Embedded Library Instruction in Experiential Learning

Abstract

Adapting to the rapidly evolving user behavior is a perennial challenge for academic libraries. In response, many researchers and practitioners in the fields of library and information science have proposed new models of library services and practices. This article presents a case study of an international, multi-disciplinary initiative where library instruction was fully embedded and recognized as a core contributor to the program. As a proactive partner of the program, the author was able to demonstrate the value of library instruction with strong visibility and impact. The author provides several implications drawn from this case study. Experiential learning is quickly becoming a major theme in higher education, and this case study shows how embedded library instruction can create a compelling value proposition.

1. Introduction

Adapting to the rapidly evolving user behavior is a perennial challenge for academic libraries. In response, many researchers and practitioners in the fields of library and information science have proposed new models of library services. Over the past decade, new themes began to emerge in journals and conferences reflecting such changing education and information service environments, including evidence-based librarianship, embedded librarianship, data librarianship, and entrepreneurial librarianship to name a few. Such ideas and efforts became a force behind reinventing the roles of academic librarians, despite some public misunderstanding that libraries were slow in change or innovation. Although embedded librarianship became a popular practice explored by many practitioners in the academic library community, it still has some significant challenges to overcome, and according to Shumaker (2009), an expert in the field of embedded librarianship, "embedded library services have not achieved full potential" (p. 17).

This article presents a case study of an international, multi-disciplinary initiative where library instruction was fully embedded and recognized as a core contributor to the program. The Global Marketing and Consulting Program (GMCP) is an international collaborative initiative between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in the United States and the Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (UNIST) in South Korea. GMCP, consisting of students and faculty from various fields, was initially conceived to assist small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in East Asia with creating business plans and strategies to enter the global market.
Compared to large and multinational corporations, local SMEs typically do not have sufficient personnel and financial resources to expand to the global market. Recognizing such difficulties, GMCP sought to provide business marketing and consulting services to those SMEs without

fees. The author participated in creating this collaborative initiative from the beginning and became the research advisor for students throughout the project engagement period.

The author (2009) offered a library marketing mix during the IFLA Conference, where the author argued that new and innovative library services should help academic libraries become proactive partners rather than remain as providers. In GMCP, the role of the author as the library instructor was proactive rather than reactive. Library instruction was regarded as the core component of the overall program, as students from various academic disciplines had to be trained in the fields of business research extensively. This article contributes to the literature in the field of new library services by proposing radical and aggressive integration of library education into experiential learning such as GMCP. Experiential learning has quickly become a major issue in higher education, which would help connect classroom knowledge to the real-world (Spackman, 2016). As universities are actively creating experiential learning opportunities for their students, academic libraries are strongly encouraged to explore options where they can become proactive partners in this new educational model.

2. Background

The idea of GMCP was originally conceived by faculty at UNIST in 2015. During the economic slowdown in Korea, UNIST sought to build an innovative program to help local SMEs grow further. Although they had long wished to diversify their markets, they often failed due to the lack of well-trained employees in international marketing as well as financial resources. UNIST established a new office named "University Industry Partnership" with an aim to serve local businesses in identifying markets beyond Korea and constructing appropriate business strategies. UNIST contacted some faculty at UIUC in the United States to help them form an international program where students from UNIST and UIUC could partner with Korean SMEs and provide consulting services in the areas of international marketing and management consulting.

In 2015, UNIST selected a total of 25 students to participate in this program, while seven students from UIUC were invited to join the program after several rounds of interviews. They came from a variety of academic disciplines including business administration, marketing, computer engineering, mechanical engineering, chemistry, political science, and accounting. All students stayed at a dormitory at UNIST during June and July.
After receiving training in principles of consulting and marketing research, students were then assigned to teams.
Five local SMEs applied to participate as clients, and GMCP administrators assembled five student teams accordingly.

