

Building Bridges Early: Embedding Future Information Professionals in an MBA Student Consulting Organization

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Abstract

As the benefits of an information literate workforce become more widely acknowledged, colleges and universities have many options to consider in preparing their students. One increasingly common approach is the experiential course or program, designed to expose students to professional work in their fields of choice or interest. One such program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is Illinois Business Consulting (IBC), a twelve-year-old student-led consulting organization based in the MBA Program. For most of its history, IBC has enjoyed a close and unique relationship with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), with masters-level library students participating in IBC as embedded members of consulting project teams. The relationship between the students in IBC and GSLIS has benefited from a designated liaison to bridge the differences—in education, work style and culture—between the two groups. Since 2003, the author has held that position, first as a library student and subsequently as a member of the Library faculty with the unofficial title of “Research Manager” for IBC. Based on her experiences in this liaison role, the author discusses the model of collaboration between IBC and GSLIS and the challenges in addressing the information literacy needs of both groups.

Introduction

Information literacy in a workplace context is an area of study that has been gaining visibility in recent years. Authors such as Bruce (1999), Cheuk (2002), O’Sullivan (2002) and Breivik (2005) have addressed the existence, relevance, nature and manifestations of the information literacy concept as applied to work practices. While the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL’s) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education provide a framework for identifying and assessing information literacy among students, Cheuk (2002, Table 1) provides a model to correlate common information literacy skill deficiencies observed in the workplace with the ACRL standards. Bruce (1999, 43) goes further

to identify seven unique manifestations of information literacy in the workplace, which she classifies as “information technology,” “information sources,” “information process,” “information control,” “knowledge construction,” “knowledge extension,” and “wisdom.” These are then correlated with established workplace processes: “environmental scanning;” “provision of inhouse and external information resources and services;” “information processing/packaging for internal/external consumption;” “information/records management, archiving;” “corporate memory;” “research and development;” and “professional ethics/codes of conduct,” respectively (Bruce 1999, 43). Although there are obviously many similarities in the skills that represent information literacy in both the educational and workplace contexts, the change in context alone creates subtle differences in the ways that individuals seek out and use information.

Accepting that those differences exist, there is at least one well-established mechanism that provides students with the opportunity to explore information seeking and application in both contexts simultaneously: the experiential project. Experiential projects can take many forms, from case studies and simulation exercises in classrooms, to service learning projects with local non-profit organizations, to consulting projects with for-profit entities. In a discussion of service learning projects in management education, Kolenko et al. (1996, 135) cite Kolb (1984) in explaining that “experiential learning is the process that links education, work and personal development.” Since experiential education is a valid approach for any discipline, there are cases in the literature that outline some projects within library schools, as profiled by Riddle (2003), who writes more broadly about “engaged library instruction” and the potential contributions that librarians can make in the experiential projects of others. The focus of the current article is a unique setting in which library students not only assist others in experiential consulting projects, but are also themselves participants in the projects.

Background

Illinois Business Consulting (IBC) is a student-led consulting group based in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Since IBC’s official founding in 1996 as the Office for Strategic Business Initiatives, well over 1,000 students have participated in more than 600 projects for clients in business, government and academia. Projects typically are related to “benchmarking/best practices; business process assessment; customer survey design and analysis; financial modeling; market analysis and feasibility studies; marketing plan development; new product/channel assessment; strategy formulation; and technology commercialization” (Illinois Business Consulting website, Service Offerings, accessed 29 April 2008). The basic structure of IBC includes permanent administrative staff (director, associate director(s) and an administrative assistant) to provide continuity from year-to-year. The daily project operations are managed entirely by students; initially populated by MBA students, currently IBC has approximately as many undergraduate student participants as it does graduate students. Each project contains typically four to six members, most of whom are “consultants” or more experienced “senior consultants” all led by a “project manager” who directs the team’s daily activities and who reports to a “senior/engagement manager,” who him- or herself oversees three to four consulting projects simultaneously. Each senior manager is a member of the “leadership team” which also includes the “student executive director,” the “operations manager,” and for the first time in 2007, a

“business development manager” all of whom are highly experienced IBC participants, typically in the final year of their program(s), who have been selected through a highly competitive process to maintain the infrastructure of IBC. In virtually every way achievable, IBC seeks to emulate the structure and operations of a “real” consulting firm. IBC’s awareness of and incorporation of the research process are evident in the training and development sessions it requires of participants (“Data gathering and analysis tools and techniques,” Illinois Business Consulting website, Training and Development, accessed 29 April 2008); in the value proposition it provides for participants (“Enhances data gathering, analysis and presentation skills,” Illinois Business Consulting website, For Students, accessed 29 April 2008); and in the stated roles for the “consultants” who make up the largest portion of each team’s membership (“Assists with data gathering and analysis,” Illinois Business Consulting website, Project Team Structure, accessed 29 April 2008).

