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Librarians and ESL Instructors as Campus Partners in Collaboration and Alliance Building

Cover Page Footnote

I have used endnotes instead of footnotes, so I left them at the end of the text.

Peer Reviewed Article

Librarians and ESL Instructors as Campus Partners in Collaboration and Alliance Building

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Abstract

Librarians and English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors can be campus partners to improve student learning. This article describes one way for librarians to begin working collaboratively with their ESL instructor counterparts on a university campus. It offers the creation and use of an assessment tool designed to capture ESL students' library learning as an initial point of collaboration. Following the discussion of the creation and use of this tool, this article then advocates for librarians and ESL instructors to build mutually beneficial alliances between them. These alliances can be based on commonalities and can offer benefits for professionals working in both roles on campus.

Keywords: librarians, ESL instructors, partners, collaboration

Introduction

Librarians and English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors are natural campus allies. Both sets of professionals work with ESL students to foster student learning, whether that learning is library-based, language-based, or a combination of both. Both sets of professionals work with ESL students inside and outside of classrooms. This article takes the example of a library assessment project and examines it as a way to not only increase ESL student learning, but to also initiate collaboration between librarians and ESL instructors. Initiating collaborations of this type is then used as the basis for a wider discussion of the merits of librarians building ongoing alliances with ESL instructors to the mutual benefit of both groups.

The library project described in this article took the form of an information literacy assessment tool for upper level ESL writing students that occurred at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario in Canada. Its use in ESL writing classes came about through the close personal and

professional relationships I have had with the ESL instructors at the university since I first began working there as a librarian in 2006. The reason for this close relationship was due to my being an ESL instructor as well as a librarian. Given our common background of education, training and work experience in the ESL classroom, the overtures I made towards the ESL instructors as a librarian after I arrived on campus seemed to open many doors. I was not only invited in to continue offering library instruction sessions to these students as my predecessor had been, but I also became personal friends with many of the instructors. In addition, I have been able to teach several ESL classes at this university, while sometimes serving as both librarian and an ESL instructor. This close relationship has therefore given me extended personal contact with the students and instructors within their own offices and classrooms, in addition to my being able to connect with them through the Library. As a result, I have been able to work with all of the ESL writing instructors who had library instruction already embedded into their curriculum in a highly personal way.



In addition to the personal information offered above, this article also provides further background information about the setting of Brock University and its ESL programs in general, as well as a description of the assessment tool's use as a way to capture ESL student learning. It traces the tool's genesis from a proposed pilot project developed within an Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) immersion program to its real-life application in flipped library ESL classes. Specific details concerning its creation, use, and evaluation will be offered so librarians interested in replicating and adapting this particular tool to their own home library environments will have sufficient information to do so.

The article then turns to a larger consideration of how an initial collaborative project like this can help librarians build stronger alliances with ESL instructors on their campuses. Moving from one-time collaboration to ongoing alliance building offers librarians a wider perspective for their work with ESL students. An ongoing alliance of this nature could begin with an initial shared project, move to a consideration of constraints and how to deal with them, and then grow from commonalities and mutual benefits. Commonalities might arise from similar educational backgrounds, common educational frameworks, mutually shared organizational motivations, and inhabited spaces both sets of professionals occupy within universities. This article concludes by considering what types of benefits could accrue from librarians and ESL instructors working together as equal and mutually supportive campus partners in ongoing ways.

Background Literature

Library literature dealing with ESL students usually falls under the umbrella of librarians working with international students.¹ This is perhaps because the use of the phrase "international students" in library literature is often in-

voked to mean "non-native speakers of English." As such, this literature generally covers topics such as how international students use libraries², how international students perceive libraries³, how librarians can best support international students⁴, how librarians can tailor library instruction to best suit the needs of international students⁵, and how librarians can engage in more effective linguistic and cultural communication with international students⁶.

The designation of "ESL" under the broader label of "international students" typically refers to a much more specific context in higher education, that of a pre-university entrance language program. The purpose of such programs is to improve the English language proficiency of non-native speakers to the level needed for enrolling directly into a degree-granting university program. Used in this way, the library literature referring specifically to this particular group of students is more limited but still available. This literature includes examples such as investigations of how library research can support the specific learning needs of ESL students⁷, explorations of how ESL students can learn or improve their English through libraries⁸, and calls to offer specialized library support to help ESL students improve their particular writing needs⁹.

A smaller number of articles highlights the relationships between librarians and ESL instructors. This subset includes proposing new models of information literacy through librarian-ESL instructor collaboration¹⁰, advocating for stronger librarian-ESL instructor collaboration¹¹, employing metaphors to promote librarian-ESL instructor collaboration¹², incorporating maps into instruction through librarian-ESL instructor collaboration¹³, and making use of grants to support librarian-ESL collaboration¹⁴.

It is into this last category of library literature that this article aims to fit. Its purpose is to pro-



mote the idea that a relationship between librarians and ESL instructors is mutually beneficial and that it should be nurtured in ongoing ways in university settings.

Setting

Brock University is a mid-sized Canadian public university in southern Ontario. It is located in the city of St. Catharines in the Niagara region of the province. It enrolls about 18,000 students, which includes about 2,400 international students and about 700 ESL students. ESL Services is the unit of the University that offers speaking, listening, reading, writing, and grammar classes to non-native English speaking students in pre-degree programs. Once students are accepted into degree granting programs, they move out of ESL Services and matriculate directly at the University as international students.