Each team, consisting of five to seven students, worked closely with the client in creating the scope of the project, framing the project theme, conducting research and analysis, and delivering the recommendation. The scope of each project varied from developing international partners and identifying key markets in North America to formulating online marketing strategies and designing promotional materials in English or other languages as necessary.

3. Role of Embedded Library Instruction in GMCP

Kesselman and Watstein (2009) offer some excellent overview of various roles and responsibilities of academic embedded librarians. Embedded librarianship typically involves librarians being invited to participate in a course or program where they provide instruction on research methods and library resources specifically tailored to the course or program. In addition, embedded librarians are usually requested to designate specific times for service -- lecture, workshop, and office hours, for example – so that they can remain visible to users and actively be promoted by the organizer (Brower, 2011).

One important question, however, must be raised when considering embedded librarianship. In many cases, embedded librarians do not own or share the responsibilities of courses or programs. In other words, embedded librarians may easily be perceived as service providers but not as core contributor or owner of the entire courses or programs.
Embedded librarians remain as supporters but do not take central roles. While some researchers reported that they were able to participate in course-integrated embedded librarianship (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009), it looks rare that librarians participate in all phases from designing courses and programs to delivering the results. It often makes the sustainability of embedded librarianship questionable – embedded librarianship can easily be discontinued by course instructors and program coordinators.

In GMCP, the author participated not as an invited librarian but joined the program as one of the founding members. The author co-developed the content of the overall program with other founding members, served on the student selection committee, co-drafted the program proposal for funding, and led regular consultation sessions with all teams throughout the program as the research advisor.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Program Design

In 2015, the author met with the Dean of University Industry Partnership, administrators at the Industry Innovation Office representing UNIST several times to discuss the overall theme and details of the program.
After establishing the vision and mission statement, they then created a student recruitment plan and client sourcing strategy. All agreed that the success of the program largely depended upon the successful recruitment of high caliber students. Students with excellent track records would ensure the quality of the final projects, which would also help convince potential clients to participate.

After those meetings, GMCP was formally created as an international collaborative student consulting organization. After an extensive promotion, GMCP was able to recruit a total of 32 students from UNIST and UIUC. They were all invited to UNIST in the summer of 2016 to participate in consulting projects.

3.1.2. Training Curriculum

During the summer, all students had to participate in a total of 40 hours of training sessions during the first week of the program before engaging in their assigned projects. The curriculum consisted of the following:

- Fundamentals of consulting
- Advanced consulting
- Fundamentals of business research
- Advanced business research
- International marketing
- International trade
- Technology management

3.1.3. Library Instruction -- Setup

As a founding member of GMCP, the author was able to firmly establish business research sessions as the core component of the overall curriculum.
As mentioned earlier, library instruction sessions were often regarded as a support service to the core curriculum.
In such a model, it was difficult to assert the value of library research as many students regarded library instruction as an extra lecture. While it is true that many students could discover the value of library resources and services for the first time as a result of library instruction, the library instructor still had a difficult time maintaining a close connection with students. The library instructor was usually invited to provide a lecture as a guest speaker, and further communication with continuity often proved to be challenging.

During GMCP, however, the author as the research advisor worked with all students from the recruiting stage until the final presentation to the clients. The author provided 15 hours of training (fundamentals of business research and advanced business research) as independent sessions (i.e. not as extra sessions within other courses). In addition, the program required all student teams to meet with the author for one hour on a daily basis to review their work. In these one-hour sessions every day, the author examined each team's research progress: methodologies, resource selection, and presentation of research data. All GMCP administrators strongly believed that the quality of each team's final deliverable would be based on creative and thorough research. Most students, both from UNIST and UIUC, initially brought very low business research skills; in fact, the author quickly discovered that their previous experience with library resources was very limited. For undergraduate students, in-depth research was not necessary for their coursework. Similarly, most graduate students participating in GMCP were not familiar with business resources available for them.

