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Supporting the Changing Practices of Undergraduate Business Teaching at North Carolina Central University

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Introduction

In the Fall of 2018, North Carolina Central University (NCCU) joined with thirteen other institutions to participate in an Ithaka S+R study to understand Business instructors' undergraduate teaching processes towards developing resources and services to support them in their work. Ithaka S+R is a not-for-profit organization that "helps academic and cultural communities serve the public good and navigate economic, technological, and demographic change" (Ithaka S+R, 2015). Ithaka S+R "works with leaders in higher education, academic libraries, foundations, and publishers to research, evaluate, and provide strategic guidance in a range of areas" such as student success, access to higher education, diversity, and research and teaching practices, and more (Ithaka S+R, 2018).

This report will outline the pedagogical practices of the School of Business instructors at North Carolina Central University. The goal of this study is to understand Business instructors undergraduate teaching process towards developing resources and services at North Carolina Central University and how the librarians at the James E. Shepard Memorial Library can support their work.

The School of Business at North Carolina Central University

The North Carolina Central University School of Business was established on July 1, 1972. The School of Business can trace its roots back to the founding of NCCU in 1910 to management education (North Carolina Central University & School of Business, 2019). In the early documents of the institution,1926-27, there were plans to create a School of Commerce. Due to "unprecedented growth in student interest and enrollment," the Department of Business and Economics, separated from the School of Arts and Sciences and became the School of Business (North Carolina Central University & School of Business, 2019).

The School of Business offers undergraduate degree programs in Accounting, Computer Science and Business, Finance, Hospitality and Tourism, Management and Marketing. The undergraduate program is fully accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). The School of Business offers programs leading to the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, the joint Master of Business Administration/Juris Doctor (JD/MBA) degree, and the joint Master of Business Administration/Master of Information Science (MBA/MIS) degree. The graduate program in the School of Business is also fully accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International).

Methodology

Participants for this project were recruited through a number of ways. The list of recruits was created using the criteria established by Ithaka S+R that participants must be teaching faculty within the School of Business. We made a list of faculty based on the criteria with special emphasis on faculty with which we had previously worked. Email invitations were sent to each faculty member who fit the Ithaka S+R requirement. In December 2018, the authors attended a faculty meeting in order to summarize the project and discover who was interested. The authors also visited potential participants in their offices in order to speak with them personally and provide additional information. Of the 15 who signed up for more information and to participate, seven interviews were conducted.

After agreeing to an interview, the participants were scheduled for an hour interview with one of the authors. No incentive was given. Interviews were conducted in a meeting room in the library and in the School of Business from February 2019 to March 2019. Interviews were recorded on digital recording devices. The audio files were later sent to a professional online transcription company. Ithaka S+R developed the semi-structured interview instrument, which was focused on the following three broad areas: background and methods, working with materials and content, and working with tools (Appendix A).

The authors conducted a qualitative analysis of the seven interviews. The three authors all independently coded each interview, using line-by-line open coding. Emergent themes were then pulled by the authors.

The study was passed by NCCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB), 1201437, and was exempt from the required approval from the IRB, on November 5, 2018. All funding for this project was provided by NCCU's James E. Shepard Memorial Library.

Participants' Teaching Areas

Participant	Teaching Area 1	Teaching Area 2
1	Finance	Management
2	Human Resources	Business Administration
3	Business Computer Applications	Project Management

4	Economics	Finance
5	Professional Development	
6	Computer Information Systems	
7	Professional Development	

Findings

Career Readiness

Career readiness and competitive intelligence are two significant themes that emerged from interviewing business faculty for the Supporting the Changing Practice of Undergraduate Business Teaching research project. Business faculty members expressed the importance of career readiness as a fundamental aspect of their courses. Faculty members want their students to be competitive in the marketplace, and for this to happen there must be an emphasis on learning what those marketable skills are that will provide students with a competitive advantage, and determine how students can practice using these skills in practical ways within a classroom setting and in other aspects of their lives. Faculty participants expressed a desire for support with helping students understand the importance of research and writing, public speaking, and exposure to activities that promote career readiness such as internships, job shadowing, site visits and exposure to a variety of career possibilities in various industries.

