Book Review

Review of *Teaching Business Information Literacy*

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ABSTRACT

Review of *Teaching Business Information Literacy* (ed. Snipes, Karo, Faulkner, & Reiter; published by Association of College and Research Libraries, 2022).

KEYWORDS

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In recent years, the concept of "information literacy" has gained traction as librarians guide patrons through understanding and evaluating information in a networked world. However, many collegiate faculty members are unfamiliar with the term and its relationship to critical thinking and effective research. Deficient faculty knowledge, coupled with inconsistent definitions of "information literacy" amongst librarians, make it difficult for academic librarians to communicate the need for increased information literacy instruction in the collegiate curriculum. Moreover, librarians are often tasked with serving subject areas that might not match their academic backgrounds and training. Written guides detailing best practices for information literacy instruction in specific subject areas have been few and far between. The ACRL's new publication *Teaching Business Information Literacy* (ed. Snipes, Karo, Faulkner, & Reiter) endeavors to fill this gap in the published literature, providing both new and experienced business librarians with a resource for enhancing their information literacy instruction.

Teaching Business Information Literacy consists of forty-one unique lesson plans designed for bringing business knowledge and skills into library instruction sessions. Nearly all chapter contributors are current or former academic business and/or information literacy librarians, with thirty-three from the United States, ten from Canada, and one from the United Kingdom. The book's organizational schema is thematic, with lessons sorted into nine topical sections: Basic Business Research, Finance and Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Management, Marketing, Specialty Subjects, Data Literacy/Data Visualization, Experiential Learning/Career, and Using Technology in the Classroom. This configuration works well most of the time, as many lessons incorporate the applied skills of a specific subdiscipline. However, a few lessons might have been better served in a different group. For example, Chapter 8, "Evaluating Information Quality," is placed in the Finance and Accounting section due to its alignment with graduate coursework in those areas, but its lesson content is generic enough to merit placement in the Basic Business Research section.

Each of the forty-one chapters presents a lesson or workshop idea using the same overarching template, which ensures that essential information, including intended audience and lesson goals and objectives, is not omitted. Teaching outlines are presented as the centerpiece of each chapter and provide a basic guide for the delivery of each lesson. However, the level of detail in these outlines varies widely. Some lessons, such as Chapter 5's "Storytelling with Business Research" and Chapter 29's "Business Ethics and Intellectual Property," are incredibly thorough, with the latter containing an instructor's script. Others, in contrast, are more succinct: "Hot Topics Trade Publications Connect Research with Career Ambitions" (Chapter 37) provides a basic structure for the lesson with a single-page teaching outline. Whether or not a given lesson's teaching outline provides enough particulars to guide another business librarian will depend on that individual. Librarians without a formal business background may feel intimidated by certain lessons. Among these are the market segmentation and market sizing lessons in Chapters 20 and 23, which require specialist knowledge for their

successful delivery. Many chapters contain helpful supplemental materials like worksheets, handouts, sample slide decks, and web links to online library guides.

All of the chapters in *Teaching Business Information Literacy* also address the "transferability" of each lesson. According to the collection's editors, these suggestions enable readers to adapt each lesson to suit the needs of their institution. Modifications include lists of substitute databases, recommendations for using the lesson with different class sizes or audiences, and advice for adapting in-person activities to the virtual environment (and vice-versa). In spite of these, some readers will find that lessons are not transferable when neither the recommended nor alternate databases are held by their institution.

The collection contains lessons that are designed for a plethora of different audiences, and lessons are generally flexible in terms of secondary specifications. While the majority of the lessons are designed for undergraduate students in business fields, four are geared towards graduate students, and eleven are classification-agnostic. A handful of authors (e.g., Heimann & Krstevska; Barrett) comment that their lessons are adaptable to non-business majors who are engaged in interdisciplinary learning. The range of suggested numbers of participants is great, with as little as six in Chapter 11's "Pitching Through Storytelling" to as many as sixty in multi-section courses that subdivide participants into cooperative teams, as in Chapter 4's gamified lesson plan. Most of the lesson plans function within the framework of a "one-shot" instructional session, where the allotted class time runs from thirty to ninety minutes. However, some lessons take place over more than one session, and Chapter 7 ("Database Scavenger Hunt and Analysis for Accounting Students") is presented as one component of a week-long immersion workshop.

The specifications of each lesson can help other business librarians determine which activities to implement in instructional sessions and which are not feasible given their typical audience, class sizes, and time allotment. Despite this, discussions of the time needed for instructors to prepare for each session are vague. Prep time is implied in each lesson, yet only seven lessons list the approximate number of hours of prep time. The reader must assess their own strengths and weaknesses as an instructor to ascertain how much prep time they will actually need to plan the session, and formulate a flexible schedule in case plans go awry.

In addition to providing lesson templates, *Teaching Business Information Literacy* also supplies a running commentary on contemporary trends in instructional and business librarianship. Several authors incorporate the use of the flipped classroom to spur students to take responsibility for their own learning. For instructional librarians who are unfamiliar with this strategy, Chapter 22 ("Dissecting Data to Make Better Decisions") and Chapter 39 ("Flip Your One-Shot Instruction Session with Survey Software") provide good points of reference. St Martin, Belantara, & Hickey mention the possibility of rebranding the business librarian as a Consultant in Chapter 30 ("Connecting the Real Estate Industry and Library Instruction"),

providing food for thought for any librarian seeking to heighten engagement with business faculty and students. New business librarians should pay special attention to Chapter 34 ("Building a Better Business Consultant"), which lists the essential repositories of information needed for successful business research endeavors in Steps 1-4 of its teaching outline. The book's final section, "Using Technology in the Classroom," also contains clever approaches to instruction. Though it does not include specific examples or web links to finished products, Chapter 38 ("Scaling Up") provides general recommendations for building asynchronous lessons. Chapter 40 ("Teaching Company Research through a Virtual Research Workshop") contains best practices for hosting webinars. Given the interconnected and digital nature of the contemporary collegiate learning environment, it is strange that these strategies are isolated in a separate section, rather than integrated throughout the book.

