

Business Librarianship (Em)powered: Valuing Critical Information Literacy over Profit

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Abstract

Academic librarianship to business programs, departments, and colleges has traditionally focused on demonstrating the value of the library, librarians, and library resources in relationship to a return on investment. If the focus on value is reframed with a critical mindset and a critical management studies (CMS) framework, opportunities for academic librarians to focus on critical information literacy and critical pedagogy can open up, thus intentionally valuing critical consciousness in students over profit. The congruence of the mission and vision statement of California State University – Monterey Bay (CSUMB) with the visionary statements made by the dean of the CSUMB College of Business stimulated the development of an alternative and collaborative one-shot library instruction session for a critical thinking and ethics-based business course. The library session focuses on the evaluation and analysis of a non-profit organization's website to determine the mission of an organization or campaign, its organizational or campaign goals, its target population, and the criteria used to specify the target population. This presentation will highlight results of an assessment survey that was administered in the Fall 2015 semester, with the intention of providing answers for a few key questions: Can individualized assessment measurements be taken? Is a deeper meshing of a CMS framework, the institutional mindset, and critical information literacy principles possible? How critical can information literacy exercises be in one-shot instructional sessions?

Introduction

California State University - Monterey Bay (CSUMB) is a small, public, and comprehensive university with approximately 7,000 students. According to the CSUMB vision statement, “the campus will be distinctive in serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and historically undereducated and low-income populations,” and “the identity of the university will be framed by substantive commitment to multilingual, multicultural, gender-equitable learning” (Vision Statement, 1994). With its “Strategic foci,” the CSUMB College of Business’ (COB) attempts to balance profit, planet, people, ethics, and equity in the education of its students (Strategic Foci, n.d.). The CSUMB library’s mission is to support its students, faculty, staff, and community members in the exploration, discovery, and synthesis of

information (Mission Statement, n.d.). The mission and vision of the university, college, and the library are in agreement on many levels.

The CSUMB library employs nine librarians who function as subject specialists and provide course-integrated instruction through partnerships with faculty members on one-shot library sessions. The library faculty target First Year Seminar (FYS) and selected General Education (GE) courses to provide support for information literacy learning outcomes in lower division courses. For upper division courses, Major ProSeminar, Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR), and Capstone courses are targeted.

As subject specialist for the College of Business, I provide information literacy instruction in the GWAR course, BUS 304: Business Communication, Ethics, and Critical Thinking. This course addresses most if not all of the areas in the COB's strategic focus. With 12% of the undergraduate student population at CSUMB majoring in Business Administration, there is a need to have multiple sections of BUS 304 available every semester. In the Fall 2015 semester, there were eight sections of BUS 304. The students in this course develop a case study on a local nonprofit organization and a for-profit business. The information literacy sessions in this course have consisted of either a one-hour lecture in the classroom or a two-hour session in a computer lab where students get hands-on experience researching the nonprofit organization that their case study will focus on. The students also have access to an online library course guide with an interactive tutorial on researching nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses (see <https://sites.google.com/a/csumb.edu/bus304libraryguide/>).

The theme of the information literacy session is ethical and socially responsible behavior, which ties into the COB's strategic area of people and equity. The library session incorporates the evaluation of a non-profit organization's website. To continue with the focus on people and equity, students practice their evaluation skills by evaluating Picture the Homeless' website for its mission, its organizational or campaign goals, its target population, and the criteria used to specify the target population (Picture the Homeless, 2016). Picture the Homeless is a New York City-based multiracial and bilingual organization with a constituency that includes homeless people living in shelters and on the streets. The organization was founded and led by homeless people.

Literature Review

Critical business information literacy has only recently been discussed within a critical information literacy framework and lens. According to Stonebreaker, Maxwell, Jerrit, and Garcia (2016), critical business information literacy (CBIL) is the application of social justice frameworks to business information literacy. There are two main areas of literature that have influenced critical business information literacy: critical pedagogy and critical management studies (CMS).

Critical pedagogy “positions education as a catalyst for social justice,” which, according to Henry Giroux, centers on generating knowledge that presents concrete possibilities for empowering people (Tewell, 2015). For instructional librarians, information literacy sessions that use a social justice-based framework incorporate critical information literacy concepts in instruction sessions. According to Tewell (2015), “critical information literacy is an approach to information literacy that acknowledges and emboldens the learner’s agency in the educational process.” For critical business information literacy, library sessions should empower students to apply social justice frameworks to economic and financial factors in order to better support the communities they will eventually serve, rather than servicing a business’ bottom line.

