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FIRE Starters: Using a Train-the- Trainer Model and Team Consultations to Support a First-Year Experience Business Competition

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Introduction

This chapter shares how two librarians at the University of New Hampshire—the first-year experience and student success librarian and the business librarian—partnered to develop and implement information literacy lessons using a train-the-trainer model and research consultations for the First-Year Innovation and Research Experience (FIRE) program at the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics at the University of New Hampshire (UNH).

The librarians used multiple methods of achieving information literacy outcomes for FIRE students. During the fall semester, the train-the-trainer model was implemented, where the librarians taught FIRE peer advisors how to teach their teams the skills and resources needed to succeed in a business plan proposal and pitch competition. Later in the year, research sub-teams from each group met with librarians for structured research consultations, helping them focus their ideas and brainstorm effective research strategies for their products and services.

To provide context for this unique first-year program, students in the FIRE program work on a year-long project in their teams, incorporating one of five "grand challenge" topics to develop a business plan and pitch for a year-end competition. Each "grand challenge" represents a broad societal problem (e.g., fast fashion or climate change) that teams are tasked to address by developing a business product or service solution. Ultimately, each team pitches their plan and competes against other teams with the same challenge topic, with winners moving on to a final round to compete against other challenge winners. The students engage year-long to learn and develop research skills for completing this project as well as to develop their knowledge about business practices through networking and other scenarios.

Planning

Number of participants

600 first-year undergraduate business students; 30–35 upper-class undergraduate peer advisors

Audience

The first-year business students are divided into 30–35 teams of around 20 students. These teams are guided and mentored by upper-class peer advisors, who are the audience for the train-the-trainer sessions. Small research sub-teams of around five students from the larger FIRE teams are the audience for the research consultations in the spring semester.

Preparation and Resources

To support our lessons, we used a variety of tools and databases, including interactive presentation technology, an online research guide, and learning modules and badges in a course management system, and we promoted the use of library databases. Here is a list of resources that we utilized to facilitate learning:

- **Mentimeter (**https://www.mentimeter.com/). We used Mentimeter, an interactive polling presentation web-based application, to create and facilitate an interactive lesson for a train-the-trainer session with the FIRE peer advisors. The UNH Library has a paid team subscription to Mentimeter, which expands upon the free version of the application, allowing for an unlimited number of interactive elements and polling questions.
  - The fall 2020 FIRE Peer Advisor presentation can be viewed at https://www.mentimeter.com/s/abd25e3625cdd8464b8b19222b14e885/28a3d4e9062b.
  - The spring 2021 FIRE Peer Advisor presentation can be viewed at https://www.mentimeter.com/s/f7d770c6f4f5b2866ad0b8eaba051038/f3079e6559a3.
- **LibGuides** (https://www.springshare.com/libguides). We used LibGuides to create a FIRE research guide that provided contextual information and source links related to each "grand challenge." We also used this research guide to curate a list of relevant databases for the "grand challenge" competition (http://libraryguides.unh.edu/fire20-21). The UNH Library has a paid subscription to LibGuides.
- **Canvas** (https://www.instructure.com/canvas) and **Credly (**https://info.credly.com). We used Credly as our digital badge platform within Canvas to create and deploy the FIRE Library Research Basics digital badge and the Market Research Basics digital badge, which students could earn by completing optional modules. UNH subscribes to Canvas and Credly as university-wide platforms.
- **Databases.** In-person consultations, the train-the-trainer session, and the FIRE research guide all directed students to consult the following UNH Library subscription databases:
  - Statista (https://www.statista.com). This tool is for researching quantitative data, statistics, and related information from a wide range of sources.
  - IBISWorld (https://www.ibisworld.com). This database includes industry research reports that provide key statistics and analysis on market

characteristics, operating conditions, current and forecast performance, and major industry participants.

We focus on teaching about the Statista and IBISWorld databases in particular for their value to the project. However, during the consultation sessions, we tailor the information needs to the students' specific business ideas and refer students to other resources as needed, including our discovery platform, Primo, additional subscription databases, and relevant websites. While there is significant use of technologies in this program, the aspect that we consider most valuable for this project is the structure of library instruction, outlined in the next section.

Description of Lesson/Activity

The first and most pressing goal for both of our activities is to support first-year students in the FIRE program in their effort to present well-researched business plans for the year-end FIRE competition that utilize relevant data and analysis. A second significant goal for this program is to contribute to the overall foundational information literacy development in first-year students more broadly, introducing them to library resources and services and fostering the critical-thinking skills needed for college-level research, regardless of the discipline.

