

# Revolution or Evolution? Lessons Learned from a Business Syllabus Study

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Brock University

Goodman School of Business

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## 1. Motivation

- Although the business school student population at Brock University was growing, requests for traditional in-class information literacy instruction (ILI) sessions were declining as faculty made room in the curriculum for 'service learning'.
- As course outlines were not considered public documents at my university, I conducted a comprehensive syllabus study of the undergraduate business curriculum in order to better understand this evolving instructional environment and to determine if the changes in the business school curriculum were **revolutionary** (a complete or dramatic change) or **evolutionary** (a gradual development).

## 2. Literature Review

- The syllabus study method has been used to analyse prescribed library use across entire institutions (Rambler, 1982; Lauer, Merz, & Craig, 1989; Smith et al., 2012) and within the business (Dewald, 2003) and accounting (Lowry, 2012) subject areas.
- Service learning (SL) is a form of experiential education that encompasses subject learning, community engagement, and reflection that can provide librarians opportunities for more engaged library instruction in terms of pedagogical relevance, academic positioning, and civic education (Riddle, 2003).
- Examples of business school service learning and experiential learning projects supported by business librarians included local company strategic management capstone projects (Whitesell & Helms, 2011), and consulting projects (Griffis, 2014).

## 3. Purpose

- To investigate the research, data, and library use expectations of Brock University business school faculty for their undergraduate students in order to gain deeper insight into the extent and nature of research-intensive assignments, including those with a service learning component.
- To identify new instructional opportunities (defined as courses with research-intensive assignments that had not had any active ILI support in the last 3 years) in order to be more strategic in my outreach efforts.

## 4. Research Questions

- What are the overall trends in prescribed research, data, and library use across all business subjects? How does prescribed use vary by course level and by business subject area?
- What is the nature of undergraduate research assignments and how do these assignments vary between service learning and non-service learning courses?
- Which of these research-intensive courses offer new instructional opportunities?

## 5. Methodology

- Setting:** A Canadian AACSB-accredited business school offering undergraduate and graduate accounting and business administration degrees.
- Sampling Frame:** 142 business courses were listed in the 2013/2014 Undergraduate Calendar. 94 courses were offered during the Fall 2013, Winter 2014, Spring 2014 and Fall 2014 academic terms. 48 courses were eliminated including:
  - 25 research topic (directed study) courses
  - 11 courses listed in calendar but not offered during the period under review
  - 9 courses not open to Business majors
  - 3 cross-listed courses (counted under home department).
- Brock University Research Ethics Board approval was obtained prior to gathering syllabi. Email invitations and follow up reminders were sent to fall faculty who had taught one or more sections of any of the 94 courses during the period under review.
- 257 syllabi from 86 undergraduate business courses (91.4% of courses) were content analyzed and assigned a level of prescribed research, data, or library use, based on a 5 point scale\*.

### Research, Data, or Library Use Scale

- No research, data, or library use required.** No evidence on syllabus of research, data, or library use required. Reliance on textbooks or course packs.
- Library use for reserve readings or other assigned course materials available within a course management system.** Linked readings, videos, and data sets in course management systems deemed equivalent to Library Reserves.
- Library use for outside readings (not on Library Reserve).** Library use required or expected to complete optional readings from a list supplied by the professor. Includes other external sources such as videos or data sets.
- Some research, data, or library use for shorter assignments.** Some research, data, or library use required for shorter class presentations, shorter writing or laboratory assignments or other assignments that require self-directed, exploratory behavior.
- Significant research projects.** Research, data, or library use required for term papers and other research projects of some significance (defined as written papers totaling at least 10 pages in length, presentations of more than 15 minutes, and/or value of at least 20% of final grade).

\*Modified from Lauer, Merz, & Craig (1989), Dewald (2003), and Lowry (2012).

## 6. Results

### Distribution of Syllabi by Subject

- 100% of courses were analyzed in each business subject area with the exception of accounting (78%), marketing (86%), and organizational behavior (93%) as noted in Table 1.

Subject	Courses Offered	Courses Analyzed	Courses Analyzed (%)	Sections Analyzed
Accounting	22	17	78%	77
Entrepreneurship & Ethics	9	9	100%	17
Finance	12	12	100%	36
Information Technology	8	8	100%	22
Management	8	8	100%	32
Marketing	14	12	86%	30
Operations	7	7	100%	14
Organizational Behavior	14	13	93%	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>257</b>

### Overall Trends in Prescribed Use Across all Business Subjects

- Prescribed research, data, or library use are lowest for 100 level courses. Some or significant research is expected for 77% of 400 level course sections and 49% of all course sections, regardless of course level.

Course Level	Courses	Sections	0 (None)	1 (Reserves)	2 (Outside Sources)	3 (Some Research)	4 (Significant Research)
100	7	43	7%	70%	7%	16%	0%
200	11	68	18%	46%	3%	19%	15%
300	24	70	4%	40%	9%	26%	7%
400	44	76	4%	5%	14%	20%	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>27%</b>

### Levels of Prescribed Use by Business Subject

- A majority of Marketing, Management, Organizational Behavior, and Entrepreneurship & Ethics course sections showed high levels of prescribed use (Level 3 or 4) while only 8% of Accounting course sections were rated at Level 3 or 4.

