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## **Mapping Collaborations Between Academic Business Libraries and Career Centres: An Exploratory Study**

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### **Abstract:**

*Supporting student retention and success are important outcomes for academic libraries. Preparing students for career opportunities can be highly rewarding for academic librarians. One way to expand on this work is through collaboration with campus partners. Collaborations between academic libraries and career centres are becoming increasingly popular yet the types of interactions may vary from campus to campus. Universities' strategic partnerships may foster new areas of services and resources for students seeking career research and development support. This paper explores how these collaborations are formed and maintained by presenting exploratory data that highlights common activities, interactions, practices and challenges, based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with academic business librarians and career counselors from four different institutions.*

**Keywords:** information literacy, career development, academic librarianship, student engagement

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### **Introduction**

It is well known that libraries, particularly public ones, have been providing career services and support for the general public (Hamilton-Pennell, 2008; Roy, Bolting, & Brzozowski, 2010; Starr, 2018; Wyckoff & Harris, 2018). These activities may include workshops supporting resume writing and interviewing strategies, personal finance, career coaching or hosting job fairs. Academic libraries can additionally support career development by partnering with career centres connected to universities. These collaborative activities range from acquiring resources to support career development to teaching students how to conduct research using such library resources as newspapers, trade publications and commercial or

governmental data sources. Studies have shown that these types of services promote the library's value in supporting students' career developments during the school year and even after graduation (Abel, 1992; DeHart, 1996; Dugan, Bergstrom & Doan, 2009; Pun, 2014; Pun & Kubo, 2016; Quenoy & Orgeron, 2003; Song, 2005; Swartz, Carlisle & Chisato, 2007). Business librarians, as librarians who specialize in business, economics or finance subjects, can play an important role in collaborating with career centres to support new opportunities and engagements for students. For the curriculum, teaching students how to conduct research on companies, industries and the markets are a key part of business librarians' work. These activities can also prepare students for their interviews and job research. To understand better how two distinct groups - business librarians and career counselors - can foster collaborative opportunities, this study explores how academic business librarians can support career counselors to promote student success and student career development.

The purpose of this study is to understand how academic business libraries are also collaborating with career centres to support their students successfully in their respective institutions. The study presents findings on common activities, interactions and challenges coming from academic business librarians and career counselors. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups, the research shares the experiences and perspectives of counselors and business librarians regarding these collaborations in supporting student success and students career development.

## **Literature Review**

The literature on career services in libraries and partnerships between academic libraries and career centres is abundant. There are articles that cover how libraries of all types can support career services, research or guidance in their respective workplaces (Farrar, Grays, VanderPol, & Cox, 2007; Sheley, 2014; Wyckoff & Harris, 2018). The role of academic libraries in fostering career research skills such as information literacy through collaboration with career centres is documented. This type of literature provides case studies on how collaborations between the two groups are formed. These types of partnerships vary between the two groups based on the level of activities including collection development, information literacy and outreach, and some academic librarians have even established their own work in supporting career research services (Abel, 1992; Albarillo, 2016a; Albarillo, 2016b; Hollister, 2005; Quenoy & Orgeron 2003; Pun, 2017).

Among subject librarians, business librarians in particular have taken the lead to expand their work in supporting the career centres or career research. Albarillo (2016b) emphasizes how academic librarians can teach career information literacy skills to prepare students in evaluating information effectively for job research purposes. Albarillo (2016b) outlines a library instruction workshop that supports career information literacy by having students conduct a guided search activity in a computer classroom. These types of classes that Albarillo (2016b) offered include "exploring career information," "job hunting and interviewing" and "company and industry information." (p. 193). Albarillo's (2016b) chapter provides a useful guide for academic librarians interested in building an instructional program to support career information literacy skills.

