CASE STUDY

MBA versus MBA challenge: Developing an engaging library orientation for incoming students

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Each year, the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, welcomes approximately seventy-five incoming MBA students to its two-year degree program. An important part of acquainting students with the program is a week-long orientation that is run by the MBA Student Association. The orientation week is comprised of traditional, informational orientation sessions and fun activities that vary from year to year (e.g. pub night, Amazing Race, etc.). The library typically provides one session to the new MBA students during this period. In the past, these sessions were ninety minutes in length and involved the students getting hands-on practice using major management resources/databases. The students were broken into small groups of three or four and assigned a database. They then searched for literature within the database and presented the results to their colleagues.

In 2013, changes in the activity schedule for the orientation week resulted in the reduction of time allotted for the library component from ninety to sixty minutes, making the original workshop design unfeasible. I needed to imagine new ways to engage the MBA students with library resources in a shorter time frame.

The average age of McGill MBA students is 28.5 (Desautels Faculty of Management, 2014). In most cases, students have been working for several years and have decided to return to school for professional development purposes. As such, the majority of MBA students fall within the category of adult learners who possess several key characteristics, including:

- A tendency to be independent and self-directed (Gold, 2005)
- A preference for experiential learning over passive learning (Ingram, 2000)
- A need to see the immediate application of the learning to their lives (school, work etc.) (Gold, 2005)

Because of these factors, I wanted to lead an activity with the MBA students that would be engaging and cater to their specific needs.

Instead of a traditional PowerPoint presentation or even some of the more common active learning techniques (e.g. think-pair-share, one minute paper), I wanted to match the spirit of the other MBA orientation activities. I therefore decided to implement a team competition during my workshop.

The structure of the workshop involved twenty minutes of traditional library content, including an introduction to important library services and highlights of major database

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resources. The main session component comprised forty minutes of group activities, which I called the "MBA Versus MBA Challenge." Separating the orientation group into two teams, I designed the remainder of the workshop as a series of challenges between the two sides of the classroom.

Challenge #1: Resource navigation

I asked for two or three volunteers from each side of the room. These students then had to work with their teammates to navigate one of the previously discussed library resources and locate a particular item. For example:

- Go to library's electronic edition of the *Wall Street Journal* and find an article on crowdfunding.
- Find the database *Marketline* and locate a report on the Canadian mining industry.

Teammates who were still seated were encouraged to assist their colleagues and yell out instructions and suggestions. Each group was timed so that the team that completed the challenge first, won that particular event.

I chose search examples that I thought would be most relevant to MBA student work (e.g. finding news articles, locating industry reports etc.). This is important in an adult learning context; as noted by Gold (2005), "introducing and explaining theories and ideas are not enough in the adult learning environment; their value and applicability should be made clear through active learning techniques such as small group work and problem-solving exercises" (p. 471).

Challenge #2: Battledecks

Battledecks is a PowerPoint improvisational competition that requires "contestants to deliver a presentation on the fly using an unknown slide deck containing random (and often hilarious) slides. The contestants are judged on their ability to create a coherent presentation that incorporates the slide content smoothly" (Hermann, Manfredi, Greenwalt, & Sauers, 2012). Battledecks are popular within the librarian community at professional conferences but were new to the MBA students.

After explaining the Battledecks concept, I asked for one student from each team who was willing to participate. Each student had a series of six unknown slides (each displaying for 15 seconds) that he or she had to discuss. In a typical round of Battledecks, the participants will have never seen the slides before presenting. However, I chose to use slides from earlier in my presentation (e.g. a photo of a group study room, a screenshot of a particular database etc.), which allowed me to see what the students had retained from earlier in the workshop.

I acted as the judge for this challenge. (An alternative would have been to determine a winner by having the students vote.) Although one team was officially declared a "winner" based on the two challenges, prizes in the form of candy were distributed to all participants.

Student reaction to the workshop was very positive. The students engaged much more eagerly in the workshop than I had anticipated, participated willingly with each activity, and asked detailed questions that demonstrated their engagement and comprehension at the end of the presentation. I felt that the workshop style met the students' need to become acquainted with basic library information but also encouraged the kind of active participation that was in line with the other orientation activities.

In the future, I would like to use more formal assessment methods to determine how much students had learned about the library from the orientation session. Particularly, I would like to ask the students for written feedback about the content and style of the workshop. Given the initial response to the "MBA Versus MBA Challenge," I plan to incorporate this style of workshop for MBA orientation again. I would recommend this activity style primarily for orientation and other similar event types. As I frequently present in-class library workshops for the MBA students later in the semester, it was not critical to relay all necessary library information to the students during this session. Instead, I could focus on providing a positive first impression of the library and imparting some key pieces of information at the same time.

References

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