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## Critical Business Collections: Examining Key Issues Using a Social Justice Lens

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# Critical Business Collections: Examining Key Issues Using a Social Justice Lens

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## Abstract

Academic librarians perform a balancing act between the needs of patrons, licensing restrictions, and the missions of our libraries. As part of the work to develop our campus collections, academic business librarians work with both schools and commercial vendors to provide resources that our business students and faculty require. Business publishers charge academic customers pennies on the dollar for access, but are likely to seek protections for their intellectual content by placing usage restrictions that run counter to what librarians would prefer. This can cause difficulties for librarians in serving their unique populations. This also can run counter to the central principles of “Critical Librarianship,” which is based on a foundation of social justice, the belief that everyone deserves equal opportunities and basic economic, political, and social rights. Balancing the needs of the publishers and business school communities with the principles of critical librarianship is a great challenge for everyone who serves these communities. Business librarians from across the United States explore ways in which collections and critical librarianship collide. Topics covered include the effects of database licenses on the intersection of theoretical academic work and practical business activities, challenges faced by public institutions supporting community entrepreneurs, and how the integration of critical pedagogy with information and data literacies can bring awareness to problems within current collections such as access to information, issues in data collection, and information creation. Through discussion, we hope to provide insight to ways in which libraries, as intermediaries between patrons and vendors, can help address these difficult problems.

## Business Librarianship Basics

Business librarianship varies from other forms of subject librarianship in both who our patrons are and the makeup of our collections. Unlike most academic librarians, we serve a large group of patrons beyond faculty, students, and staff, including groups such as entrepreneurs, business owners, business incubators, and startup accelerators. Our collections include traditional materials such as books, e-books, and journals, but also include specialty business databases that function in very different ways than journal aggregating databases and provide things such as market research reports, demographic information, company information, financial data, and business news. Additionally, we have more recently started purchasing datasets. Collections must serve the different information needs of our various patron groups. Students may be more interested in things such as business articles and market research reports, whereas entrepreneurs may be interested in market and industry reports, demographic information, and books/materials related to writing a business plan. Meanwhile, faculty may be interested in articles and datasets. This creates a conflict of

interest when we are given suggestions on how to spend library money by any one of these parties. It is up to the business librarian to determine what is most equitable.

## Critical Librarianship

Critical librarianship examines ways in which libraries and librarians consciously and unconsciously support systems of oppression (Hudson, 2012). This can include the development of critical thinking, information literacy, and lifelong learning skills in students, and engagement with diversity, information ethics, access to information, commodification of information, labor, academic freedom, human rights, engaged citizenry, and neoliberalism (Garcia, 2015). We want to ensure we are looking at our work through a social justice lens to determine if we are providing the best access without harm to any of our patrons or colleagues.

Critical librarianship intersections with business collections in a number of ways. For example, at a land-grant institution such as Purdue University, our mission includes addressing opportunities and

challenges facing the state of Indiana. However, our contracts with database vendors generally include clauses that restricts the usage solely to academic endeavors. How do we, as librarians, balance the requirements of the publishers with the needs of our patrons? In what other ways do our collections collide with critical librarianship? This session sought to provide insight on the critical issues business librarians are facing with their collections, and how they are currently working to address them.

### **Open Access: Starting the Conversation With Business Faculty**

Open access (OA) supports the democratization of information at a global level. Librarians can work toward this goal while providing valuable faculty support through assisting faculty in navigating scholarly communication options and metrics. In order to do this we need to start the conversation with business faculty by appealing to their desire to widen the reach of their research and to their sense of altruism.

Starting this conversation with faculty can be challenging for a number of reasons. Business schools hope to improve their rankings by emphasizing the importance of faculty publishing within journals with strong journal impact factors; therefore, business schools traditionally measure research impact through citation counts and journal impact factor. This influences where faculty choose to publish, particularly for those working toward tenure. However, scholarly work has engagement outside publishing in journals, so it is limiting to focus only on this metric.

As information becomes increasingly open, is disseminated in nontraditional ways, and is available rapidly, scholars should examine additional metrics to ascertain how their research is influencing practice as well as scholarly conversation. For instance, data gathered from scholarly repositories provides insights on downloads (e.g., rates and geographies) for articles, datasets, and gray literature. Scholars can also use altmetrics to provide insights on how their work is influencing social media, news, and policy. This data allows scholars to demonstrate engagement. Discussing these nontraditional metrics presents the opportunity to discuss how OA can assist in disseminating their work—widening potential reach—as well as how the library can provide support. Faculty may not be able to distinguish the options available such as those offered by Green

OA journals versus Gold OA. Librarians can provide advice when choosing journals for publication, finding funding for publication, and in navigating author agreements. Academic libraries can also assist faculty in depositing to scholarly repositories. But to do this work, we must first start the conversation. Discussing with faculty how they can measure impact and engagement creates that opportunity.