3.1.4. Fully Embedded Library Instruction Model

As business research became fully embedded into the program, the author sought to differentiate instruction sessions from traditional library instruction methods. Most previous library instruction sessions were heavily resource-oriented. In other words, the library instructor examined the content of the course and developed materials that would help students identify appropriate library and non-library resources. Library instructors would create online resource

guides or pages specifically created for the course or program, and those guides would provide direct links to electronic resources.

For GMCP, the author sought to lead library instruction and embedded librarianship to the next level. At every stage of the project, the author worked closely with each team to make certain that the outcome of their deliverable demonstrated effective and creative business research skills. Examples of how this process worked are as follows:

Project scoping stageEach team is assigned to a specific client.
The team then works with the client to determine the scope of the project (e.g. assessing market opportunities in the US, identifying potential business partners in Canada, developing marketing strategies to enter a new market). In this stage, the author advised the team with conducting research on professional project scoping process, successful business proposals, and preliminary assessment of the industry development.

- Problem framing stage

Once the team and the client agree on the scope of the project, the team then moves to the problem-framing stage. In this stage, the team conducts a series of brainstorming sessions, issue identification sessions, and hypothesis building sessions. Research is a critical component at this stage, as all team members must contribute their ideas and suggestions based on individual research. Without effective research, the team cannot construct strong arguments, and it may result in poor and irrelevant recommendations to the client.
The author led one research session for all students to discuss how to find key information on business and technology issues such as economic indicators, industry developments, competitors, and customer behavior. The author also scheduled regular consultation sessions with each team to suggest appropriate research strategies, as the needs of each client were diversely different from one another.

- Research and analysis stage

During this stage, all teams engage in in-depth research, requiring both primary and secondary research. Depending on the scope of each project, some teams have to conduct primary research such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews with experts. In order for them to conduct primary research, however, teams must have done sufficient secondary research to build meaningful interview questions, construct logical questionnaires for a survey, and identify experts to interview. In so doing, teams can gather and accumulate significant information that is not easily obtained otherwise; clients will value the information that teams discover during this stage. The depth of analysis is largely dependent on the quality of research performed in this stage.

Previous library instruction sessions mostly covered only secondary research by presenting both library and non-library resources published in print and electronic formats. However, the author advised the teams on both primary and secondary research methods. The author reviewed the research plan of each team and suggested an appropriate research method.
For some teams, the author suggested identifying key experts who could provide opinions on certain technological developments, while some teams were encouraged to conduct focus group sessions to study the needs of certain buyer groups. More than introducing resources, helping students with designing primary and secondary research methods requires advanced knowledge

and training in business research. Subject specialization for academic librarians is thus critically important since students can lose confidence in the library instructor's ability to formulate optimal research strategies for them. The author had previous professional experience with marketing research, and this subject specialty played a critical role in making this embedded library instruction successful.

- <u>Synthesis and delivery stage</u>

The teams synthesize their findings and recommendations into the final deliverable, usually in PowerPoint slides and written reports. The author's role in this stage was to ensure quality assurance of the entire deliverable.

The author created a checklist for all teams, which included questions on the accuracy of data, appropriate citation styles, grammar, and proper reference styles. Since clients judge the quality of the work based on what they see from the final deliverable, even small mistakes can easily discount the overall quality of the project.

4. Results

GMCP developed a list of success measures after the first program concluded:

- Client satisfaction (survey and interviews to be conducted)
- How did the program help you to grow further?
- How did the program help you to find the new markets for your products?
- How did the program help you to assess your company's readiness to expand to the global market?
- How did the program help you to improve the performance of your company?
- How did the program help you identify new market opportunities?
- Would you recommend this program to other corporations to participate?
- Student satisfaction (survey and interviews to be conducted)
- How did the program help you connect your classroom knowledge to real-world situations?
- How did the program help you use your previous knowledge and experience to solve the problem?
- How did the program challenge you to grow as a professional?
- How did the program provide new opportunities that you had not experienced before?
- Would you recommend this program to other students to participate?

