

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

BROWN UNIVERSITY • VOLUME 12 / NUMBER 2 • JANUARY 2008



A Librarian's Perspective on Teaching

Lee A. Pedersen, Ph.D., MLIS

Chemistry, Engineering, and Physics Librarian

I am the Chemistry, Engineering, and Physics Librarian for Brown. This means that I develop the collections, liaison with the faculty, do specialized information research for students and faculty, create outreach opportunities, and, most importantly, teach information finding and using skills to undergraduate and graduate students in classroom and one-on-one settings. During a typical instruction session, I help new users navigate databases and use Library tools so they can find high quality, relevant information for their assignments. While these sessions do not involve semester-long contact and reinforcement, they are the basis for learners to build information competency life skills that will be transferable to any career.

In today's information-seeking environment where the common assumption is that everything is online and freely accessible with Google, I see my teaching responsibilities as coaching on how to find reliable information with efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps that is why I usually start a class session with a Google example and use it to guide participants to better, focused resources available through the Library's science and technology collections.

Many of my constituents are not aware of how important the role of teacher is for me to serve them. There are many venues for teaching. When faculty members invite me to meet with their students, the face-to-face content is designed for each class. An online course guide provides the students with useful links to paid and free resources and a way to replay on their own schedule some of the information and searches given in the session. A new instructional technology screencasting, with audio and visual, was invaluable for creating a tutorial called Patent Searching: Don't Reinvent the Wheel (see URL below). This technology will become a key tool for student replay on other course guides. I also teach whenever a constituent has a one-on-one consultation with me or I answer an email query. When I hold office hours, a service I call Librarian in the Lobby, the visitors to my "desk" in Barus & Holley and MacMillan always get a dose of coaching. At the same time, they teach me. Each time I conduct hands-on workshops on the resources available specifically for undergraduates or for graduates and faculty in my subject areas, the teaching opportunity is meant to help the participants develop life skills in information discovery. I currently offer a workshop for undergraduates who will be doing their first research project with a

Brown faculty member in chemistry, engineering, or physics. I also have one for physics grads and one on chemistry resources.

Here's just a sample of what a subject librarian teaches: how to use Online Course Reserves Access (OCRA), how to find an article that is not online at the Library; how to get a copy of a dissertation lent to the Library, how to use specialized databases for article discovery, and why, when, and how to use Josiah. Of course, when I have the opportunity to work with a group in a class or a workshop/training session, the teaching cannot cover everything I think the audience needs. The ideal outcomes are that they begin building competencies in information finding and they have a personal coach to whom they can turn if they need more. Librarians for other subjects are also available for instruction in classes, working with faculty for developing specific course guides, and for individual consultations for both faculty and students (see URL below).

Before becoming a librarian, my professional career was as a research scientist in industry and later a faculty member. I tell people that as a librarian at Brown I have the best of both those worlds – teaching and research.

Patent Searching: Don't Reinvent the Wheel
http://brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/instruction/screencast/uspto/

Subject Librarians
<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/libweb/about/sr.php>