From its inception, Illinois Business Consulting has enjoyed a unique arrangement with the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS). The primary mechanism by which library students become members of IBC project teams has been the LIS 450/590IC Information Consulting course, which at this writing has been offered a total of twenty-one times between Fall 1995 and Fall 2007. Three instructors have overseen a total of 195 enrolled library students in that time, with the most recent instructor having the longest tenure with the class, offering it ten times between Fall 2001 and Fall 2007. In the semesters during which the Information Consulting class was not offered, and even on a few occasions when it was, other methods for getting library students involved in IBC projects have been attempted. Examples include independent study modules and inviting remote participation by the substantial distance learning population in the GSLIS program. Finally, if no supporting mechanism is needed or desired by the library student, that student may apply directly to become a member of IBC, since it is a group open to all qualified students who are able to pass the rigorous interview process.

To facilitate the participation of the library students on the consulting teams, a liaison position was created. At least as long ago as 2002, this liaison role was occupied by a library student who had recently taken the Information Consulting class and/or otherwise participated in an IBC project, who was recommended by the instructor of the Information Consulting class to be the liaison, and who was accepted by the IBC administrators and student leadership team. The liaison position typically lasted a single semester, requiring frequent rotation of the library students who occupied the position. The author was selected as the liaison beginning in Fall semester 2003. Through a combination of circumstances, that appointment was extended for the full academic year. At the same time, the liaison role was integrated into the structure of the IBC leadership team, creating the first (and last) “Director of LIS” student position in that academic year. The liaison responsibilities followed the author in the transition from graduate student to University Library employee and are currently a major component of the author’s outreach activities.

The work of the liaison focuses heavily on information literacy instruction. Each group—the library students and the non-library (largely MBA) students—approaches the consulting projects with different skill sets and different expectations of what they can contribute to the consulting project. This requires a different approach in preparing each group for the research tasks ahead and the liaison, as an experienced project participant who is familiar with the

perspectives of both groups, is expected to bridge these two groups to enable effective collaboration.

The Liaison and the Library Students

For library students to enter the world of consulting, several perspectives must be adopted, many of which may be new to the student. De Stricker and Olesen (2005, 52) outline several skills required of information consultants: “concentration,” “multitasking,” “patience,” “equanimity,” “quick study,” “communication,” “relationship management,” “projecting credibility and gaining trust,” “negotiation,” “tolerance for ambiguity,” “corporate culture savvy,” “independence” and “coping with anxiety.” As a former corporate librarian, Klopper (2006, 16) notes a key distinction in the work performed by corporate versus academic librarians. As she states, “Academic librarians do not ‘do’ research; their responsibility is to provide their customers with the knowledge and skill sets necessary for them to successfully locate and evaluate the information they are seeking on their own.” In contrast, “The corporate librarian would...do the research and push the results back to the requestor, usually with a succinct summary of the results” (Klopper 2006, 16). Within IBC, the library students and the liaison must be prepared to perform both functions: performing research and enabling others to do the same.

As noted earlier, the Information Consulting class is the most common mechanism for involving library students in IBC projects. The course provides a mix of theoretical background, practical assistance and personal support for the library students. From the most recent offering (Fall 2007), the course catalog describes the course as:

“...designed to provide students with ‘real world’ experience...on cross-functional teams working on actual projects for business and industry clients. In addition to regular class sessions, students are assigned to work with teams of MBA [and other] students, providing crucial assistance in accurately defining and satisfying the clients’ project information needs. Course Objectives: 1) to become effective and contributing members of cross-functional work teams; 2) to develop an understanding of the people, processes and resources involved in business and industry information work; and 3) to apply knowledge of information resources and technologies to organizational problem-solving.” (Elichirigoity 2007)