These goals were achieved through two activities:

- Two librarian-led peer-advisor train-the-trainer instruction sessions
- Small group research consultations with the research sub-teams of each FIRE team

The first component of our support for the FIRE business competition was comprised of two interactive instruction sessions for peer advisors.

Goals/learning outcomes

Designed as a train-the-trainer model, the learning outcome of these sessions was for peer advisors to recognize and recall knowledge about available resources to explain and recommend to first-year students on their teams.

Time required

One session was held early in the fall semester, and a second was held early in the spring semester. Each session lasted 60 minutes.

Teaching outline

Fall session

The presentation in the fall semester focused on connecting the peer advisors' previous knowledge gained in their experience as alumni of the FIRE program to their new roles as mentors to first-year students. The presentation began with a poll asking the peer advisors what resources they found to be the most useful to them when they were in the FIRE program. The resources included in this poll were the following:

- the FIRE Library Research Guide
- librarian consultations
- Google

- library databases
- Wikipedia
- FIRE staff
- other (with instructions to share their other resources)

After results were collected and displayed on the interactive presentation, we discussed the findings with the peer advisors, reminding them of the unique values of the research guide, library databases, and librarian consultations.

Next, we highlighted the FIRE research guide, an annually updated guide providing links to relevant databases, librarian contact information, and tabs for each of the year's selected "grand challenge" topics (figure 35.1). Under the topic pages, librarians and FIRE staff curated resources highlighting thought-provoking articles, statistics, and related library resources and webpages for that topic. These topic pages were to be used for preliminary "grand challenge" investigations and brainstorming activities.

Figure 35.1
FIRE Resource Highlights

During the fall session, we demonstrated how the peer advisors should introduce students to the guide, explored one of the "grand challenge" resource tabs as an example, and offered suggestions on how teams could use the guide. To wrap up the fall session, we promoted the FIRE Library Research Basics badge that students could earn by completing a foundational research skills module in Canvas.

Spring session

The spring semester presentation also used an interactive method, with a game show-style quiz embedded into the slideshow (figures 35.2 and 35.3). The multiple-choice quiz questions were interspersed between lesson content and emphasized key points we felt were important and worth reiterating (figure 35.4).
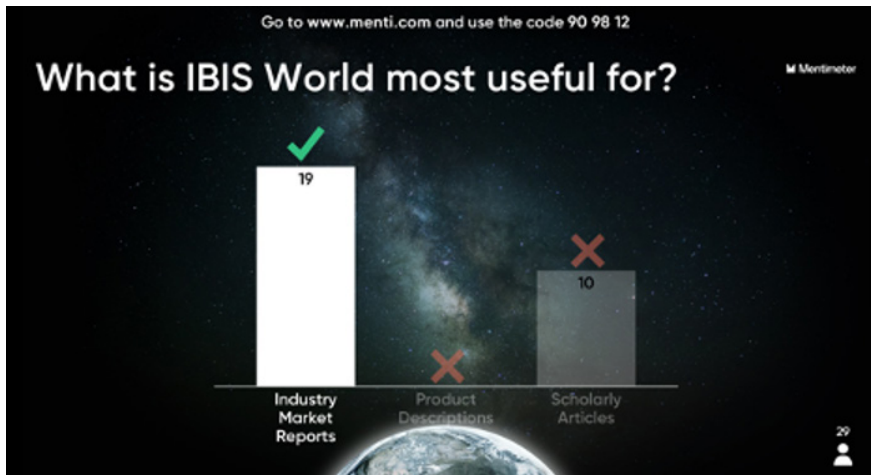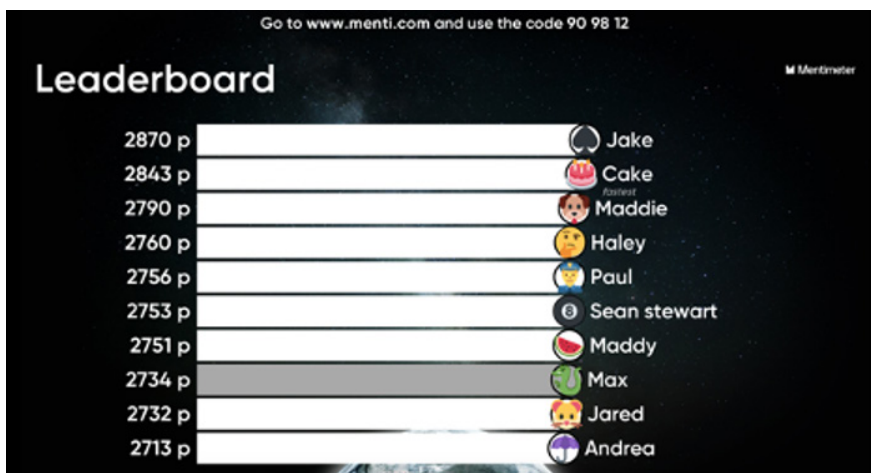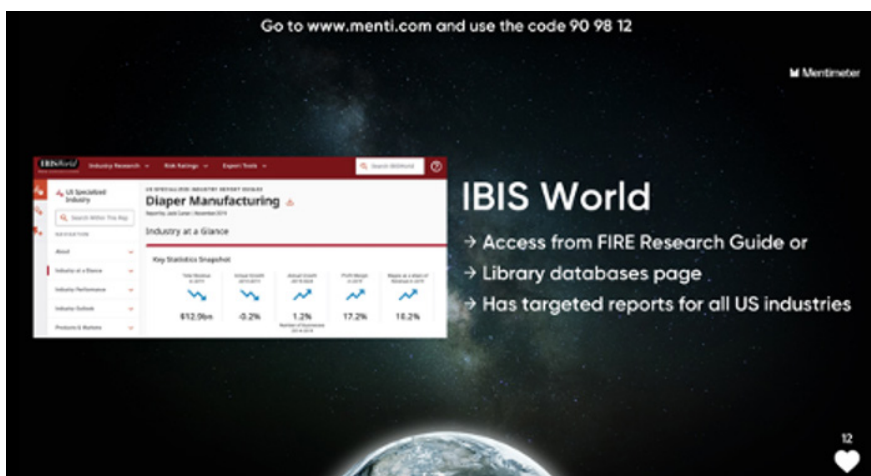
Figure 35.2