At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Song (2005) describes a case study of the university library supporting the business career centre and how the business librarian's work in supporting information literacy for business students has expanded. Song

(2005) argues for a new six-stage service model to support career research. Through a series of orientations, workshops, individual consultations, and assessments, students may learn to be more prepared to conduct research in preparation for their interviews while “the business librarian helps them effectively use information from multiple resources and personalize such information, so that their resumes and cover letters would become focused and highly relevant to the companies and industries to which students were applying” (Song, 2005, p. 14). Song (2005) also describes the role of the career service office in UIUC as a partner to implement such service, and that librarians play a key role in fostering personal relationships with students throughout the process.

Song (2005) highlights one key point: “the library will share the service responsibility with the career service office. In fact, the career service office has felt the need to offer similar services but has not been able to do so due to many reasons. Also, the career service office can concentrate on recruiting companies to visit the campus and provide general career guidance for students. Instructing students individually with research poses a heavy workload for them, and they also lack the expertise in using information. The library will be their collaborator and partner” (p. 13). This kind of relationship fosters opportunities for the career service office to focus on other priorities while the business librarians can provide career research support as specialists in the field.

Dugan, Bergstrom and Doan (2009) of Purdue University describe a collaboration between the libraries and the career centre by exploring the development of a shared resource known as the Career Wiki. This central site supports information and library resources in career development and allows students, librarians, and staff to access its content. This type of online tool can be useful to engage with stakeholders, particularly in the career centre, to share information and resources.

Fiegen (2011), Gunn and Miree (2012), and Natt (2013) provide case studies on how business information literacy is applied to support the academic curriculum, and these case studies can also demonstrate how to support career research collaboratively with the career centres.

Through content and survey analyses, Natt (2013) describes the concept of business information literacy by drawing on different sources, literatures, and data. The study focused on translating and transferring the academic context of business information literacy into the corporate setting for special libraries and information centres. More importantly, Natt (2013) highlights the abilities to identify, find, and analyze financial information, business literature, and competitor/industry information as business information literacy skills in this global environment regardless of workplace “context.” This article provides a useful critique and analysis of business information literacy as a concept.

Gunn and Miree (2012) describe and compare the online information literacy assessment results of their first year and final year of business students. This kind of segmentation and sampling is useful for understanding how undergraduate students can perform in business information literacy tests. It is noted that online testing can be effective to support some but not all information literacy skills. Some of the more specific skills such as data analysis, various types of publication such as trade magazine, scholarly article, or company report may still require specialized workshops or consultations. An online program such as the Career Wiki as proposed by Dugan, Bergstrom and Doan (2009) could be designed to engage with distance-learning students who may not have easy access to the resources from their libraries or career centres.

Fiegen (2011) reviews several research publications on business information literacy and suggests new studies in the field, as she highlights the important articles that integrate an educational theory or pedagogy into this practice of information literacy. Although Fiegen's (2011) work does not directly mention career centre and academic library partnerships in supporting business information literacy, she provides useful guidance in understanding the role of business information literacy in supporting academic curriculum, student learning and success based on this extensive literature review.

For a research study on partnerships between career centre and business librarians, Pun (2017) conducted a survey to identify activities and partnerships from the perspective of the academic business librarians. The five questions included:

1. Do you currently have a partnership with the career centre?
- 2a. If you have no career centre partnerships, why is that the case?
- 2b. If yes, can you describe the type of partnership you have with the career centre?
- 2b1. Can you give some examples of your partnerships? How did you foster the relationship?
3. What do you like about your career centre?
4. What are some challenges in forming this partnership?
5. How do you see the role of business information literacy in career development?
6. If you have a partnership with the career centre, would you like to be contacted for an in-depth interview? (Pun, 2017, p. 4).

In this preliminary research, Pun (2017) finds that academic business librarians perceive career centres as their key partners, and value career research and business information literacy skills. Pun describes the activities that academic business librarians are pursuing to support their career centres, such as outreach and consultation with the career centre staff, and training career counselors on how to use library databases, particularly the business databases. In this research, the study examines how such collaboration can support student success by surveying and interviewing several business librarians and career counselors for their feedback and perspectives.

