TEACHING AND LEARNING

Using the Pandemic to Move Forward: Building on the Past for a Solid Future of Business Library Research Instruction

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Overall, the instruction program in the Business Library at the Cox School of Business has benefited and grown as a result of the changes required by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has shown that much of what we have built in the past can be used and expanded to ensure a solid future for the Business Library research instruction program.

When all instruction went virtual in March 2020, the Business Library already had several instruction sessions scheduled. Since we had previously established strong relationships with these professors, there was never a question about cancelling, so we flipped to Zoom and conducted our sessions.

When I began teaching via Zoom, I quickly noted several differences. The most significant was how I presented content. Previously, I would show a PowerPoint slide, then switch to demonstrate a database or research guide while encouraging students to follow along on their laptops. Switching programs is harder to do during screen sharing in Zoom if you are only sharing programs and not the whole screen. And if you have two computer monitors, you have to be sure you are using the one being displayed. Finally, students are no longer able to glance up and see your screen and then down to their own. Over time, I learned to encourage students to watch my screen and then increased the amount of time for students to practice their own searches.

Another difference, and one I still struggle with, is not being able to "read the room." Most students do not use their webcams, and even when they do, it is not the same as fully engaging with students in the classroom. When encouraging discussion and participation, I miss the ability to have eye contact with them. Some professors rely on lecture, and while it can be difficult to lead students away from that mode in person, I have found it almost impossible in the virtual environment. One option is using polls to solicit answers since students are more willing to contribute anonymously.

An advantage to teaching in Zoom is the chat feature. Students who may not want others to know that they are asking a question can use the private chat to communicate their need and get a response. If a student brings up something of value to the rest of the class, I can then convey that without revealing the source.

In addition to teaching classes via Zoom, our open enrollment workshops transitioned to that platform, which was straightforward for most, but a challenge for Bloomberg instruction. Our library has a robust Bloomberg Basics workshop that attracts over 400 attendees per year. This workshop has traditionally assigned two students per terminal for a hands-on, in-person experience to ensure each attendee is familiar with Bloomberg's layout and navigation. As the pandemic continued, we needed to

find a way to conduct this workshop virtually. With remote Bloomberg in place, we scheduled small groups to Zoom into the terminal. Then we gave participants the opportunity to take remote control, while the instructor guided them through what to do. This enabled 6-7 students in each group to get hands-on experience. While this solution was not ideal, it enabled students to receive the training needed to access Bloomberg on their own.

We are looking to the future by producing and encouraging the use of online tutorials. Our business school started offering an online MBA program in 2019; therefore, we created a number of tutorials to embed in that program. With the impetus of the pandemic, a few more were produced to meet the demands of the increased number of remote learners from all the degree programs. A particularly pleasant surprise came when I reviewed the results of Level Up Your Job Search, https://smu.libwizard.com/f/level_up_your_job_search. This tutorial contains a number of open text boxes for users to enter search results. Even though this was an ungraded part of graduate program orientation, the answers were remarkably thorough. They wrote more than previous groups did during in-person sessions. This is evidence of the value students found in completing the tutorial. We plan to leverage these and other tutorials by including them in our research guides and online resources for use by all patrons.

Our reputation goes so far that a faculty member whose classes are not part of the Business Library Research Program¹ contacted me to ask what I knew about how other faculty were handling student group presentations in their classes. The pandemic has been very uplifting in demonstrating the importance of all the time we have invested in relationship building around the Business Library's value.

Sometimes it takes a crisis situation to demonstrate true worth and capabilities. We look forward to continuing the momentum created by the pandemic in building the future of our instruction program.

¹The following text is part of the SMU Undergraduate Catalog, and therefore requires that certain courses contain research assignments. "The BBA Library Research Program ensures that students are experienced in finding answers to complex questions and can present their research in an ethical and professional manner. All students that graduate from the Cox School of Business will have substantial research experience in the areas of subject major, senior capstone project, and career preparation" (Southern Methodist University, 2021).

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Reference

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