The library students are introduced to IBC’s processes very early in their Information Consulting class, usually in the first class session. At that first session, a representative from the permanent administrative staff of IBC (for example, the director or assistant director) comes to the class to provide an overview of the operations of IBC, what the library students add to the process, and what benefits the library students can expect to receive from their participation. The overview of IBC’s operations usually includes a “typical” timeline of a project; the types of projects frequently undertaken; examples of recently completed and/or upcoming projects; and a sample list of past and/or upcoming clients. Benefits for the library students, as anticipated by IBC, are essentially the generalized benefits that any student consultant would expect: the opportunity to become familiar with business practices and explore career options; the chance to

interact and network with business professionals, with the implication that these professionals may directly or indirectly provide avenues to future employment for the student; and the chance to develop research, problem-solving and teamwork skills. After the orientation to IBC's operations, the IBC representative takes questions from the library students and then departs.

The next portion of the class contains a presentation by the liaison targeting the skills and interests of the library students. Making allowances for the possibility that many of the students will ultimately choose non-consulting careers, in this presentation the transferable skills that the students should expect to develop during their IBC participation, useful in any workplace context after graduation, are emphasized. For example, in working side-by-side with the other members of the consulting teams, the library students recommend resources, as well as search terms and strategies, and thereby provide some measure of research training to the other students. The library students themselves are also responsible for gathering, compiling and presenting information to their teams for consideration. Since many of the projects require primary research, the library students are often able to develop their interviewing skills and to suggest techniques to the other members of their teams. With so much research being conducted, the library students are frequently given the responsibility to create the bibliography of sources used or attempted; this list is often included in the deliverable to the client. Finally, unless circumstances disallow, each library student is expected to be part of the presentation team, often outlining the research that was performed on the client's behalf. As noted by Frank et al. (2001, 91) in advocating information consulting as an approach within academic libraries, "Librarians need to be more aware of the practices of effective consultants in business or the private sector." Participation in IBC grants library students some of those insights.

The personal competencies of the information professional, as outlined in the Special Libraries Association's Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century (Revised edition, June 2003) have particular relevance for the library students. Communicating effectively; presenting ideas; building "an environment of mutual respect and trust;" working collaboratively within a team; "plan[ning], priori[tizing] and focus[ing] on what is critical;" "think[ing] creatively and innovatively;" and "remain[ing] flexible and positive in a time of continuing change" (Special Libraries Association 2003, 12) are skills that every IBC participant should bring to his or her project, and library students are no exception, but these are not skills that library students may have had to demonstrate in their coursework. One characteristic that is especially emphasized in the liaison's presentation is "see[ing] the big picture," which is a unique feature of participation in IBC projects for library students: the opportunity to be embedded with a project team and be a part of its daily operations from the project's start to finish. It is hoped that the students' awareness of the rarity of this opportunity will enhance their interest and willingness to commit to the Information Consulting course and to an IBC project.

The remainder of the initial class period for the Information Consulting class is typically reserved for discussions about the "nuts-and-bolts" of the experience: how library students will be assigned to the projects; time management; the workflow throughout the project and how that corresponds to the in-class work; ethics in research and presentation; effectively acting as representatives of GSLIS in interactions within IBC and with clients; and administrative aspects, such as team meetings and legal forms. The role of the liaison is also explained: to provide direction in identifying resources and performing research; to clarify business concepts; to

provide insights into the overall operations of IBC, through attendance at the weekly IBC leadership team meetings; and to intervene on the occasion of conflicts between a library student and another member of his or her project team.

Depending on the needs of the Information Consulting class, the liaison will make other visits. These sessions most often cover some of the fundamental business resources that the students need in the initial phases of a project, combined with ideas about the processes to use in approaching the research. These are more involved, elaborate versions of resource sessions that are conducted by the liaison for the non-library students at the start of the projects, since the library students will be expected to provide guidance to other students on their teams. A “cheat sheet” of basic company, industry and market research resources is distributed and is reviewed in detail with the library students before the sheets are distributed to the rest of IBC. Occasionally, as the semester moves ahead, the liaison may visit the class simply to hear any questions or concerns that the library students may be having about their projects, the kinds of work they are being asked to do, and the dynamics within their teams.