### **Accessibility in Business Databases**

When selecting business resources, accessibility should be considered so that equal opportunity for learning is provided to students with physical and learning disabilities. Libraries can use adaptive software in conjunction with databases to make resources more accessible. For example, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) is using the following software to meet the needs of disabled users:

- JAWS 17, a screen reading software
- Read & Write Gold, which is literacy software for people with dyslexia and reading difficulties
- Kurzweil 3000, which assists students with reading, writing, study skills, and test taking

However, many business databases are not designed to be compatible with these adaptive technologies. For instance, mouse-dependent databases don't work with screen readers necessary for the visually impaired. For screen readers to work effectively, the tab function must be available; when it is not, these students are unable to read, learn, and use that resource. It would be highly unfortunate if an individual were prevented from becoming a great financial mind the likes of Warren Buffett because of inability to learn to use a key database within the financial field.

Librarians can contact their institution's adaptive educational services to learn more about how they can make their library more accessible physically, through adaptive technologies, and how to consider universal design when creating content to support research and learning.

Lastly, librarians need to be advocates when talking to vendors about the needs of our students. It is critical that we bring up accessibility and universal design so that resources we purchase can be used by our entire student population.

## **Understanding Business Collections to Support Critical Information Literacy**

Librarians must understand the content of our business resources so we can help students develop critical thinking skills when evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing information, especially when working with market research and survey data. Following are three examples of how librarians can help students think critically about business resources.

### ***Example 1: Uncovering Bias***

When evaluating resources, students need to be able to learn how to determine how information is collected and created so they can gauge whether sample bias is present. Unrepresentative samples occur through nonresponse bias, volunteer bias, and undercoverage. When evaluating survey data, it is important to show students how they can compare the survey sample to general population statistics to determine if populations are underrepresented within the study. Survey question design can result in nonresponse bias, which may be uncovered through comparison with population demographics but isn't always, especially if a question doesn't consider an oppressed group. For instance, most surveys represent gender as binary, alienating those who don't identify as male or female. Those individuals may choose not to participate in the research, causing nonresponse bias. Nonresponse bias occurs when individuals are unwilling or unable to participate within a survey, which creates a problem if the respondents differ from nonrespondents. Nonresponse bias can also occur through the method of collection.

### ***Example 2: Navigating Persona Creation***

When working with students who are navigating marketing projects, additional social justice–related issues can also present themselves. For instance, marketing students may be asked to create a persona. If students search for the term “persona” in a search engine, they will find a variety of examples—some good, many bad. The challenge with persona creation for marketing is that a fine line exists between creating a persona versus a stereotype. Too often, students can fall into the trap of looking for research that supports their idea of a person, resulting in the creation of a caricature with an alliterative name like “Low-Income Lisa” instead of evaluating the available research to create a sketch of a person

representative of the population they are targeting. Small group research consultations are an excellent opportunity to help students take a step back to critically evaluate their research as well as introduce new resources that will help create a more complete picture of a person in their target market.

### ***Example 3: Using Resources to Drive Discussion***

Specific business resources within a collection can be used to help students develop critical literacy, data literacy, and information literacy skills through library instruction and research consultations. One example of how a resource can be used in instruction is by demonstrating how to pull the demographics of top management positions with Simmons Oneview. It should not be surprising that most of those individuals in 2015 were older, white men, a population who have traditionally held positions of power (Simmons Research, 2015). This snapshot in time creates an opportunity for students to easily marginalize those who fall outside this majority. Through class discussion librarians can help students realize that they need to be future focused, and should investigate how demographics may be shifting, and that sometimes the best decision may be to focus on a niche. Librarians can help students realize that one source will not provide all the answers. They need to dig further, analyzing multiple resources in order to synthesize them into a business recommendation.

