Title: Identifying Partnerships for Career Success: Academic Collaborations Between Librarians and Career Centers

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Abstract

Today, more and more academic libraries are required to present their assessments, values and high impact practices for student success. How are academic librarians supporting students and their professional interests beyond traditional academic needs? One approach is through key partnerships with non-academic departments such as the career center that focuses on students’ professional growth. This exploratory study presents the initial findings of how academic business librarians perceive such partnerships with their career centers to support student success. The paper will present selected feedback on how academic business librarians are partnering with career centers and counselors to support student success.

Keywords: business information literacy, business librarianship, career center, academic collaborations, higher education, and research skills

Introduction

It is evident that most students seeking career center services are typically students who major in business, and are seeking job interview advice or internship opportunities. With the rise of digital information and the demanding job skills, particularly in research, students need to develop stronger skills in this area to remain competitive for the job market. Today, academic libraries are considering new collaboration with campus partners such as the career center to promote and support student success. More importantly, librarians can play a critical role in supporting the students’ career development, particularly in career research.

Traditionally, academic libraries have supported career centers by developing collections centered on business research, career development and test prepping materials. However, there are more collaboration between the two groups: creating new workshops from researching company profiles to industry news to preparing graduate schools in the humanities and sciences, these types of academic collaboration can support students’ professional development.

This project is an exploratory study that will present initial findings from a recent survey on how academic business librarians have been partnering with the career center to support student success. This paper will share selected examples of how academic libraries are developing stronger engagements with their career centers, and explain how business information literacy skill is an important career development skill for students.
Research Question

The main research question to address in this study is how are academic business librarians supporting career centers and counselors to promote student success and students’ career development in higher education?

Based on the survey results, respondents have shared how they have been collaborating with their career center to promote student success and career development. This research question explores the relationship between the career center and the academic library at the undergraduate level from the academic business librarians’ perspective. It is true that there are many variances of academic organizations such as a separate business library or business resource center; however, this paper will present general findings from academic business librarians and their activities with their career centers.

Literature Review

Currently there are selected numbers of research articles demonstrating case studies of these partnerships; some forms of collaborative model from universities outside of the U.S., and a survey on collaborative activities between the two groups such as career collection building rather than on relationship building. The articles also focus exclusively on business students and their information needs. This is evident because business librarians conducted the research.

There are also a few articles covering theories and practices of career center and research in higher education. A few of these publications include the Journal of Career Development and the Career Development Quarterly. These two publications have updated research on how career centers are transforming in higher education. They provide useful articles about the changing and current trends of career services.

In academic business librarianship journals such as The Journal of Business and Finance Librarianship offers numerous and updated research articles on business information literacy and how they are being interpreted, applied and adapted in business classes. The research articles that are useful in this area include Natt (2013), Gunn and Miree (2012), Figen (2011). These kinds of articles can provide a foundational understanding of what business information literacy means in higher education and how they can support career development as described in the other professional literature. The core skill of business information literacy can be integrated and viewed as a foundation skill for career development. There’s another gap in the literature on business information literacy in career development. This paper explores academic business librarians’ perception on student success.

Song (2005) presents a case study between the University of Illinois Libraries and the Business Career Center. Song writes that partnership is formed based on mutual interests
to support business student’s information literacy needs. The article highlights how academic librarians can be instrumental to support a targeted audience.

Dehart (1996) also covers similar grounds but on job searching strategies for librarians teaching career workshops in DePaul University. Dugan et al (2009) describes a similar collaboration in Purdue University but focusing on a central library resource and service: Career Wiki to support library collections and information resources in career development. Dugan explains that librarians support career services collaboratively through this product. This case study discusses an innovative way to engage with the career center across campus. It could potentially be included as part of the recommended guidelines to support this kind of collaboration.

A book chapter by Barnhart and Ogur in Wale’s (2016) edited volume on business school libraries covers a recent survey design on academic business libraries supporting career centers and entrepreneurship program. The study is well conducted as it emphasizes the greater need for business school libraries to support career programming. The survey is helpful to understand the targeted group: graduate business students and offers specific kinds of questions to consider such as vendor services in supporting alumni groups and recent graduates.

Another helpful article is Quenoy and Orgeron (2003), which provides an update to the survey from Abel (1992) on a study about the cooperation between academic librarians and career centers. The initial study by Abel found that there are benefits from such cooperation based on the survey results, however, there are not many sustained models or practices to ensure this collaboration. Quenoy and Orgeron (2003) replicated the survey study by Abel to see if there have been any improvements of collaboration since the Internet and information-sharing tools have been readily available. They concluded that there is a need for this partnership based on the benefits outlined in numerous publications but there have not been improvements since “librarians and practitioners do not feel comfortable with their own knowledge of one another’s career collection and services” (2003, p. 1). The study is useful to see where partnerships have been heading and they identify that there needs to be more research on student/faculty awareness of these services and resources. However, the challenge is that not every institution has or sustains these partnerships. Part of this project is to propose best practices to scale and sustain these collaborations.

It is also recognized that these articles do not emphasize growing trends or demands of research skills such as business research, business information and data literacies as career development skills for employment or internship opportunities. That is often difficult to assess since many skills and jobs often change and evolve based on technological, cultural and economical shifts. However, this part of the project will present an overview of what academic business librarians are doing to support their career centers and how they perceive business information literacy skills in the career research framework.
Research Methodology and Data Analysis

How are academic business librarians supporting career centers and counselors to promote student success and students’ career development in higher education?

To address this question, a brief questionnaire survey was released on February 24, 2017 until March 23, 2017 asking for feedback from respondents who are employed academic business librarians currently collaborating with their career centers.