Competitive Intelligence

Competitive Intelligence, which is the process of "gathering, analyzing, and distributing intelligence for decision making purposes (Kurian) was mentioned by several interviewees in terms of faculty members gathering information to understand what other businesses are doing the help prepare their students for the workplace or graduate school. Faculty members researched various industries to gain insight regarding the types of projects they are involved in to identify the transferable skills deemed pertinent for employees to be marketable and successful on the job. Interviewees mention that obtaining industry information, articles and up-to-date information on trends helps to keep faculty abreast of what needs to be shared with students in preparation for their careers and developing assignments that build upon skills that are deemed necessary by industry. Information that has been analyzed and is therefore ready for use in decision making. For example, one interviewee stated how they are actively involved in creating this competitive advantage for their students, "interacting with the current business professionals

so that I can be credible…Choreographing the class, including other business professionals, hiring professionals, coming in, and talking to our students."

Another interviewee stated in regards to working with career services, "There is no way that any of us could do it alone. It takes a team. And then we have to incorporate the industry leaders because we want to make sure that what we are teaching really does relate to the real world."

Teaching approach and partnerships

Writing Skills

One of the most frequently mentioned topics that emerged in the interviews was writing skills or the broader subject of soft skills. The common theme taken from the interviews is that there is a disconnect between instructors' expectations of student writing skills and actual student writing. A participant said that they recalled that a student thought that writing was her strong point, and upon review, the faculty member found the opposite to be true.

This disconnect between expectations about writing skills and reality seems to continue through college and into searching for a job. A 2015 study completed on behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities confirmed that 82% of employers participating in the survey view effective communication through writing as a significant learning outcome (Hart Research Associates, pg. 4). This 2015 study also showed a gap between employers' assessment of recent college graduates and the level of preparedness college students feel they have. Just 27% of employers felt college students graduate with the writing skills expected for the job, but 65% of students felt their writing skills prepared them for employment (Hart Research Associates, pg 12). This opinion is echoed by faculty involved in the Ithaka S+R project, including one participant who said "I'm still not prepared for the kinds of things that they [the students] don't know…" when writing tasked with writing business letters.

During one of the interviews, an interviewee posited that there has been a shift in writing styles since the use of text messages and social media as forms of communication.

> "[S]tudents don't want to write. And I think with the area that we're in with text messages and cryptic notes, Instagram, and all those kinds of things, students…would rather text or write… very short emails, than write complete sentences… If you're [going to] text me… make sure it's logical and … write in complete sentences."

However, these changes in writing have not altered expectations in professional areas in which students in the School of Business will seek employment.

> "… Career Readiness… [is] based… on the top 10 skills employers are looking for, and most of them are the soft skills

Four out of seven interviews mentioned student writing, and specifically that the student writing they see in assignments is not at the level they expect.

Fortunately, at NCCU there are resources in place for students to receive assistance in improving their writing skills. The Writing Studio on campus offers support for all levels of proficiency, and provides the following: one-on-one consultation about writing, brainstorming topics, rough draft development, help with organizing ideas, and fine tuning writing (North Carolina Central University & The Writing Studio, 2019). Professors already encourage students to attend these sessions, which include regular weekday hours and by appointment evenings and weekends.

"I send students to the writing lab (Writing Studio) all the time… when they don't know the difference between there…their, [and] they're…it effects the writing. But I tell them to go to the writing center."

The James E. Shepard Memorial Library is a learning commons, with evening appointments offered with Writing Studio consultations, tutors available at scheduled times, and technology assistance with IT services housed in the library. The library also offers library instruction sessions tailored to specific assignments, library orientation, sessions focused on plagiarism and creating citations, scavenger hunts, one-on-one sessions with both students and faculty, and scheduled consultations. The librarians at the James E. Shepard Memorial Library also provide outreach to liaison areas, invitations to events in the library to each department, and library orientation for new faculty embedded in new faculty orientation. All of these types of outreach help boost information literacy and knowledge of the Writing Studio, although according to the interviews with the School of Business faculty, these techniques aren't reaching all students. One solution might be embedding information literacy sessions in more first year classes, in particular focusing on more than just a one-shot library instruction session.

Information, Resources, Support and the Library

During this study participants mentioned various types of resources they used when creating materials for courses. Participants stated using resources such as graphic syllabus, puzzles, creating writing samples, and creating YouTube videos. They also mentioned they utilized their colleagues for support in a teamwork atmosphere. The collegial environment inspired sharing of materials such as rubrics and advice from classroom management to keeping students engaged. When participants were asked what other supports can help in selecting, creating, or making materials available, and they mentioned the business librarian was helpful in sending emails about resources to faculty, sending emails about new databases, and presenting how to download ebooks for free to help students with financial difficulties. Moreover, participants mentioned "of course resources" is important for support but also that being able to access the newest technologies (i.e. software, hardware, licenses) would also be beneficial because when students graduate they will have to use that technology and they need the exposure now in order to be successful. Another participant stated when asked about other supports or resources, replied "Well, we always need resources. Always, I guess technologies would be something that we

really want to make sure we have the best, the newest, because, again, when [students] go outside, that's what they'll be using."

