John Eric Juricek

Embedded in Shanghai

A librarian accompanies students to China

In March 2011 and 2012, I was invited to accompany a large group of graduate students on a week-long visit to Shanghai where we learned firsthand about international business. This article describes the experience and the value that was derived from being "embedded" within such an academic activity and makes suggestions that academic librarians across all subject areas may find helpful in their outreach and assessment efforts. A brief citation analysis of student works was made possible by these trips and is included, as well.

As head of the Crocker Business Library and Accounting Library at the University of Southern California (USC), my responsibility is to oversee the delivery of library services to the USC Marshall School of Business as well as diverse users across campus. The Marshall School is a highly ranked business school with more than 3,500 undergraduate and nearly 2,000 graduate students. At Marshall, all MBA students, and many undergraduate students, take a class that includes a foreign trip as part of their studies to enhance their understanding of international business, usually in Asia

View of Pudong in Shanghai, China. Photograph by John Eric Juricek.

or Latin America as befitting our location on the Pacific Rim.

Although part of the USC Libraries, our library's personnel are treated as administrative staff of the Marshall School and are thereby eligible to volunteer to participate in these trips in a supporting role. I volunteered and was selected to accompany a group of 72 part-time MBA Professionals and Managers (PM) students on their trip to Shanghai in March 2011, and another group of 75 the next year. These trips were in addition to the regular information literacy sessions and reference consultations that we provide to the program, which is known as PM GLOBE. One of our library staff members had accompanied undergraduate students on a trip to Singapore a few years earlier.

Embedded librarianship has been defined as "a higher order of collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty or other members

John Eric Juricek is head of the Crocker Business Library and Accounting Library at the University of Southern California, e-mail: juricek@usc.edu

of the campus, where librarians are more fully immersed and participatory in the academic experience," and this description certainly applies to this experience.[1] Spending 12 hours a day with the students, staff, and faculty for a week each year was definitely an experience in immersion that was only heightened by the bonding that occurred from successfully navigating a foreign environment.

Other cases of embedded business librarianship have been reviewed by Laura Berdish and Corey Seeman, who described reference-intensive work with MBA students at the University of Michigan,[2] and Judy Li, who described the librarian-as-teacher experience at Mississippi State University.[3] A more relevant travel-oriented example comes from outside the world of business in Susan Sharpless Smith and Lynn Sutton's piece on accompanying 13 students from Wake Forest University on a Sociology field trip through the American South.[4] However, two trips with more than 70 students each year to a foreign destination was a significantly more complex undertaking with extensive language and cultural issues.

Streets of Shanghai. Photograph by John Eric Juricek.

Trip preparation

The first part of the class was classroom-based and included information literacy sessions in January of each year over four nights reaching approximately 350 students in Los Angeles and the satellite facility in Orange County. Students were divided into sections depending on their destination, and librarians demonstrated the use of key databases for country, industry, and company research.

Each year, it was somewhat surprising when I announced to the students in the Shanghai sections that I was going to accompany them on their trips, and this seemed to enhance their attentiveness. We provided follow-up reference assistance to the students as they completed their initial research assignments.

After being selected to accompany the Shanghai students on their trips, my participation changed and expanded beyond my role as librarian. I attended two pre-trip Saturday sessions with the students in which guest speakers provided background information on China's culture and business environment, and I helped provide administrative support for everything from ensuring each student had the proper travel documents to taking attendance. The business school's Office of Global Programs and Partnerships coordinates dozens of such trips each year and we also received extensive training on how to respond appropriately to a wide range of scenarios ranging from a sick student to natural disasters or terrorism.

In Shanghai

Three teaching faculty and two staff members traveled with me and the students to Shanghai in both years. We stayed in centrally located hotels, and each weekday we usually took two buses to visit nearby companies, although a few times the executives met with us in our hotels. The companies included well-known multinationals in industries such as banking, shipping, real estate, entertainment, beverages,

pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, and auto parts. Occasionally the speakers were alumni of our school, which helped the students relate to them and their personal stories. The dress code of formal business attire, early mornings, and lingering jet lag took some getting used to, but things went very well with minimal problems. My daily responsibility was to ensure the logistics of the trip went smoothly, but I had plenty of time for wide-ranging discussions with the students, staff, and faculty.

Shanghai is a great shopping mecca, which many students took advantage of, and some time was built in for sight-seeing and cultural exploration. After our week ended, most students returned home, but some of us traveled for a few more days, and I was able to visit Beijing and Xi'an. A few weeks after our return, we had another Saturday session, and each team of students made a formal presentation of their recommendations for their assigned company.