As noted earlier, there have been other mechanisms for facilitating the participation of library students in IBC projects, besides the Information Consulting class. In 2006, the liaison led an independent study for two library students, in which the students earned credit for participating in one consulting project each and in reporting on two internal IBC initiatives of their own choosing: one, the feasibility of a physical library within the IBC administrative offices, containing titles not held (nor likely ever to be held) by the University Library system; the other, the usefulness of a career resources webpage, targeted toward careers in consulting and for the exclusive internal use of IBC participants. While these reports met with varying degrees of acceptance and neither project was subsequently pursued by IBC, it seemed to be a valuable experience for the library students to not only gain perspective by working within client-facing consulting teams but also to work within the infrastructure of IBC.

During one semester, IBC experimented with incorporating interested library students from the distance learning program for the MSLIS degree. There was only one student who agreed to participate and although both she and the team were committed to making the arrangement work, it was not an experiment that was ever repeated. Reasons include the fact that the non-library students on the team struggled to manage the communications and research efforts with a member of the team who would only be able to physically visit the campus once during the semester. Moreover, this model removed what is, in the opinion of the author, the most valuable part of the experience for both library and non-library students alike: having a dedicated research professional who is involved and embedded in the team’s daily operations. By involving a distance learner, that team essentially had a faceless (although not nameless) remote researcher who addressed its requests but was never truly integrated within the team.

Finally, as also noted earlier, library students may not desire any supporting mechanism for their participation in IBC. In that case, they are welcome to apply to IBC as would any other student from any other department on campus. However, the requirement to prepare a résumé and undergo a case-based or behavioral interview (both of which are waived for students in the Information Consulting class) and still potentially not be accepted into IBC is a level of risk that many library students are not interested in taking.

Overall, the primary need of the library students prior to the start of their projects is to understand operationally how IBC works and the culture and environment in which the research will be taking place. Of secondary consideration, at least in the early stages before the project work begins in earnest, is the training in specific resources and practices through which the research will be pursued and completed.

The Liaison and the Non-Library Students

As with any evolving organization, the nature of IBC changes with each new student leadership team. Accordingly, the liaison's work within IBC has evolved over the years, influenced by the work styles and preferences of the student consultants. Over the semesters that the author has been in this liaison role, many different approaches have been tried, discarded and revisited.

One of the standard activities, year after year, has been a general resource presentation to all IBC participants, library students included. In some years, this presentation has taken the form of one of several required training modules, specifically the 45-minute module on Data Gathering. This mandatory training session was recorded on video at one point and linked through the IBC intranet for all IBC participants to view on-demand. With the availability of the video, in recent years the IBC participants have also been introduced to resources in a 20-minute segment at the mandatory orientation/"kick-off" meeting at the beginning of each new semester. Although the discussion can in no way be comprehensive in 20 or even 45 minutes, it does serve to introduce the IBC participants to a few of the many resources available to them to support their project work, not the least of which are the library students themselves. At either presentation (the Data Gathering training module or the orientation/"kick-off" meeting), the cheat sheet of resources to get started with research is distributed and the URL is announced so that students can download the sheet if needed.

Another common ongoing research support mechanism is web-based resource pages. Several years ago, this took the form of many web pages created by the liaison and placed in the IBC intranet for the exclusive use of IBC participants. Those web pages have long since been taken down, as student interest in using them waned and the IBC intranet underwent many changes. Recently, a new initiative has been started, in conjunction with a redesign of the IBC website and the intranet: a resource wiki has been established and is currently in the process of being populated by the author.

The liaison is also a regular attendee at the weekly IBC student leadership team meeting. The "bridge" aspect of the liaison role is most obvious here, since the liaison is able to present any concerns that the library students may have, and likewise will learn information that may be helpful to the library students in their ongoing participation. Occasionally, the liaison may be called upon to address project-specific research questions or citation/attribution questions within the meeting, which provides an instruction opportunity for all present. Finally, at these meetings the liaison is a tangible reminder that research assistance is available for the project teams.

Consulting Projects: Participation and Collaboration

The participation of the library students begins with their assignment to project teams. In the first or second class period of the Information Consulting class (or otherwise soon after a library student has been accepted into IBC), the students fill out interest forms which ask them to summarize their educational background, work experience, relevant GSLIS coursework completed to that point, skills they would like to develop during their participation in IBC and, finally, a ranking of the top five projects in which they are most interested. These interest forms are then considered in the assignment of students to project teams; for the library students in particular, there is a desire to place them on research-intensive projects, to the extent that those projects match their interests.