Faculty expressed that it is very important to them that students are able to do research, access resources, evaluate sources and think critically about the information they are retrieving. There are resources such as databases that faculty specifically recommend to students. For career readiness, Vault is a database as one faculty member stated, "Vault has great information there for them. [The information there] can help them in so many ways. So that I can say, truly it has been a big help to our students." Moreover, the library is a place where business faculty rely on for "empirical research" and for "data" i.e. business related data or databases. As one faculty member stated "most important as business professors, we need databases. Because you can't do a lot without databases. And also you can't help students to understand empirical research without databases." Ensuring faculty have the resources they need in order to be successful is the mission of the James E. Shepard Memorial Library.

It was expressed often that the library is a place that has research, and evaluation tools and where critical thinking can take place. Unfortunately, students are not taking advantage of the resources.
This quote from a faculty member captures this sentiment well:

> "And then it could be like a lot of other resources that we have here on campus. Again, it's going back to this mindset change. A lot of resources that they don't have to pay for out-of-pocket. It costs too much to pay for a lot of stuff. They just don't utilize these things. Once we can get them to understand these things are for you. They can make life so much easier for you if you just utilize them, but a lot of them just won't do that. But it's not a fault of the library. I think there's great resources over there. It's just getting them over there."

Marketing the library and rebranding the library in order for students to see the library in a different was also mentioned by a faculty member as one ways to draw attention back to the library and the great resources it has to offer. The faculty member stated that this is not unique to the library: "not only the library but whatever resources we have on campus, we need to figure out how we can ... get the students interested and get them to understand that this is a great resource." Moreover, this faculty member stated, "I think it's almost a rebranding kind of thing of what the library is, not that we're gonna change the name of what this is but it is an information resource center."

Faculty also mentioned that they wanted workshops, demonstrations and training on the newest databases or the newest technology and for the business librarian to continue to inform them of new resources and come to their faculty meetings to tell them about new resources. Moreover, faculty mentioned they wanted the business librarian to attend their faculty meetings in order to inform them of new resources available at the library. The faculty member stated "...we need the support of the business librarian. we have to, in other words [the business librarian] should be attending our meetings."

When asked if there were any supports services to help them in creating materials or making them available, a faculty member replied:

> "If I'm teaching a graduate class, the graduate assistant would be very very helpful. Although, the library's close to us in the school of business, it's hard to get over here a lot of times, but what I ... the graduate assistant could support in doing some research or even being a teaching assistant or whatever. But what I would like, a graduate student could help me personally, but also in helping me personally the graduate student could increase their skill level by understanding the various databases and maybe pulling some data and organizing the data for me so I can run some tests or statistics or whatever if I'm doing a paper like that. But I think a graduate student could really be helpful to me in helping to get some of that groundwork laid for a research paper. And like I said, that could really increase their skill level too."

In this scenario the faculty member, graduate student and library have a dynamic research relationship. The graduate student would be of assistance to the faculty member, and the library by providing databases and resources that support them both with their research goals. Moreover, the library can save both the faculty member and the graduate student time by directing them to the most effective resources for their research.

Further Research and Opportunities

During this research study when asked "What materials do you typically create in the process of developing a course?" a faculty member said the following:

"We read in my class, we use real time. In order words, I'm not the type where I read from a textbook. We engage each other. We ask questions. And by that we call it scholarship of teaching and learning. Learning takes place in the classroom. We make sure everyone is learning. ...But we engage everybody. We learn, that because they have less time after class hours, our learning takes place inside the classroom."

The concept of scholarship of teaching and learning is an area that can be further explored. Shulman (2006), states "The scholarship of teaching and learning invites faculty at all these levels to view teaching as serious intellectual work, ask good questions about their students' learning, seek evidence in their classrooms that can be used to improve practice, and make this work public so that others can critique it, build on it, and contribute to the wider teaching commons." Currently the scholarship of teaching and learning and student engagement in the classroom is an area that librarians and faculty can collaborate with ongoing research, scholarship and also by sharing successful student engagement techniques in the classroom. Currently, the librarians at the James E. Shepard Memorial Library use a department liaison model. A librarian is assigned to each department or school at the institution. Also, when possible librarians are embedded in the classroom for select subject areas, such as the First Year Experience/Seminar classes. The librarians at the James E. Shepard Memorial Library teach information literacy classes, and use various instructional techniques such as flipping the classroom and cooperative learning. The librarians can work with School of Business faculty to utilize the scholarship of teaching and learning concepts also to engage students in learning.

