Drewes and Hoffman \(2010\)](#) recommended academicians consider using an embedded librarian as part of their community, "Social bonding has a

transformative effect on trust, not just in social situations, but also when a faculty college has research or support needs" (p. 79). Yet as [Dewey \(2004\)](#) asserts, an embedded librarian "requires more direct and purposeful interaction than acting in parallel with another person, group or activity" (p. 6). In his blog, David [Shumaker \(2009\)](#) describes the embedded librarian as "one who can identify the need, the source, and the value of information—often before the customer/colleague thinks of it—and deliver what's needed" (*Embedded Librarian*, Jan. 24, 2009).

In a study of embedded librarians funded by a grant from the Special Library Association, [Shumaker and Talley \(2010\)](#) found 60% of the librarians surveyed reported their embedded services were more than ten years old, but the methods of embedding varied widely. Some were merely collaborations between faculty, while others used librarian-in-residence programs, reference chat, Twitter, blogs or included librarians within online classrooms. Services included in-depth research training conducted outside of the library, and librarians often shared instructional duties with teaching faculty. [Brower \(2011\)](#) further elaborated on the characteristics of the embedded librarian which included: collaboration with users, forming partnerships at the department and campus levels, providing needs-based services, offering convenient and user-friendly services outside the library, becoming immersed in the culture and spaces of users, and understanding the discipline including the culture and research habits of users (p. 4).

Similarly, [Siess \(2010\)](#) proposed moving librarians out of the library and into units such as hospitals, corporations, and law firms. For example, a librarian hired by Affinion Group as a research analyst, upon the invitation of the company president, moved her office to work more closely with a team. As a result, the librarian now contributes to strategy sessions and serves as a legislative and regulatory expert for issues

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affecting the company (Shumaker, 2012). This has relevance for corporations as well as business schools. Embedded librarians at the Kresge Business Administration Library of the University of Michigan work with in-residence student teams through a multi-disciplinary action program and provide training for specialized business research needs (Berdish & Seeman, 2012).

CASE STUDY

DERRELL C. ROBERTS LIBRARY

As background for this case study, the Derrell C. Roberts library serves Dalton State College (www.daltonstate.edu), a four-year commuter and growing residential college population in Northwest Georgia with an FTE of 4,800. Methods of instruction for teaching library and online research skills include guided orientation tours, basic library skills introduction, online tutorials, individualized consultations or research appointments, printed handouts, and guides accessed from the library Web page (<http://libguides.daltonstate.edu>), subject-specific orientations designed by librarians in conjunction with faculty, and library workshops. Two librarians provide instruction on the use of library resources, services and technologies. Three additional librarians are also available to teach classes. In addition, each librarian is assigned as a subject liaison to one or more of the schools or academic departments on the campus. All librarians work the reference desk and assist students, staff and faculty via one-on-one instruction. Library instruction is held in a wireless classroom equipped with laptops for an active learning environment.

Through a consortium agreement, the Roberts library supports the School of Business through subscriptions to relevant databases which include: ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Premier, MasterFILE Premier, LexisNexis Academic, and Hoover's Company Capsules and Profiles. These databases provide full-text access to over 27,000 journals, magazines, and newspapers, as well as 402 videos available through the *Films on Demand* database. Students have 24/7 off-campus access. If the library does not provide full-text access to a journal, students and faculty may request materials via the free interlibrary loan service. There are also 1,760 electronic business book offerings and eighty-nine films held in the library. New titles are purchased using the *Resources for College Libraries* from the Association of College and Research Libraries.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT COURSE

DSC's Strategic Management course was the focus for this study. DSC catalog course description for the senior-level business class in Strategic Management is:

Represents the capstone course in business. Presents theory and practice of strategic decision making within organizations in a case method format. Topics include environmental analysis, organizational direction, strategy formulation and implementation, strategic control, strategic management theory, research and concepts, environmental influences on business, and secondary research methodology. Students will be required to prepare and deliver an oral team analysis of a publicly-traded company, its industry, and its strategy.

This course is required during the final semester of the students' program. Students taking Strategic Management have completed all core courses and are required to take an internationally-normed exit exam, the major field test in business, offered by Educational Testing Services (www.ets.org) as part of this course.

A Senior Seminar co-requisite course is also a graduation requirement. Graded on a pass-fail basis this course includes resume and cover letter preparation; a community service/service learning project of four hours; mock interviewing with local business leaders; preparation of a personal marketing plan and a personal elevator pitch; and a final etiquette training session and formal business dinner. Together both

courses offer the preparation senior business students need to enter the world of business and secure initial employment in their major.

PHASE 1 (2008/2009)

COURSE DESIGN

The textbook used in this capstone Strategic Management course includes a number of business cases based on publicly-traded companies that are typically between 20 and 40 pages in length and contain competitor data and financial information. The cases are typically written from publicly-available materials and are not based on direct contact or interviews with a company. For the end-of-course team company analysis and presentation, students were assigned to teams based on major and other demographics (international background, age, gender, work experience, etc.). Teams then chose one of the textbook cases for analysis and presentation. To analyze the case, students often updated the material, depending on the copyright date of the textbook. Most of the cases included in the textbook were one to three years old.

LIBRARY INSTRUCTIONAL EFFORTS

Prior to the senior capstone course project, business students attended one or more targeted library instruction session(s) usually in their Freshman First Year Experience (FYE) course or in English or Speech. Because most business students at this institution do not receive subject-specific library instruction, the strategy professor scheduled a research skills orientation. The Strategic Management classes attended a one-hour library overview of business resources early in the fall 2008 semester after teams and cases were assigned.

Each student was provided a handout listing the subscription databases offered by the library. Additional time was allotted at the end of the session for teams to begin their research on the assigned companies with the librarian available for assistance.

In their comments to their instructor, students reported that the sources were too general and not pertinent for the required guidelines of the assignment. Due to the limited number of staff, librarians were not assigned as subject liaisons to individual schools or departments which could have allowed a better insight of the specified research necessary for this project.

At the end of the fall 2008 semester, the strategy professor consulted with the Reference/Instructional librarian and shared additional information regarding the course and student responses on the capstone project. Following the company research requirements of the capstone project, the Reference/Instructional librarian created a course guide including links to business databases as well as print and Internet resources for company research.

In addition to the course guide, students enrolled in the spring 2009 semester were provided the Reference/Instructional librarian's contact information and encouraged to schedule research appointments. Research appointments are 30-minute sessions in which the librarian meets with either an individual student or the entire group working on a team project. While several students contacted the librarian via email and stopped by the library for assistance, teams did not schedule research appointments. At the end of the first year, the strategy professor again met with the librarian for a review of course evaluations and appraisal of the capstone project.

PROBLEMS/CHALLENGES WITH PHASE 1

The process of analyzing an existing case did not offer the learning experience that business faculty believed essential for graduating seniors. The cases were too comprehensive for students as complete data gathering on the company and competitors was mostly done in the case itself. With the information easily at hand, there was no incentive to test or improve library research skills. Even when the case was assigned as homework reading, fellow students did not prepare the case thoroughly, so little interaction was present in the classroom. In addition, the textbooks have an average of twenty cases and the class

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