The typical workload is one consulting project/team per library student, unless the student's prior education, work experience and personal interest indicate that more than one project can be handled during the semester. Depending on the number of students enrolled in the Information Consulting class and the number of projects being conducted by IBC in a given semester, not all teams have embedded library students. On rare occasions, an IBC project team may have two library students, when the project that a library student was originally assigned to was terminated before the end of the semester and before true experience on a consulting project could be attained.

As mentioned earlier, each semester begins with a mandatory orientation/"kick-off" meeting, which is very important for the library students in particular. At this meeting, project team members are introduced to each other for the first time. Occasionally, this can be very nerve-wracking for the library students, who may feel out-of-place in the business school environment. When possible, the liaison attends these orientation sessions, if only to provide a familiar face for the library students and to help facilitate the initial introduction to their teams. The library students also have the chance here to complete administrative tasks such as signing the non-disclosure agreements and helping to identify the first "official" meeting date and time for the team, when the true project work will begin. When a library student is unable to attend this orientation session and is not present to ensure that the team meetings are set at times when he or she is available, it can begin a difficult period for the library student to become integrated within the team.

In the first week of the project, efforts are largely focused on getting everyone on the team "on the same page," particularly with regard to communication modes and frequencies. During this time the library students begin to have some understanding of the intensity with which the work will be conducted and often it is at a pace that is unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable to them. For example, MBA students are accustomed to checking their email accounts several times daily. The library students learn very early on that requests for information or input may be awaiting their response on email at any time of the day or any day of the week, and sometimes are expected in such a short timeframe that the "deadline" may pass before the library student realizes a request has been made. As the semester continues, this issue resolves itself, but requires an adjustment in work style for many of the library students.

After the initial logistical issues are surmounted, the projects progress at very different paces and therefore the experience of a single library student is never identical to that of his or her classmates in the Information Consulting class. Some teams will have smoothly-running projects that progress at brisk, but achievable, paces; others may be overwhelmed with excessive client expectations with regard to completion times; others still may find that relatively little work is available in the first several weeks, as negotiations with the client about the nature and scope of the project continue. Some library students will find themselves tested with research that excites and interests them; others will struggle with the complexity of the research required and may find it hard to continue on. Some library students will find that they are sought out for guidance in the research and will step up within the team to provide that direction. Other library students will not be approached to guide the team's research efforts and will receive research assignments comparable to those given to other members of the team; depending on the interests and goals of the library student, he or she may be content with this role. Some library students may find that all of the research work has been given to them; while rare, this situation is one that requires correction, since responsibility for the research should be shared within each team.

Throughout the semester, the liaison is available to help with research stumbling blocks. Since participation in IBC projects is meant to be a learning experience, the liaison needs to incorporate learning into the research process, in the form of information literacy instruction. Although there are occasional similarities, most questions are unique to the type of student (library or non-library). Questions that are common to both groups relate to the amount and types of information that may reasonably be available. Since many of the projects include the gathering and compiling of confidential and/or competitive information, considerable time must be spent in helping the students understand the reasons why data will be generally very difficult to find and to suggest other ways that they may be able to achieve insights by gathering other types of data that are readily available. For library students in particular, this guidance helps them to develop an understanding of the types of information that may be available through many different sources and to anticipate insights that may be achieved by combining data elements from different sources.

Questions and requests from the non-library students are very goal-oriented, more often focusing on getting to the end result rather than structuring a process to arrive there. Many times, the liaison's work with the non-library students is devoted to helping them see the component parts of the larger project scope, to attack the project in pieces rather than looking, in vain, for a single comprehensive report that would directly address all of the client's issues. Very rarely do the non-library students look at a resource as an entry point to more and better data; rather, they tend to classify everything as either an ideal fit or of no value at all. The information literacy instruction to these students takes the form of helping them to gather clues and leads from partially-useful resources; pursue citations in footnotes and bibliographies; and perform iterative searches with the concepts and keywords that are being uncovered. Another area of information literacy instruction, more prevalent among the non-library students, is an understanding of when and how to cite the sources used. Formal citation styles are typically not an issue of concern for the clients, but they do want to understand how the research was conducted and what resources were used in arriving at the conclusions and recommendations.

