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How valued-added is your library instruction? Research librarians work with faculty to conduct in-class training

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"I teach ESR [Ethics and Social Responsibility] to non-law students. One of my guest speakers, the Director (Legal) of a major European bank, presented on the role of in-house counsel as ethics gatekeeper in a business organisation. I thought that it might be a helpful follow-up for the future business decision-makers in my class to be introduced to the process of thinking through the legal implications of business services and products, with a view to giving cogent instructions to legal counsel. I therefore requested Ms Charlotte Gill, Research Librarian (Law), to design a one-hour exercise with the above as the terms of reference. Charlotte roped in her colleague, Mr. Rajendra Munoo, Research Librarian (Training) to assist with the designing of this exercise."
Arvin Lee, Adjunct Faculty, School of Law

■ 3-D Approach: Designing, Developing and Delivering the in-class session

With these guidelines, the two librarians reflected on how they could deliver the class by anchoring it to a case study. They decided to focus on the advertising industry and selected a car television advertisement as the case study. The students were presented with a fictitious scenario of being executives in an automobile company who are required to ensure that their advertisements are in accordance with the organisation's corporate social responsibility policy. The advertisement was presented to the students via YouTube and they were asked to 1) identify the potential ethical and legal issues that might arise if screened in Australia, 2) research these issues, and 3) formulate questions for their legal counsel.

Working in groups of 3-4 with support from the research librarians, the students were required to brainstorm possible issues regarding the advertisement. This challenged them to think beyond both their personal point of view and their cultural context. As part of this exercise, the students had to write down the results of their brainstorming session in the form of a mind map. The introduction of the mind map was an effort to illustrate to students the value of planning their search strategy. For instance, the students identified reckless driving as a potential issue presented in the advertisement. They then used the mind map technique to link other associated keywords and concepts such as speeding, dangerous, drift driving, etc. The final part of the strategising activity required students to think about the different resources that might help them locate information on

■ Reflecting on the Experience:

Here are some of the things that worked:
● **Using the YouTube videos** as attention grabbers since students are familiar with the resource and can go back to revisit the example.
● **Choice of the subtle advertisement for the case study** helped students realise that even the most innocuous advertisement can generate a variety of legal issues that may not be immediately obvious. It surprised students when they found out that the advertisement was actually banned. This helped to illustrate the point.
● **The mind-map** is a powerful visual research tool that assisted students in thinking about the issues and concepts before launching into their research. The blank paper pushed students to fill up the empty space with ideas and notes.
● **Teaching students to discern between free and fee-based resources for research** drove home the message that in the real world many companies may not have the luxury of subscribing to many online databases. As such, students need to learn how to identify and evaluate free resources. For instance, free legal research portals were highlighted rather than emphasising the fee-based services. If you can't beat them, join them: Instead of forbidding students to use Google and Wikipedia, they were shown how to use these complementary resources responsibly. The advanced search features on the former made them realise that they did not know everything about Google after all. Tips on how to evaluate information from the web, including social tools made students realise that it is crucial to assess the quality of the information available, especially on blogs, wikis and podcasts.
● **The cyclical nature of research** illustrated the point that it is important to filter the results and pick up new key terms and concepts and then reapply them to other sources. For instance, when searching Factiva for news articles, the term "hooning" was picked out. This turned out to be a colloquial Australian word which has been adopted in Australian legislation.
● **Collaborative sharing and exchange** of ideas by the Research Librarians made the session a success as they interacted closely with the faculty and had a de-brief after the initial session to look at areas for improvements.

■ Areas for improvement:

● **Choosing a famous example or product:** Students immediately recognised the car advertisement and

these various concepts.

Not surprisingly, students had difficulty in naming any apart from Google. A sample mind map prepared by the librarians was then unveiled. It generated much interest in terms of the breadth of possible issues and the variety of resources. For example, when looking for public reactions regarding new advertisements, students did not think of the non-traditional sources like blogs, discussion forums and other social tools. Finally, a demonstration on how to conduct searches in some of these resources - including the database Factiva, legal research portals, websites – and advanced Google techniques, was provided. The students were also given time to try out the searches for themselves.

■ **The Research Librarian Imperative:** ,p/> As Research Librarians at the Li Ka Shing Library, one of our goals is to integrate information research skills into the curriculum to improve the information literacy skills of SMU students. For this to happen, we work closely with Faculty on ways to incorporate this training into their courses. The collaboration with Faculty has proved to be a successful partnership in terms of reaching out to students. Students are more receptive to learning research skills when it helps them complete their assignment and they are able to apply what they have learnt immediately. In most cases, the training is focused on helping the students complete their research assignments through the use of the plethora of resources that an academic university provides. However, students are seldom able to see how these skills can be applied to situations they will encounter when they have joined the working world.

started to Google it before they had even started brainstorming the issues. They then found that the advert had been banned. Selecting suitable examples can impact the effectiveness of the instruction and sometimes creating a hypothetical one can address the same learning objective.

● **Designing the hand-out:** The hand-out that was distributed at the beginning of the class included key words in the sample search strings and this helped the students in their brainstorming activity. A learning point here is that in addition to the design, timing too is crucial: hand-outs need to be distributed at an appropriate time during the lesson rather than upfront which might distract students.

● **Time management is always an issue:** The amount of content covered was a bit too much given the allocated time, especially since the session involved hands-on exercises. Posting the training materials on the library website allowed the students to refer to it for revision.

■ **Feedback from the Faculty:** "One of the major challenges inherent in such an endeavour is to teach students 'sense-making' for purposes of identifying issues that are not even within their contemplation. This is not an easy skill to design an exercise for; it is one thing to establish answers to pre-defined questions, it is quite another to figure out what questions are pertinent and how they should be defined. To this end Charlotte and Rajen adopted a seemingly innocent car advertisement to teach students how to identify potential legal issues, even though none were apparent. This exercise, which was clear and well designed, gave students an awareness of the fact that there were legal and ethical issues which went beyond what was apparent. In addition, although this exercise was anchored in the particular instance of a car advertisement, it taught a process of sense-making that could be of general application across different business contexts. The product crafted by Charlotte and Rajen was well-conceived, and engaged the students."

■ **From the Research Librarians themselves:**

Rajen and I are very excited about this class. We want to improve this methodology and extend it to future training classes. The aim is to teach practical research skills that students can apply to any career that they may pursue. We will continue to teach students how to use the library's resources but we will also emphasise what is useful in the terms of free resources.

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