Subject	0	1	2	3	4
Accounting	17%	58%	17%	4%	4%
Entrepreneurship & Ethics	6%	6%	12%	35%	41%
Finance	11%	44%	11%	11%	22%
Information Technology	0%	36%	9%	36%	18%
Management	0%	25%	0%	28%	47%
Marketing	7%	27%	0%	0%	67%
Operations Research	7%	50%	7%	36%	0%
Organizational Behavior	0%	0%	0%	36%	38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>27%</b>

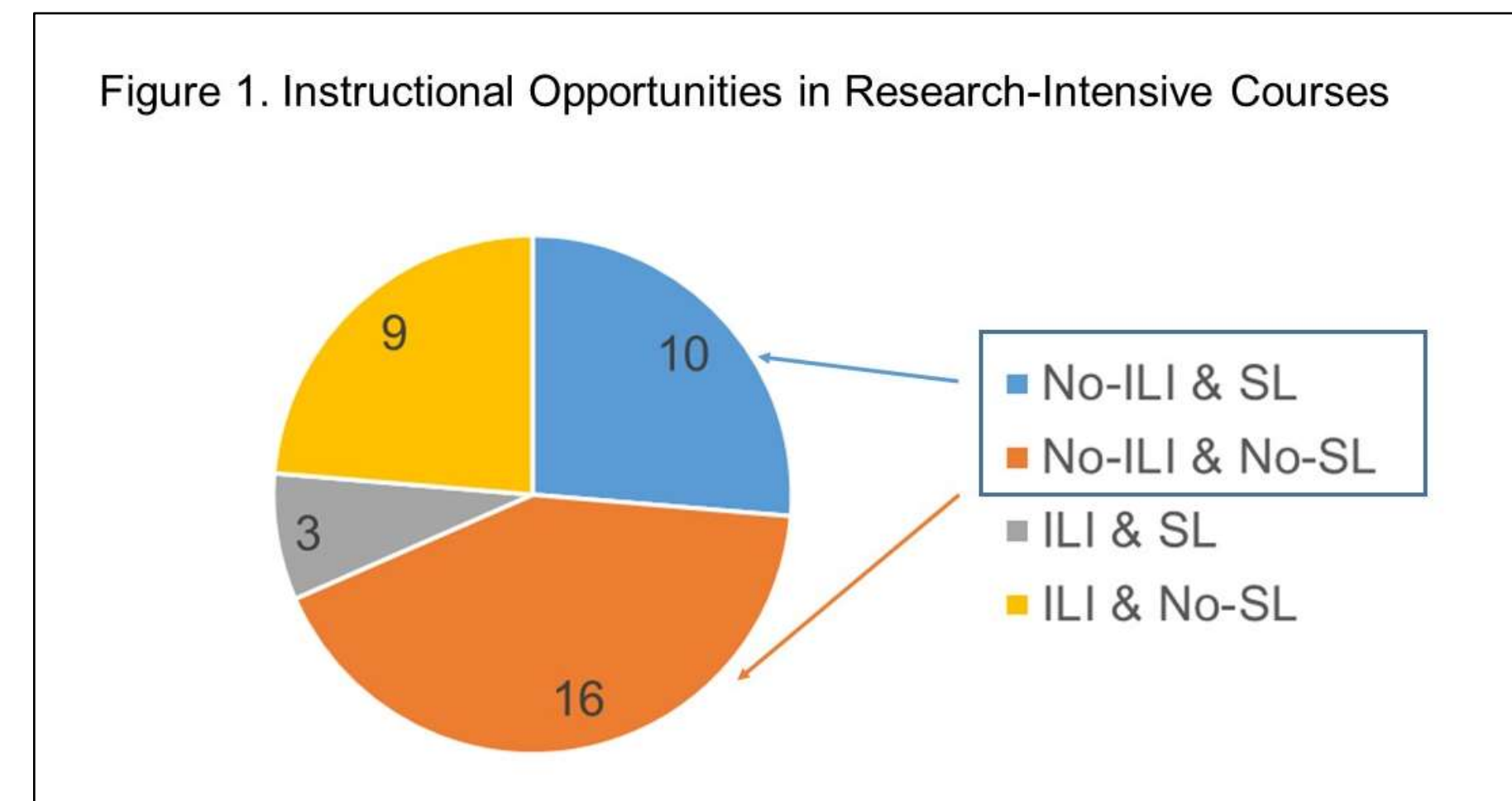
### Research-Intensive Assignments and Service Learning

- 38 courses had significant research expectations (Level 4). 13 of these courses had at least 1 section with a Service Learning component.
- A comparison of research-intensive assignments from traditionally-taught and service learning courses in Management and Marketing appears in Table 4.

Subject Area	Examples of Traditional Course Assignments	Examples of Service Learning Course Assignments
Management (2 SL & 3 Traditional Courses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual research paper on an international business topic.</li> <li>Group term project - case study of a Canadian firm based on secondary source research.</li> <li>Group term project - foreign market entry analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External analysis and strategic analysis report for SL client.</li> <li>Consulting project proposal and presentation for SL client.</li> </ul>
Marketing (7 SL & 4 Traditional Courses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group term project - marketing plan &amp; presentation based on secondary source research.</li> <li>Group term project - new product development plan.</li> <li>Individual research report on a retail management topic based on secondary source research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group marketing research project &amp; presentation for SL client.</li> <li>Integrated marketing communication project &amp; presentation for SL client.</li> <li>Strategic marketing plan for SL client.</li> </ul>

### Instructional Opportunity Analysis

- 26 courses were identified as opportunities for information literacy instruction including 10 courses with a service learning component (Figure 1).



## 7. Lessons Learned

- The syllabus study revealed that significant research was expected in some, but not all, business subject areas and identified numerous courses (with and without SL components) that might benefit from future ILI outreach efforts.
- Courses with SL components were research-intensive and focused on real-world business or organizational problems. While SL clients provided relevant background information, some external research was also required.
- As Riddle noted in *Where's the Library in Service Learning*, librarians need to "think outside the information literacy box" in order to adapt to this pedagogical shift. Service learning has changed the business school curriculum in a revolutionary way – and I now have a better understanding of where I might add value in order to revolutionize my own ILI practice.