## **Methodology**

In the initial phase of this research, a survey from Qualtrics, an online survey tool, was distributed to a listserv soliciting responses from academic business librarians (Pun, 2017). Data was collected from these librarians regarding their collaborations with their career centres in 2017. At the end of the five-question survey, participants were given the opportunity to be contacted for further discussion of their responses.

In the second part of the study, participants from four different universities volunteered to be part of an in-depth interview or a focus group. Participants were either academic business librarians or career counselors. A series of questions was asked in these meetings (see Appendix A and B). To protect the identities of the participants, pseudonyms were given to individuals and focus groups, such as participant A, participant B, participant C, and participant D. A total of seven subjects participated in an interview or a focus group. Table 1 breaks down the types and numbers of participants involved.

Table 1

*List of participants*

Participant	Number of Participants	Status
A	1	Business librarian
B	2	Business librarians
C	1	Career counselor
D	3	2 business librarians and 1 career counselor

During the interview or focus group session, each participant received a consent form to sign to ensure that their identities would be protected. In addition, this consent form explained that this study had received institutional review board (IRB) approval at California State University, Fresno. For the interviews/focus groups, each session generally lasted for about one hour and was held in a library or in the office of the career centre of the respective university. A semi-structured interview approach was used because it is a “qualitative data collection strategy in which informants will be asked a series of predetermined but open-ended questions” (Given, 2008, para. 1). The interview and focus group methods were included because they allowed participants to have the option to share their responses with their colleagues. The career counselors participated in this study through a referral by the librarian participants.

For participant C, a career counselor, a series of questions was asked regarding his/her work at the career centre in collaboration with the library (see Appendix A). Participants A and B received interview questions from Appendix B while participant D, career counselors and librarians, received a combination of questions from Appendix A and B. This method was determined based on the factors of time and convenience. For participant D, this approach also generated useful feedback when observing how business librarians responded to a career counselor in the room and vice versa.

One important note is that the sample size of this study is very small, and the findings should not be used to generalize experiences and perspectives. Only a limited number of participants volunteered to be part of the study. Nevertheless, this research does provide useful considerations when trying to understand how partnerships can support student success and student career development. This study also highlights key themes from the findings that were gathered in the interviews and focus groups.

### **Findings and Analyses**

Three themes emerged based on the findings and conversations from the interviews.

#### **Common collaborative activities**

The first theme explores common collaborative activities in collections and services: the common activities between academic business librarians and career counselors can vary from school to school. However, these are the recurring activities with slight variations that academic business librarians do to support or collaborate with their career centres/counselors that have been identified.

Offering business research workshops: how to use a Bloomberg terminal; how to conduct company/industry research; how to find news sources using Hoover's, Thompson Reuters, or LexisNexis; how to access Vault; or how to use Business Source Complete. These workshops are scheduled during the semester or offered through a consultation by request basis.

Librarian participants revealed that the sessions may not be well attended, or there are fewer of these open workshops due to the high demand for in-class workshops. Another challenge is that some of the business databases are licensed for use by business school students only, and not for the general student population to access.

Sharing resources under various models: there are different levels of sharing resources that exist between academic business librarians and career counselors. Librarian participants mentioned that they often purchase materials at the request of career counselors; some career research databases, such as Vault, may be funded from other sources outside of the library's collection budget, as stated by participant A.

LibGuides are also popular online resource guides that have been created for career research purposes. Participant A also stated that access to the LibGuide is shared with career counselors to co-update information on the LibGuide page. Participant B stated that their resources only support the business school students, who are typically Master of Business Administration (MBA) students, which would also limit these resources to a specific group, but their career counselor may support a variety of students beyond business ones. There are no consistencies on how resources are being shared and sustained.

### **Direct collaborations**

The second theme examines direct collaborations between counselors and academic librarians (including non-business-related liaisons). Participants C and D, who are from career centres, stated that they would like to see more collaboration between their career centres and the academic libraries. They would also like to see more involvement with their librarian colleagues, because career research is relevant to every discipline.