The most notable result was that one client successfully made a new supply contract with a large US company. This client, a manufacturer of new chemical materials for the automobile industry, testified that the student team discovered areas of improvement which he never considered; consequently, the team's recommendations helped him re-create marketing strategies and secure a new contract with a large US company.

The team, in turn, attributed its success to its strong research and analysis efforts.

5. Implications

The author's involvement with GMCP produced several implications to make embedded librarianship and a new model of library instruction successful.

- <u>Become a co-owner of the program</u>

Previous embedded library instruction was often an invitation-basis, and consequently, the library instructor's role remained as a guest without fully integrated into a course or program. In order for the library instructor to be fully embedded into the program, it is necessary to participate as one of the program owners who share the responsibilities of the outcome. Instead of remaining as a guest speaker or waiting to be invited, the library instructor needs to seek opportunities where he can create a program in collaboration with other faculty or researchers aggressively. In so doing, the library can move from the role of information provider to that of a partner who co-own the program.

- <u>Make a clear contribution in every stage of the program</u>

As an embedded component, the contribution of library instruction must be visible in every stage throughout the program.

In GMCP, all teams could move to the next phase only after they met with and received approval from the author.

The author carefully worked with each team to determine if the team satisfied all the research requirements at each stage. In so doing, library instruction could demonstrate clear impact, and all teams experienced how close interaction with the library instructor could improve the quality of their work.

- <u>Provide subject expertise beyond traditional librarianship</u>

Most academic librarians in North America have advanced subject degrees in addition to their library science degrees. The author had an MBA degree with some industry experience, and this advanced training undoubtedly contributed to the success of this embedded library instruction in experiential learning.

The author was able to identify key elements of marketing and consulting projects; furthermore, the author successfully integrated library instruction with advanced topics of business. The result of this embedded library instruction was more than creating online resource guides or providing one-time bibliographic instruction. The contents of library instruction during GMCP consisted of actual applications of primary and secondary research based on the needs of actual client needs, while traditional library instruction mostly covered what library resources could assist teams in finding relevant information. As the demand from users becomes increasingly complex, an advanced subject specialty for academic librarians is now a necessity.

6. Future Plans

Based on the success of its first year, GMCP is now expanding both in its scope and participants. The University of Georgia has decided to join this collaborative partnership, and two faculty members and five students will join the program in 2017. Additionally, responding to the request from the clients, GMCP added Chines and Southeast Asian markets to its market coverage. Consequently, GMCP admitted Chinese and Southeast Asian students at UIUC so that they could play key roles in studying those markets.

GMCP is currently seeking universities in China and Singapore to partner. The author already provided a total of six instruction sessions using the online platform during May 2017 to prepare students before they begin their summer projects in June.

References

Brower, M. (2011). A recent history of embedded librarianship: collaboration and partnership building with academics in learning and research environments. In Kvenild, C. & Calkins, K. (Eds.), *Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-shot Instruction* (pp. 3-16). Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Kesselman, M.A., & Watstein, S.B. (2009). Creating opportunities: embedded librarians. *Journal of Library Administration, 49*, 383-400.

Song, Y. (2009). Marketing library services: a case study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In Flaton, K. (Ed.) *Management, Marketing, and Promotion of Library Services Based on Statistics, Analyses, and Evaluation* (pp. 257-264). Munchen: IFLA Publication.

Shumaker, D. (2011). Beyond instruction: creating new roles for embedded librarians. In Kvenild, C. & Calkins, K. (Eds.) *Embedded Librarians: Moving Beyond One-shot Instruction*, 17-34. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Spackman, A. (2016). Client-based experiential learning and the librarian: Information literacy for the real world. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship, 21*, 258-273.

Contact information:

Yoo-Seong Song
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
1408 W. Gregory Dr.
Urbana, IL 61801
yoosong@illinois.edu
217-333-8021

Author bio:

Yoo-Seong Song is Associate Professor and Economics Librarian at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As the Director of Business Intelligence Group at the School of

Information Sciences at the University, he teaches courses in information consulting, applied business research, and knowledge management.