

Academic BRASS

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Challenges Faced by a New Academic Business Librarian

I recently attended my first Academic Business Reference Committee meeting in San Antonio and I was asked if I could share some of my experiences as a new academic business librarian. Having just completed my first year in my new profession, a few challenges definitely stand out.

Technical Subject Knowledge: Becoming intimately familiar with a wide range of business reference resources has been my biggest challenge. Unfortunately, my otherwise-excellent library science school did not offer a course in business information sources while I was a student and so I entered my new job scarcely knowing SIC from SEC or S&P from E&Y. My internships and professional business background helped to a certain extent, but there is clearly a large body of technical knowledge that must be mastered before one can ably answer at least fair proportion of reference desk questions. Reference work appears to be highly accumulative in nature: unfamiliar questions often take a long time to answer while familiar inquiries can be dispatched quickly. Two key BRASS resources, the Best of the Best Business Websites (

full blown journal articles. I have found, however, that the selection of interesting topics of enduring scholarly merit is more difficult when one does not have a great deal of experience upon which to base “how we did it here” type articles.

Outreach to Faculty: Some of my more cynical colleagues refer to outreach as “romancing the stone” and it is true that our faculty status has not automatically opened the gates to the supposed inner sanctum of our teaching faculty. Our business teaching faculty members are quite independent and relatively few of them request bibliographic instruction or research assistance. Constructing a network of good working relationships is a slow process based on trust earned through positive experiences. Clearly, investing in strategic marketing and outreach efforts could pay substantial dividends over time.

Starting a new job in a new profession is never easy, but I believe my membership in ALA, RUSA and BRASS, in particular, will help provide me with the tools and support network needed to meet these challenges. With a judicious blend of luck and perseverance, I may yet become a wizened veteran of business academic reference.