Librarian participant D agreed that subject librarians would be helpful to support business students who do not necessarily want a career in the business field. All librarian participants A, C and D mentioned that there may not be much collaboration between their subject librarian colleagues and with their career centres. In addition, two main points came up from this theme:

Meetings in shared spaces: librarian participants B and D shared that they usually host open house meetings with career counselors and the staff in the career centre at the beginning of the semester. This was an effective way to build rapport. They also mentioned that because they are located in the same building, it was easier to run into the career counselors and share ideas. Distance can play a significant role in fostering the relationship between the two groups. If non-business librarians do not visit the business school or work at the business library, they may not encounter the career centre and counselor within the same shared space at all.

Career fair collaboration: a librarian participant previously provided career research help during career fairs for students. However, over time there were not enough students showing up for assistance. Participant C who is a career counselor also shared that it would be beneficial to see that kind of collaboration whereby librarians can provide career research training for

students to find out more about the company despite the hectic time and day of the event, and also prior to such event.

When asked, “how is the career centre structured in your university? Is it within student affairs or academic affairs or each college provide career services?” all five academic librarians stated how their career centres are placed in the university organization chart. The career centres are either located under the specific school, or within student affairs. There are no commonalities on where the career centre department is located. It has been mentioned by participant A that if the career centres were organizationally and physically located in the school (e.g., the business school), it would be helpful and easier to form new collaborations with the business school library.

Three librarian participants also shared that there is more than one career centre on campus: one to support undergraduate students and another to support business school students. This arrangement of services can cause confusion for the librarians and students when it is about referral services. As a result, it can be challenging to coordinate and organize resources to support these different groups and efforts. The priority lies within the business library’s interest in supporting business school students, rather than simply supporting the general student population who might be interested in business related careers.

### **Redefining business information literacy**

The third theme involves redefining business information literacy: the term is not relevant to categorize information literacy in the business research context as all librarian participants agreed. When asked about business information literacy as it relates to career research, one librarian participant felt that business information literacy does not resonate with students or faculty. However, it is important to note that business information literacy or business research is an important academic research skill to understand the values of information, or how to use databases to find the cost of things.

A librarian participant said that students do not know what business information literacy means but that it is a skill that they are learning in the library research workshops. Career counselor participant C remarked that “information literacy could teach students on how to conduct research skillfully in the long term.” They all recognize the importance of such skills, but the term needs to be redefined because it is generally not related to a business work environment. Despite the studies that argue the importance of business information literacy skills for students, this concept may need to be reconsidered, based on the feedback (Fiegen, 2011; Natt, 2013).

When asked if their universities define or support student success, none of the participants said that it has been identified as an important value for their university/library to consider. Participants did not align their work with the career centre in relation to the value of student success at all, but they did stress the importance of student career development. The workshops and resources they share are part of these measures in supporting student career development. In general, the participants had positive experiences collaborating with each other, but certain points can be considered to improve such partnerships over time.

## Conclusion

Based on this exploratory research using qualitative methods, the study finds three stimulating themes to consider when identifying ways that collaborations support student success and student career development:

- Common collaborative activities in collections and services
- Collaborations with career counselors and academic librarians
- Redefinition of business information literacy

First, the different types of activities in collections and services have been understood in the literature and in this study. However, the financial management and constraints of sharing such resources may come down to the library's or career centre's own budgets. Not all databases from the business library can be accessed by students who are not part of the business program. These resources may be provided by one of the partners and may require further cross-trainings and awareness of such resources between both groups.

One additional consideration that was not brought up in the discussions is that academic business librarians may be part of the email listserv announcements from the career centres so that they are also aware of upcoming events, activities and programs, hosted by the career centres. Business librarians can attend these sessions to build further rapport with the career centres and with students seeking career development opportunities.