In this Qualtrics survey, there were a total of 9 questions. Skip logic was applied for respondents who did have a partnership with their career centers and who did not have a partnership with their career centers. There were 32 respondents for this survey who came from the United States and Canada.

The purpose of this paper is to present the types of activities, challenges and opportunities for this partnership and how do academic business librarians perceive business information literacy skills and their career center partners. The survey respondents are completely anonymous. (The second part of this project would identify these partnerships and conduct an in depth interview with the academic business librarian and career counselor for follow-up).

In this survey there were 6 questions that required an answer from respondents:

1. Do you currently have a partnership with the career center?
2a. If you have no career center partnerships, why is that the case?
2b. If yes, can you describe the type of partnership you have with the career center?
2b1. Can you give some examples of your partnerships? How did you foster the relationship?
3. What do you like about your career center?
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 center, would you like to be contacted for an in depth interview?

For question 2a, one respondent wrote that it is something that they need to be doing. In question 2ab1, there were 23 responses that described the activity and type of partnership with the career center. There were 4 responses that mentioned the creation of a “LibGuide,” an online library guide provided by Spring Share. There were also 4 responses that discussed collection development – purchasing career materials for the career center. Whenever the career center director or counselor requests for materials, the librarian will purchase them. The other responses included workshops – 9 responses on workshops ranging from finding companies to preparing interviews and learning about specific industries to career research workshops from very basic career research to specific majors. These types of collaborations are slowly developing for other respondents too. There were other responses – for outreach, respondents would visit
care career fairs, attend career center meetings on campus, and train career counselors in using business databases, and serve as the embedded librarian or liaison to the career center.

For question 3, (what do you like about your career center?) 18 responses generated positive feedback. Many stated that the career center is committed to student services and success. The common words in the responses are “open, receptive, and collaborative.” There were also comments about the career center director being “dynamic” and positive” in collaboration. This question assesses the librarian’s perception of the career center being a partner for student success. Based on this small sample, it is known that the career center can be very supportive and collaborative with the library.

For question 4, (what are some challenges in forming this partnership?) there were 14 responses. Many of these responses mentioned “time” as a major factor to sustain these partnerships. Librarians do not have enough time to meet with the career centers due to their heavy workload. In addition, the career center professionals are also very busy and may not have time to meet with librarians. Another challenge is limited resources: the academic libraries and career centers may not have enough funds to support these programs. Funds can serve as incentives to draw students to workshops as one respondent noted. This important question addresses why the partnerships may not exist for some institutions or why they are not sustainable for others. Student success is important focus for many universities, and to continue promoting student success through collaboration may be challenging at times due to limited resources and heavy work responsibilities from both partners.

For question 5, (how do you see the role of business information literacy in career development?) 18 responses mentioned that business information literacy is a critical skill for career development. From learning about labor market information to understanding how business/companies/organizations work to company/industry information in business databases, respondents find that this skill is important for business and non-business majors, undergraduates and MBA students. Several responses suggested that business information literacy skill can help prepare students for their interviews since they will learn more about the organization and company through research.

Finding valid sources on company and industry information and how to evaluate these sources are key components to business information literacy according to one respondent. These responses are actually helpful to develop further understand of how academic business librarians are interpreting and framing business information literacy in student success in obtaining a job. It is important to note that business information literacy can be interpreted in different ways, and there has been no response on the relationship of business information literacy with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy.

Overall, in this survey, academic business librarians perceive that career research and business information literacy skills are important skills for students to develop. Selected academic libraries have been developing services to promote career research in a number of ways: LibGuides, business information literacy and career research workshops,
outreach, and 1 on 1 research services with the career center. Other important interactions include training career counselors on how to use business databases, hosting career counselors in the library for selected workshops, attending job fairs and career-focused programs on campus. To visualize these collaborations, the responses were inserted in a textual analysis tool called “Voyant-Tools” to draw stronger connections between specific words and activities.

Figure 1. Word cloud using Voyant-Tools.org

Based on the question 2b, (if yes, can you describe the type of partnership you have with the career center?) the responses were added into the word cloud feature (or the most popular words in the responses). The most popular words out of 65 words in the responses include career, research, library, students, resources and workshops. These keywords suggest that they have commonalities to describe this partnership.

Figure 2. Word links using Voyant-Tools.org

In addition, the word link feature in Voyant-Tools and drew the connections between popular words in the responses. Three popular words include: students, career and library. Career is connected to research and resources, which indicates that the respondents consider these connections in their collaborations.

Conclusion: Future Study
It is well known that the academic experience is very formalized and structured for students. Students may have challenges to transfer their experiences and skills from college into the workplace. However, this paper presented general findings on how the activities of the partnerships between academic libraries and career centers to support student success.

This paper is a preliminary research on this partnership, and how academic business librarians are actively supporting their career centers through several approaches from resource building to workshops to outreach services. This research is part of a major project that explores how to academic libraries can play a critical role in supporting students’ career development and success. A future part of this project will involve in depth interviews and focus groups with career counselors to understand their perceptions of the academic library and their business librarian colleagues, and the importance of business information literacy in their context.

By exploring and surveying current practices, the paper presented initial data on how academic libraries are creating such collaborations with the career center, another resource and information services organization devoted to student success. By creatively partnering with the career center, academic libraries are demonstrating their value to support student success in an innovative way: to engage with students and their career research and development process. Today, any work place will require strong communications and technology skills. Now there are growing demands for excellent research and information literacy skills (in the areas of marketing, business, and finance, etc.) from college graduates due to the rise of digital information, and the timely partnerships between academic libraries and career centers can certainly enhance students’ skills and prepare them for careers in the 21st century.

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References