Citation analysis of pre-trip briefing papers

Before we departed, each team of students wrote a briefing paper, which analyzed their assigned company and its industry. Although not formal scholarly works, these briefing papers cited the information sources consulted, although in a variety of formats and citation styles. My participation in the trips gave me access to these papers and allowed me to analyze the footnotes and endnotes, an assessment activity not usually possible through our typical one-shot library instruction sessions. An analysis of the 388 citations in the

24 briefing papers across both years shows the following results in the chart below.

I was somewhat surprised to see that more than half of all citations were to public Web sites, but a company's own site is a rich source of information and that was the most commonly cited type of public Web site. Students also used news sites, blogs, and free reports from consulting firms and international organizations that were not part of our library's collections. Sadly, there was one reference to Wikipedia.

Library resources constituted about one-third of all citations, and one popular and easy-to-use industry database dominated that segment. Perhaps the most surprising finding was that was non-library pay sites or proprietary research firms were used for more than one-tenth of all citations. This particular population of students was almost all fully employed, so they may have had access to special resources through their employers.

In all cases, the "long tail" phenomenon presented itself as one database or Web site was disproportionately used in each category, followed by two or three that were used significantly less, followed a large number of resources that were cited only once or twice. It should be noted that this analysis was hampered by inconsistencies in citation style; it was occasionally difficult to tell what exact source the students had used or how it was accessed.

This analysis has led me to consider paying more attention in our library instruction sessions to "smart Googling" and the effective use of public Web sites. As much as we promote the use of our impressive library databases, technical difficulties such as incompatible browsers, remote access issues, and mystify-

Type of resource cited	Number	Percent
Public Web sites	199	51%
Library resources	132	34%
Pay sites or non-library research firms	47	12%
Personal interviews or correspondence	10	3%
Total	388	100%

Briefing paper citation analysis.

ing interfaces still lead many students to reach first for public information that is more accessible and "good enough" for their immediate, nonscholarly needs.

Impact of the trips

The benefits of being embedded on these trips were multidimensional. As a traveler, I had never been to Asia, so spending time in China was very enlightening from a cultural and historical perspective. The energy and vitality of Shanghai was quite striking. As a tall Caucasian, I stood out in the crowds and often elicited a fair amount of attention, questions, and picture-taking; this was a fascinating experience and reinforced the value of escaping one's usual comfort zone.

On a more academic level, I learned a great deal about key concepts in the study of business including Porter's Five Forces; Cultural, Administrative, Geographic, and Economic (CAGE) Analysis; Six Sigma quality programs; and the classic Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. Many of the company speakers showed PowerPoint slides as they described their business operations and it was very interesting to see which databases and information resources they use in the workplace. This will help in our collection development efforts. The exposure to the student papers and presentations was also valuable and will help us sharpen our instruction and make it more relevant.

On a more personal level, the trips enabled me to establish rapport with the students, faculty, and staff beyond our typical library instruction sessions. Many of these students later approached me for help with other classes and assignments. The time spent with staff and faculty was invaluable for deepening personal relationships and learning more about the operation, objectives, and drivers of the business school.

Recommendations

Although not every academic librarian can take a foreign trip with students and faculty, the bottom line was that we should do more outreach and try to get involved with our users in nontraditional, "nonlibrary" settings. Yes, it can be difficult to get beyond our day-to-day responsibilities; many of us are understaffed and "virtually" on call almost 24 hours a day, but it is helpful to spend more "face-time" with students, faculty, and staff in other activities. Try to volunteer at a charity event, assist with a fundraising campaign, or help a campus organization that is of personal interest to you. Even if "library topics" never come up, the time spent with others is important, and you never know where a conversation might lead. Also, ask professors if you can attend student presentations or somehow see the results of their work to better assess your reference and instruction work.

Having said that, try to be as strategic as possible in your investments of time and energy. Spending time with students is helpful, but at some point you will want exposure to senior faculty, department heads, directors, and managers to get their seasoned insights and opinions as well. We may not all be able to embed ourselves in an exotic locale, but by reaching out and getting involved with our campus community, we can achieve similar rewards.

Notes

1. Barbara P. Norelli, "Embedded Librarianship, Inside Out," *Public Services Quarterly* 6, no. 2/3: 69-74, Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts, EBSCOhost (accessed July 19, 2012), 69.

2. Laura Berdish and Corey Seeman, "A Reference-Intensive Embedded Librarian Program: Kresge Business Administration Library's Program to Support Action-Based Learning at the Ross School of Business," *Public Services Quarterly* 6, no. 2-3: 208-224.

3. Judy Li, "Serving as an Educator: A Southern Case in Embedded Librarianship," *Journal Of Business & Finance Librarianship* 17, no. 2: 133-152, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed July 19, 2012).

4. Susan Sharpless Smith and Lynn Sutton, "Embedded librarians: On the road in the Deep South," *College & Research Libraries News* 69, no. 2: 71-85, Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson), EBSCOhost (accessed June 12, 2012). ⇗