Conclusion

In order to support the changing practices of teaching, from this study, the library and the School of Business will be able to utilize the suggestions that were recommended by participants. These include but are not limited to promoting library workshops to faculty, librarians attending faculty meetings, and librarians assisting with gathering data for competitive intelligence analysis. Promoting library instructional sessions and writing studio services are a part of the learning commons with the library will also enhance and promote student success.

Moreover, marketing the library more intentionally and ensuring that faculty members are provided with information that promotes industry-specific skills that are relevant and transferable will provide a competitive advantage in the real world.

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Interview Instrument

Project title: Supporting the Changing Practices of Undergraduate Business Teaching

Background and Methods

1. Tell me about your experiences as a teacher [E.g. How long you've been teaching, what you typically teach, what you currently teach]

    » Does your teaching incorporate any particular teaching methods or approaches? [E.g. experiential learning, case method, design thinking, problem-based learning, flipped classroom]?
    » Have you received any support/relied on others towards developing your teaching approach?
    » Are there any other supports or resources that you think would be helpful for you?

2. Do you currently teach more general research or study skills in any of your courses? [E.g. finding sources, evaluating sources, data literacy, financial literacy, critical thinking]

    » How do you incorporate this into your courses? Have you experienced any challenges in doing so?
    » Does anyone support you in doing so and if so how? [E.g. instruction classes offered through the library]
    » Are there any other forms of support that would be helpful in doing this?

Working with Materials and Content

3. What materials do you typically create in the process of developing a course? [E.g. syllabi, course website, online modules, lectures, assignments, tests]

    » How do you make these materials available to students?
    » Do you make these materials more widely available? [E.g. public course website or personal website, sharing via listserv]
    » How you experienced any challenges in creating and/or making these materials available?
    » Do you ever consult with others as part of creating and/or making these materials available?
    » Are there any supports that could help you in creating and/or making these materials available?

4. Beyond the materials you create in the process of developing a course, what other kinds of content to students typically work with in your courses? [E.g. readings from textbooks or other sources, practice datasets, films]

   » How involved are you in how this content is selected and/or created?
   » How do you make these materials available to students?
   » Do you make these materials more widely available? [E.g. public course website or personal website, sharing via listserv]
   » How you experienced any challenges in selecting, creating and/or making these materials available?
   » Do you ever consult with others as part of selecting, creating and/or making these materials available?
   » Are there any supports that could help you in selecting, creating and/or making these materials available?

Working with Tools

5. Have you considered using and/or are you currently working with data and/or analytics tools to understand and improve your teaching? [E.g. dashboard or an app through a course management system, early alert notification system on student performance via email]

   » If no, why? (e.g. unaware of such offerings, current offerings are not useful, opposed to such offerings)
     » If a tool could be designed that leverages data (e.g. about students) in a way that would be helpful towards your teaching, what data would feed into this and how would this tool ideally work?
     » Do you have any concerns in relation to how this data is collected and/or leveraged (e.g. privacy)?

   » If yes, what data and/or tools have you used and how? To what extent was this useful?
     » Do you have any concerns in relation to how this data is collected and/or leveraged (e.g. privacy)?
     » What are some of the greatest challenges you've encountered in the process of using these tools?
     » Do you rely on anyone to support you in using these tools?
     » Are there any other forms of support that would help you as you work with these tools?

6. Do you rely on any other tools to support your teaching (E.g. clickers, smart boards)? If so,

   » What are some of the greatest challenges you've encountered in the process of using these tools?
   » Do you rely on anyone to learn about and/or support you in using these tools?
   » Are there any other forms of support that would help you as you work with these tools?

Wrapping Up

7. If there was a magic wand that could help you with some aspect of your teaching [beyond giving you more money, time, or smarter students], what would you ask it to do for you?

8. Are there any ways that library or others on campus have helped you with your teaching in ways that have not yet come up in this interview?

9. Are there any issues relating to your experiences teaching that you think that librarians and/or others on campus who support you and your students should we be aware of that have not yet come up in our discussion? [e.g. on the role of the library in supporting teaching, what makes teaching in your specific area of Business or Business more widely that warrants unique support]