## **The Use of Business Databases During Experiential Learning Activities**

Experiential learning, or learning through experience (Kolb, 2015), is an important part of business education. Business schools are increasingly looking to infuse curriculums with these practical, real-world applications of business theory, so that students gain specific hands-on skills and knowledge before they graduate (Kayes, 2002; Kosnik, Tingle & Blanton, 2013; Reising & Dale, 2017). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the main accrediting organization for business schools, also encourages experiential learning in business curriculums by dedicating a specific accreditation standard to the presence and evaluation of experiential learning activities (AACSB, 2013, Standard 13). Experiential learning in business education can take many forms, including consulting projects, internships, case competitions, or participation in a university business incubator. For many students,

participating in experiential learning activities serves as a way to network with future employers and gain valuable skills to put on their resume. In short, students' success in these activities plays a key role in their success in the business field after they graduate, and it is vital that libraries provide resource access to support these unique student learning experiences.

An important part of an experiential learning activity is that it is grounded in real-world experience. In business, this means that the activity will likely result in a profit. Even though experiential learning activities occur as part of an academic class, using library databases for these activities sometimes blurs the line between academic use and commercial use. For example, PMBA students (professional MBA students who are simultaneously working as mid-level professionals and pursuing an MBA) complete a consulting capstone as part of their curriculum. Often, a student chooses a project based out of the same company that they are working for. Upon project completion, results are delivered to the company and often, the project is implemented, resulting in financial gains for the company. Also, because the student is already working at the company, professional working activities and academic activities both occur at the same time. Other examples of the blurred line between academic activities and commercial activities happen when PMBA students choose businesses of their own to use as projects for their capstone courses or when students start a business through a university incubator and continue their involvement with the incubator and other students after graduation.

### ***Examples of Commercial Use Language***

When business librarians have questions about the restrictions on the commercial usage of databases, they often turn to language in a database license to further clarify what the database can be used for. However, commercial use terms vary across resources. The following examples illustrate how three different database licenses approach experiential learning activities.

Database 1: No form of commercial use . . . permitted. [Authorized Users may not] publish, re-distribute or make available to third parties any Intelligence which any of them extract from the Service, whether by itself or as part of any work or other material.

Database 2: Customer may use, access, copy, store, display and create derivative works of . . . the Data for its internal business purposes and may use minor portions of the Data, as part of reports, or separately, given to clients of Customer, whether in electronic or other present or future media.

Database 3: Authorized Users may . . . [use] the information comprised in the Services as part of a live project conducted as a requirement as part of the course PROVIDED THAT as a maximum, ONLY the lesser of 2.5% of any single report forming part of the Services, and 25% of a section within any single report, (such percentages to exclude indexes and contents pages) is included in a dissertation or thesis by way of a direct extract.

As illustrated, the terms discussing commercial activities or "live" projects vary from one database to the next. These are only three examples, but business libraries subscribe to many databases, making it difficult to keep track of various licenses. Furthermore, as librarians, we encourage students to use a variety of databases and resources to corroborate their findings. It isn't our intention to limit student access to resources or confuse them about what resources are available to use for certain activities.

### ***Implications***

But why does this matter? For most business databases, academic libraries represent a small portion of a vendor's overall profit. Do vendors even care what is being done with their databases? In short, they should. And we should too.

Being informed and clear about database license terms can help give librarians confidence when recommending sources to use for experiential learning activities. Knowing exactly what activities a database supports also limits the chance that librarians or staff will unnecessarily restrict a database because they fear violating a database's terms of use (Aagaard & Arguello, 2015).

In the event that a database license is unclear in its regard to experiential learning activity, it serves as an opportunity for librarians to communicate with vendors, ask questions, and begin to consider whether specific language may need to be added to a license

in order to explicitly address the database's use for experiential learning activities.

Finally, these experiential learning activities are not unique to business schools. In engineering and medicine, experiential learning activities may result in product creation for the marketplace, a process typically referred to as "technology transfer" or "technology commercialization." Understandings about library resources in experiential learning activities can be used to inform librarians who work within these other disciplines where similar academic use/commercial use questions might arise (Elliott, Dewland, Martin, Kramer, & Jackson Sr., 2017).

### ***Solutions? Answers?***

There is no one answer to questions raised about the gray areas of commercial use in academic business databases. Library responses to this issue might vary depending on the size of the institution and the number of resources it subscribes to.