The questions and requests from the library students frequently pertain to the process of the research. Very often, however, the library students are equally interested in understanding how to best help their teammates and their clients. For example, many times library students will want to gain a sense of the amount of information that will be sufficient for the team to consider, not wishing to provide too much or too little information. Related to this question is the issue of format, for example, is raw data preferable, or should the library student attempt to compile it before reporting the results of the research to the team? Finally, the library students occasionally want to understand the “big picture,” how the data they have been tasked to gather will fit into the project as a whole. Many times, these questions would be better answered by the leader(s) of the consulting project, but to the extent that the library student feels uncomfortable asking them for clarification, it is the liaison’s role to find out the answers and provide some guidance.

In the students’ collaborations with each other on the project teams, there is a mutual education process, in which the library students provide examples of efficient and effective research practices for the benefit of their teammates, in return gaining perspective in the applications of their coursework in a very specific workplace context. Elements of both “traditional” information literacy (toward the development of the individual-as-student) and workplace information literacy (toward the development of individual-as-professional) come into play. For example, as noted earlier, Cheuk (2002, Table 1) has identified common scenarios that indicate a lack of information literacy skills at work and has matched those with the ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. So, as students come to understand the “nature and extent of the information needed” to address the client’s issue, they not only address ACRL Standard One but also see how that standard would manifest in a workplace context. Other skills noted by Cheuk (2002, Table1) as lacking in the workplace, including “retriev[ing] information effectively from information systems,” being “aware of the full range of resources available,” “evaluat[ing] and filter[ing] information,” and “relat[ing] information creation and use to a broader context” can all be practiced by the students in the course of their project participation, simultaneously making them more information literate students and better prepared to rectify these deficiencies in their future workplaces.

As the research phase comes to a close, the research role of the library students becomes less pronounced as everyone on the team begins the “push” to complete the project and prepares to participate in the final presentation. Depending on the duration of the project, the final presentation to the client may coincide with the final weeks of the semester, although there are often projects that end earlier than, or extend beyond, the end of the semester. In the latter case, the library students are generally under no obligation to continue with the project, having earned a grade in the Information Consulting course by that time. However, most library students choose to remain with the team, to see the project through to completion.

Since participation in IBC is a major component of the Information Consulting class, there is an evaluation of each library student performed by the senior manager overseeing the project, with input from the project manager who worked directly with the library student. These evaluations are typically coordinated by the liaison, who has an obligation to encourage thoughtful and timely comments from the senior manager and project manager, since each library student’s grade will be impacted. The evaluations ask the senior managers to assess the library students on seven aspects: the overall contribution to the work of the team, skills as a

team member, quality of information resources provided, understanding of the overall project, communication skills, timeliness of the response to informational needs, and analytical skills. Each of these aspects is to be judged on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). There is also the opportunity for the senior manager to include additional comments. This exercise is good preparation for the senior manager, for the future completion of performance reviews. Library students participating in IBC outside of enrollment in the Information Consulting class undergo the standard evaluation that IBC requires for all consultants on the teams.

One long-standing and apparently irresolvable issue is that library students typically do not repeat their experiences with IBC semester after semester. Once they have received credit through the Information Consulting course, the library students typically move on to other coursework, except in the rare case that consulting is truly the career interest of the library student and he or she is willing to commit the additional time to IBC to further build his or her résumé. In that case, the library student would be welcomed as an experienced researcher and would be a highly valued addition to any IBC project team.

Conclusion

The “bridges” that are built through the IBC/GSLIS collaboration are the reasons that the author continues to be the liaison and “Research Manager” for IBC after so many years. As a bridge between education and employment, IBC participation benefits all students by allowing them to apply their coursework to experiential consulting projects, in collaboration with other students from diverse backgrounds, with different career goals. After graduation, the students can draw upon their experiences in IBC to build bridges in the workplace. For library students, understanding the consulting process from beginning to end will influence their perspectives on client service and the relationships they have with their clients, regardless of the setting that the student ultimately selects as his or her workplace. For students who choose a consulting career, Chao (2005, 20-21) has noted that new consultants “identified information seeking as another challenge” and that “it takes time for the new hires to be acquainted with all the resources.” A potential remedy suggested by Chao (2005, 21) was the development of work relationships to get a sense of the “range of available skills and expertise” in the organization. Having seen what is possible and achievable with the support of a skilled and dedicated researcher, graduates from IBC will hopefully be inspired to seek out the information professionals in their hiring organizations and will strive to cultivate relationships with them, since they have seen how powerful and fruitful those collaborative relationships can be.

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