Figure 35.3

Figure 35.4

The quiz questions were:
1. Why should students do the market research badge?
2. What types of information does Statista offer?
3. What is IBISWorld most useful for?
4. What can librarians help with in consultations?

Students were awarded points for answering questions, and the animated leaderboard created a fun, competitive atmosphere that kept students engaged.

The lesson began with revisiting the FIRE research guide (figure 35.1), with a particular focus this time on how to access the databases that students would use as their research projects grew in scope. Through the course of the game show, we explained how the peer advisors could train their teams on how to access and use two recommended business databases, IBISWorld and Statista. To do this, we shared screenshots, showed how to access the databases via the research guide, and showed example searches in each of the databases.

We also promoted the second badge for the FIRE program, the FIRE Market Research badge, which includes more detailed tutorials for these databases as well as for other helpful databases used for market research. We concluded this session with an explanation of the required FIRE research team library consultations that comprise the second activity described below and instructions on how to set up appointments for the consultations.

For the second activity supporting the FIRE "grand challenge" competition, we hosted research consultations for the research sub-teams of each FIRE team.

Goals/learning outcomes

There were three learning objectives for the consultations: As a result of the consultations, students on the research sub-teams would
1. recognize library and non-library resources and apply strategies to brainstorm and hone ideas for product or service addressing a "grand challenge";
2. gather background information and data to demonstrate the relevance and need of their proposed businesses; and
3. relate and explain researched information back to full FIRE teams to integrate research findings into and support their teams' poster and pitch presentations.

Time required

We offered about a dozen 2-hour drop-in consultation sessions during a 2-week window in the spring semester.

Teaching outline

When arriving at the drop-in consultations, the research sub-teams were consulted on a first-come, first-serve basis with whichever librarian was available. Some sessions were staffed by both librarians and hosted in the library, and other sessions were staffed by only the business librarian and held at the business college during the business librarian's office hours.

To facilitate productive and focused consultations, we provided a handout (appendix 35A) with probing questions about the products or services that their teams were considering. We asked what problem the product or service solved, how it was a business, who their customers were, and who their competitors would be.