In addition to awareness about commercial use language in database licenses, a possible way to address this issue is by educating patrons about appropriate uses for databases. Along with initiating a dialogue with patrons, "Acceptable Use Policies" can be utilized. These policies, posted publicly on a database page, inform users in simple terms what specific activities the resource supports. This allows users to feel confident using the source, but also serves as guidance for staff or other desk users who might be unfamiliar with the resource. Lastly, specific language relating to technology transfer, technology commercialization, or "live" activities can be included in database licenses to further clarify what activities the resource supports.

### ***Making Business Resources Available for Walk-In Users***

One of the very important aspects of the modern library is making resources available to a wide population of users and potential users. Academic libraries (both public and private) have long-standing policies and practices of welcoming diverse members of the community to use their resources. While circulation of print material might be limited to current members of a campus community, most libraries welcome guests to browse print collections and use them onsite. As libraries transition their collections to a

greater (or sole) reliance on electronic resources, the dynamics of walk-in use has been a problem that has been front and center on the minds of librarians, especially for business.

There are a number of reasons why academic librarians are committed to preserving walk-in use of resources by the general public. One important aspect is that many public institutions in the United States are land-grant universities with a mission to make resources available broadly to the communities that they serve. While many of these schools do this through university extension services, the library also plays an important role in fulfilling this mission. Additionally, the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is a strong force to encourage academic libraries to make resources available to a broader population. From the FDLP page: "The mission of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) is to provide free, ready, and permanent public access to Federal Government information, now and for future generations" (<https://www.fdip.gov/about-fdip/113-mission-and-history>). Librarians have also seen interaction with the broader community as a value proposition that is central to their function. This has extended to archival collections and special collections that are often housed in academic libraries. In many ways, making information resources available to a broad audience is very important to the cultural mission of a library.

In regard to ensuring that libraries have collections that are open to walk-in users and other community members, it is important to explore who these people are. Among the most commonly found walk-in users of a library, we would find local community members; students at other schools; independent scholars; visiting scholars; interested individuals; and (especially in the case of business resources) people engaged in businesses as an owner or an employee. For that matter, many budding entrepreneurs might be seeking assistance and resources through local libraries as a walk-in user. This last grouping of walk-in users is what many publishers dislike in regard to providing access. There is a perception among vendors and publishers that business men and women are using resources at local academic libraries to bypass the need to purchase them. A businessman or woman could easily spend a day at a library and download reports that will save their company thousands of dollars. This is certainly plausible, but it is likely happening far less than vendors fear.



The dynamic of usage in a walk-in situation can be difficult as we balance between the user's need for privacy and the publisher's need to understand potential nonlicensed use of the materials. While many libraries do not have detailed statistics of what walk-in users are reading, we do have one proxy way of exploring this topic. At Kresge Library Services (Ross School of Business of the University of Michigan), we looked at reference statistics over the past five-plus years (July 2012 through October 2017). This is what we found in regard to the questions that we received:

- Ross Community—90.48% (18,563 questions)
- Other University of Michigan—4.03% (826 questions)
- Ross Alumni—3.82% (784 questions)
- Non University of Michigan—1.67% (343 questions)

While this may plausibly indicate that our walk-in usage from non-Michigan community users is relatively low (given that this population only produced 1.67% of the questions to the library), there are a few data points that should be considered. First, during this time period, we did not have walk-in access at the library during construction. There were, however, questions directed as to where they may use computers on campus. In this regard, we were able to direct them to the main library and their guest machines. Second, many community members might be happy to use the resources, but not feel that they were able to ask questions—which might

drive the number a bit lower than could be expected. While these numbers are not perfect, we believe they accurately reflect the relatively low use by walk-in users vs. current members of the Michigan community.

While not large in numbers, academic libraries (especially in business libraries) should strive to make their resources available to this important part of the academic community. To that end, there are a number of issues that the business librarian needs to address. First, librarians need to find balance between the needs of current students and the needs of the broader community. There are many contentious contract renewals that have potentially been derailed because of walk-in access issues. Is a library prepared to walk away from a resource that does not allow walk-in use? If so, would the current students and faculty be harmed by such a move? Second (and related to the first), we also need to respect the wishes and licenses for specialized resources (that are very valuable to our students), when they insist that only current students be allowed to use it. If publishers fear the risk of having these resources freely available on campus outweighs the benefit of exposure on campus and the small amount of revenue, they will no longer sell to academic customers. Third, librarians need to be reasonable about what services can be provided to these community users. At Michigan with Kresge Library Services, we have four terminals that patrons may use, but we do not offer printing to those patrons. The cost associated with doing so, especially for computers that are logged in all the time, is not worth the effort that would be involved.

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