Another key feature of *Teaching Business Information Literacy* is its attention to the specialized databases and web resources utilized in business research. Showing students how to get the most out of specific databases is the primary focus of several lessons, including Chapter 40's "Teaching Company Research through a Virtual Research Workshop." Various chapters highlight resources that are available on the open web, such as U.S. government websites and Google Trends. In "A Tour of Public-Use Market Research" (Chapter 10), Carolyn Klotzbach-Russell tackles the pertinent problem of conducting complex research when access to subscription databases is unavailable to ensure that students can satisfy their business information needs post-graduation.

Given its publication in the post-COVID-19 pandemic world, it is surprising that *Teaching Business Information Literacy* does not contain many lessons that are designed especially for online learning. Of the forty-one lessons, only four were created as virtual lessons. Two of these—a primary resource exploration for future entrepreneurs (Chapter 13) and a survey of library resources for business research (Chapter 38)—take the form of asynchronous online modules. Most of the other authors state that their lessons are adaptable to the online learning environment, and a few (e.g., Heimann & Krstevska; Opdahl) illustrate the modifications they made to their instructional plans when their courses went remote, such as simulating classroom discussion through a web conferencing application's chat or poll feature. Although some lessons (namely Chapter 18's "Teaching Business Research Using Strategic Analysis Diagrams") do not indicate specific adjustments for virtual sessions, creative facilitators could modify elements of each lesson to offer instruction outside of the face-to-face class. Web-based tools mentioned in other chapters (e.g., Zoom, Google Docs, Google Jamboard, Padlet, and Trello) go a long way in enabling and enhancing the online instructional session.

One of the book's shortcomings is its de-emphasis on information literacy standards. Although the book's editors mention the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy and RUSA's Business Research Competencies in the Introduction, the individual chapters of *Teaching Business Information Literacy* do not address these standards consistently. The ACRL

Information Literacy Framework is discussed in only twelve chapters, often in a few passing sentences. The Business Research Competencies are referenced even more infrequently (i.e., in three chapters). Three authors incorporate three other standards: the BRASS Business Information Literacy Research Competency Standards; Jacobson, Mackey, and O'Brien's Metaliterate Learner Characteristics; and Pothier & Condon's Data Literacy Competencies. Ideally, the lesson template shared across each of the chapters should have a discrete section dedicated to the lesson's alignment with a chosen set of standards. Chapter 14 ("Aligning Business IL with Startup Thinking") details how the lesson aligns with each of the six frames of the ACRL Framework, and Chapter 30 ("Connecting the Real Estate Industry and Library Instruction") contains a model chart for presenting the alignment of lesson goals with the ACRL Frames.

The overall quality of stated goals and objectives differs significantly across chapters. Practitioners familiar with SMART Objectives will be disappointed to see objectives that do not incorporate measurable markers of student progress or address the amount of time needed for students to achieve mastery of a concept or skill. Examples of stated goals and objectives that do align with SMART principles are found in Chapters 3, 8, and 19, as they demonstrate what can be achieved during a single lesson and call for the production of a specific result (e.g., "Develop at least three keywords"). Moreover, they incorporate both the lower and higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Chapter 16 ("Managing Your Management Information Literacy") is the only chapter that differentiates between a single overarching goal for the lesson and seven discrete learning outcomes. This distinction is useful in identifying both the tasks the students need to accomplish during the lesson and what knowledge and skills they will be able to take with them after its conclusion.

Teaching Business Information Literacy also alludes to the importance of faculty collaboration in planning and delivering instructional sessions for specialist audiences. Several authors (Premji; Opdahl; St. Martin, Belantara, & Hickey; Kraft) address the faculty-librarian partnership explicitly, holding that effective information literacy instruction is impossible without this working relationship. Three chapters highlight lessons that were developed as a direct result of such joint efforts: a one-shot session in support of a semester project in a Business Writing course (Chapter 3), portions of a weeklong immersion course for Master's students in Accounting (Chapter 7), and a workshop co-taught by a finance executive-in-residence (Chapter 9). These lessons are only feasible when a robust academic partnership between library instructors and departmental faculty is in place. Others, like Chapter 14's open workshops in entrepreneurship research skills, are also setting-specific, as they were designed in part to connect students with specialized organizations and support systems on their home campus and in their local community. Business librarians who are new to the field or to their university will need to omit these lessons from their teaching repertoire until they can connect

and collaborate with key faculty at their institution. Unfortunately, most of the book's chapters have little to suggest in the way of outreach activities to engage faculty.

In spite of its deficiencies, *Teaching Business Information Literacy* is still a pedagogical guide worth perusing. Practitioners could easily spend a few weeks or months mining the book for relevant strategies to adapt and implement in their own instruction. The collection would have been even more convenient had it been better aligned with information literacy standards, as such alignment would have permitted readers to quickly pull ideas from the most relevant lessons. Readers should consider field testing some of these lessons nonetheless, as this could open new avenues for scholarly dialogues and additional research into the burgeoning topic of business information literacy.