Second, although various collaborations exist with counselors and academic librarians, the physical space remains an important resource for this activity. Organizationally, if the business school oversaw the library and the career centre, there would also be opportunities for collaboration, as described by librarian participants B and D. This type of set up is reflected in an organization chart or within the same operations unit. Counselors and librarians may run into each other in meetings, as well.

Physically, if the business library and the career centres are located in the same area or building, there are stronger collaborations and preferences for that kind of set up. One participant noted that once the career centre moved to another location, it created a gap in their partnership. Sharing the same building tends to generate opportunities to collaborate. More broadly, "research that defines library spaces and the role of academic libraries is in its nascent stages and future inquiry is encouraged building on conceptualizations of the Japanese concept of 'ba' thought of as a shared space to build relationships and advancing both individual and collective knowledge" (Nitecki, 2010, p. 58). Space is critical for collaboration.

Third, business information literacy may need to be reconsidered from a faculty and/or industry perspective that links closely to student career development. As all participants stated, it is an important skill, but it does not resonant with students clearly. The concept should be revamped to remain relevant and timely. Wu and Kendall (2006) describe a business information literacy survey that was distributed to teaching faculty found that there are five business information literacy criteria and those are: "company information, current awareness, presentation tools, industry information, and international information. Company information is considered the most important element, which includes financial reports, background and history, competition, and ratios. It is followed closely by current awareness" (para. 31).

Business information literacy should be connected to student career development; doing so requires effective communication and engagement with career counselors, faculty, and industry partners, because this skill goes beyond finding information and resources online. There are important key soft skills that students need to develop, including writing and presentation skills. With today's avalanche of digital information and tools, students who are joining the workforce will need to have these skills and know how to conduct research effectively and efficiently and be able to differentiate between sources that are credible or biased.

In general, this research provides a snapshot of collaborations between academic business librarians and career counselors based on a small sample of partnerships. These themes can also be considered for other subject areas, including agriculture, health sciences, humanities, social sciences and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). The research can be expanded into other directions, as career centres are and have been moving towards a more subject liaison/networking model (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Kretovics, Honaker, & Kraning, 1999).

For this study, the career counselors who were interviewed knew their librarian colleagues well and felt that the benefits of such collaboration strengthened their own work. To continue building on this research, a future study should identify more career counselors to gather their perspectives and input on how they may or may not be collaborating with their academic librarian colleagues at a critical time of rapid changes in technologies and resources. Such investigation could enhance the academic librarians' understanding of how another department within the larger organization perceived the library, and point to new opportunities for collaboration.

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## **Appendix A: Interview with a Career Counselor**

1. Can you tell us about the importance of research skills for career development?
2. Do you know about the feedback from employers on your students/alums and their research skills when they intern or work for these companies?  
2a What would be a successful career development skill?
3. Can you tell me about your academic library? Do you have any partnerships with them right now, the way you see it?
4. How can the academic library support your needs as a career counselor? What would you like to see happen?
5. Have you seen specific databases or online tools that the library can purchase?
6. Did you know about subject liaison librarians in your library? What about subject databases? Do you know who your business librarian is?
7. What about library skills such as business information literacy, do you see the importance of that skill in career development? How would you promote that skill in career centre program?

## **Appendix B: Interview with an Academic Business Librarians:**

1. How is the career centre structured in your university? Is it within student affairs or academic affairs or each college provide career services?
2. Can you tell me more about your partnerships with the career centre?
3. Have you done workshops or introduced resources to the career centre?
4. How does your institution (university or academic library) define student success?
  - 4a. If your university does not define it, what about the value of academic libraries supporting high impact practices? Can you say something about that?
5. Have you seen specific databases or online tools that can support career development or career research?
  - 5a. If you have purchased it, how are they being used or promoted?
  - 5b. If you have not purchased it, what is the reason for that?
6. Can you tell me more about your subject/liaison librarians – do they have any interactions with students' career needs, advising or professional development?
7. What are your thoughts on business information literacy skill? What about this skill as a career development skill? What about the relevance or importance of it?
8. Any specific library databases you think could be helpful for career research?