Critical Management Studies (CMS) is a subject area within management and organization studies. As a professional study, the Academy of Management has a Critical Management Studies division within its organization. CMS scholars have developed a website in which they attempt to define CMS. According to these scholars, CMS “challenges the prevailing conventional understanding of management and organisations” by “interrogating the established relations of power, control, domination, ideology” in organisations, society, and people. CMS also serves as a “platform for debating radical alternatives” (What is CMS?, 2016). A CMS framework for critical business information literacy challenges students to reflect on management and organizational theories, helps to incorporate discussions of power and privilege into their analysis of business information, and empowers students to imagine alternative management and organizational practices that counter economic and financial systems of oppression.

Method

A survey was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and efficacy of the information literacy sessions to business students. One hundred thirty students from seven of the eight BUS 304 courses in Fall 2015 participated in this survey, which consisted of eight questions. There was one dichotomous scale question, four open-ended questions, and three three-point scale questions. This paper will mostly focus on the results of the three-point scale questions:

- How well did this library session connect with the five business principles of people, planet, profit, ethics, and equity?
- Did this library session help you better select and use information to investigate a point of view?
- How well did this library session help you critically evaluate information and its sources?

Results

Table 1

BUS 304 Library Instruction Session Survey Results - Fall 2015

	Have you had library instruction in a business course before today?	How well did this library session connect with the five business principles of people, planet, profit, ethics, and equity?	Did this library session help you better select and use information to investigate a point of view?	How well did this library session help you critically evaluate information and its sources?
Yes	23			
No	107			
Connected Well/Helped		80	123	112
Not Sure		40	4	11
Did Not Connect/Help		9	2	6
Did Not Answer		1	1	1
Percent Connected/Helped		62%	95%	86%
Percent Not Sure		31%	3%	8%
Percent Did Not Connect/Help		7%	2%	5%
Percent Did Not Answer		1%	1%	1%
Total # of Students	171			
Total # of Respondents	130			

Percent of Respondents	76%			
Percent First Session	82%			

Of the students that responded:

- 82% received a business-related information literacy session for the first time
- 62% found that the session connected well with the College of Business’ strategic focus areas, as compared to 95% who reported that the session helped them find and use information, and 86% who reported that the session helped them to evaluate the information critically.

Conclusions

One basic conclusion is that the survey mostly evaluated the teaching aspect of the library session, and not what the students learned from the session. There is a need to construct an assignment that students can submit as evidence for assessment of student learning.

The mapping of information literacy across a curriculum helps librarians to identify relevant courses for which library instruction would be the most useful. Curricular mapping can also function to make connections to the shared values or visions held across different levels, departments, or colleges within an institution. Library instruction should support not only information literacy objectives, but also the overall mission and vision of the institution and the department or college that each librarian serves. The CSUMB library’s support of the College of Business’ strategic focus serves to support the lifelong learning and professional skills promoted throughout various business courses. In this case, the five business principles of people, planet, profit, ethics, and equity need to become more embedded in the information literacy outcomes taught in the business-focused library instruction sessions than they have been. Students already feel comfortable with finding, using, and critically evaluating information. More deeply embedding information literacy values into core departmental values will support and enhance students learning threshold concepts.

The capacity of students to master information literacy skills through one-shot library instruction sessions is limited. There is a need to have a more embedded approach to library instruction through credit-bearing library research courses with a departmental or college-based focus. For an information literacy program that does not offer credit-bearing courses, there is a need to expand the number of library sessions offered to each key course in which information literacy threshold concepts must be met.

The foregoing case study requires follow-up assessment in order to assess student learning holistically. Currently, CSUMB library sessions do not incorporate an assignment that can be completed during or after the library session; doing so would aid in assessing what the students learned and how well they learned the concepts.

As Audre Lorde commented at the Second Sex conference in New York City in 1979, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (Lorde, 1984). We need to reimagine economic, business, and financial organizations, policies, structures, and systems in order to bring about genuine change to communities that have been drastically impacted by capitalism and neoliberalism. We need to discuss alternatives to current business models that value profit over people.

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