These questions allow the research teams to contextualize their ideas and assess the viability of their product or service. Students often have a hard time thinking about the data or information they need to develop their initial concepts into realistic proposals as well as aligning data and information regarding their "grand challenge" directly to their proposal. By challenging them to answer these questions, we helped them think about their concepts from a broader view before deciding on all of the business aspects. In addition to the probing questions, the handout also offered ideas of where to look for information that would help answer the questions, providing opportunities to identify areas of research that would help their teams build successful presentations and posters.

Additional details

The handout helped manage the consultation flow, giving the teams direction for focusing their work productively while the librarians visited with other teams. Often, several teams would arrive at the drop-in consultation sessions simultaneously. A typical triage method in such cases would involve us providing the handouts to each team, then working with those who arrived first for around 5–10 minutes, then moving to the other groups, and finally circling back to check in with the first team again. This allowed for teams to think about our questions, try some preliminary research strategies, and follow up with us with their questions and research ideas. We also offered teams the opportunity to consult with us further by attending additional drop-in sessions or office hours after their initial consultation. This was valuable because some of these first-year students were overwhelmed with the details of market research and needed time to process and consider the needs of their teams.

Transferability

Substitute databases

We chose Statista and IBISWorld as the databases for students to use first in thinking through the data and information that would inform their "grand challenge" knowledge and business solutions. Other databases could be substituted, based on access to various subscriptions. Another market research database, such as Marketline Advantage or Euromonitor Passport, would be a possible substitution for IBISWorld. Open data through the US government, such as Census or Bureau of Labor Statistics data sets, plus other free data resources from state governments, could replace Statista content.

Ability to transfer online and to other audiences

While these activities were conducted in the specific context of the FIRE program, there are aspects of the instruction sessions that are transferable to other formats or contexts. First, both the train-the-trainer sessions and the research consultations have typically been conducted in a face-to-face format, but they could easily be shifted to an online environment. The use of Mentimeter or other polling software for the train-the-trainer session would encourage active participation in an online format, like its use and role in the face-to-face classroom environment. Similarly, the team research consultations could occur through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other online meeting software. The use of tools such as Google Jamboard (https://jamboard.google.com/) could encourage each team to

work through the consultation handout questions. One positive feature of utilizing this format would be providing a collaborative shared digital takeaway for the student teams.

When considering these instructional activities outside of the FIRE program for transferability, the train-the-trainer model could be very useful in working with faculty or teaching assistants who are providing teaching to a large foundation class that has many sections. Like with the 35 sections of the FIRE program, this would ease the burden of classroom time for the librarian by meeting once with the instructors and providing them with the knowledge and tools to share with their students. For the research consultations, setting up a structured time for students to attend consultations is a helpful way for librarians to accommodate this activity into their workloads in a manageable way. Additionally, the worksheet for student teams in this context was a good way to manage the room with multiple research teams having consultations in the same space simultaneously. For similar scenarios where multiple groups might be working with a librarian at the same time but tackling various topics, having a structured scenario or set of questions allows the groups to work while the librarian can circulate and answer questions.

The FIRE program offers a unique and structured format to guide students through the research experience heading toward their business proposals and the final pitch competition. Pitch competitions are often less structured in terms of research and preparation support, so it could be an opportunity for librarians to provide drop-in consultations similar to ours in format, with a handout to help student contestants to think about their information needs in relation to the development of their business idea.

Appendix 35A

FIRE Research Teams | Librarian Consultations

This worksheet will help you brainstorm some of the areas of research you will need as your team begins to develop your product. This research helps you learn about your competition and customers as well as answer questions about why your product solves a grand challenge and how it is relevant to a market.

Need help after today? Ben Peck: benjamin.peck@unh.edu or Wendy Pothier wendy.pothier@unh.edu

FIRE Research Guide: https://libraryguides.unh.edu/fire19-20

1. What is your product/service? How is it a business?

2. What problem does your product/service solve?
    a. Try finding data/statistics in **Statista** about the importance of why your business is taking on this problem.

    b. Is your product focused on a specific region? If so, finding relevant data to the region might be helpful.

3. Who is the customer?
    a. Think about things like where they live, how old they are, income, preferences, etc. **Statista** might be a good source to learn data about your potential customers.

4. What are some competitor products and companies?
    a. Try looking up the competitors' websites to see product lines (costs, features, etc.).

    b. Try looking up the competition in **Mergent Intellect** or **ReferenceUSA** to learn about their size and sales revenues.

    c. You can learn a lot of data about the industry related to your product through **IBISWorld, Marketline, and Statista**.