ESL Services offers a number of different instructional programs for ESL students. The 14-week instructional program, the IELP, the Intensive English Language Program, runs in the fall, spring, and summer sessions. It runs parallel to the general timeframe of the semester-long University courses in the degree-granting programs. The upper level writing classes of the IELP are where the library research assignment is generally embedded in the curriculum. These upper level writing classes are labelled as Level 4 high intermediate writing and Level 5 advanced writing. ESL students are placed into these classes based on the results of an English language proficiency assessment given at the beginning of the term.

Assessment Tool

The library assessment tool described in this article was used with the Level 4 and 5 IELP writing classes during the 14-week long session in

the summer of 2014, as well as with another advanced course, Academic Transitions for students advanced beyond Level 5. For the purposes of this article, I am including results from Academic Transitions in with the Level 5 sessions. Level 4 is a designation for upper intermediate English language proficiency and Level 5 is a designation for advanced English ability for the non-native English speakers (ESL students) in this program.

Creation

The creation of the tool stemmed from a proposed pilot project developed within an Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) assessment immersion program the previous November. The ACRL Assessment Immersion Program of that fall offered an ideal opportunity to develop such as tool with the intent to try it out in a real-life setting after the immersion program ended.

Its genesis at Brock came about through my own initiative. I had worked with the ESL instructors for several years prior to the development of this tool without finding or using a good way to capture data about the student learning in library workshops. Having the opportunity to participate in an ACRL immersion program presented an equally good opportunity to design some sort of instrument that could potentially capture data about ESL students' library learning as well. Therefore, its creation came about from a lucky alignment of both student need and professional development.

Form

The tool itself was very simple. It took the form of a worksheet with four questions on it that was meant to be filled out during the information literacy session given in the writing classes.



Figure 1: Worksheet

<p>IELP Session number: ____ (4 or 5)</p> <p>Do not put your name on this worksheet!</p> <p>Directions: For the next 30 minutes, please fill out answers to the questions below. The librarian will collect this worksheet at the end of the session.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is your topic?2. What keywords did you search?3. List one good article that you found:4. What is the most important information you learned today?

Implementation

The assessment worksheet that served as the tool to capture ESL students' library learning was put to use in their writing classes. The writing coordinator of ESL Services had agreed in advance to participation in this library data gathering project and was open to testing it in the upper level writing classes for the high intermediate and advanced English language proficiency learners in ESL Services. Since the coordinator had agreed to the use of the tool in all of the upper level writing classes, there were no challenges with individual instructors of these sessions objecting to its use in any way, as they had been consulted earlier in the semester about it. In fact, the writing instructors themselves seemed highly supportive of capturing the students' library learning as well since they themselves worked right in the intersection of student learning in both library processes and writing skills.

Because I conducted all the library instruction sessions within the writing classes I could collect the forms at the end of each session, making the data capture very easy. I did make sure to tell the students not to write their names on the

forms because it was not a test. I explained that I would be collecting the forms to find out if the library instruction made sense to them, and to possibly consider better ways to work with them in the future.

The tool was used in flipped library ESL sessions for Level 4 and 5 Writing students. The context for these sessions was that the ESL students were expected to have completed Advantage Plus, an online library tutorial, outside of class prior to coming to these sessions. The purpose of these in-class sessions was then to apply what had hopefully been learned in the online tutorial in a way that would reinforce its content. SuperSearch, the online discovery tool of the University Library that offers both book and journal article searching simultaneously, served as the library tool featured in these sessions. The session format had me speak for about the first 15 minutes, followed by individual searching time for the students to use SuperSearch to fill in the worksheet. Figure 2 below offers the lesson plan, the learning objectives, and some assignment information for Level 4 and 5 students.



Figure 2: Lesson Plan and Learning Objectives

Lesson Plan for Level 4 and Level 5 Intensive English Language Sections:

- I. Librarian to spend about 15 minutes for quick review from Advantage Plus (completed outside of class ahead of time – this is a flipped class):
 1. General Searching Tips
 - Identify **keywords** (=content words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, not function words like prepositions, indefinite and definite articles, etc.)
 - Use **synonyms**: child OR youth OR adolescent OR teenager OR juvenile
 - Use **quotation marks** for phrase searching: “international students”
 - **Find one good record** and look at it for more searching ideas from skimming the abstract, from the subject headings, etc.
 2. Where to Search for this Class Assignment - Use Super Search
 - Limit to **scholarly journals**
 - Limit to more recent years
 - Reminder of what **Get It** is
 3. Evaluating Sources – How do you know it is good information?
 - **Must use your own judgment**
 - Skim abstract
 - Look at other subject headings
 4. Listing a Journal Article – **include all of these pieces**:
 - Author
 - Title of article
 - Name of journal
 - Journal volume and issue
 - Journal date
 - Pages
- II. Individual searching time – Librarian to walk around and help students fill out assessment worksheet – about 30 minutes
- III. Contact information – Librarian to give the students my email for future contact or any follow-up questions from these particular sessions (show where to find it on the Library web page)

Learning Objectives:

- (1) Students will learn where to find Super Search through the Library.
- (2) Students will be reminded of some general search tips and given a chance to practice them on their own individual topics.
- (3) Students will be able to identify one good journal article from their searching.
- (4) Students will understand all the elements of a journal article needed for the bibliography of their papers.
- (5) Students will articulate what they felt was the most useful information they learned in the library instruction session.

Assignment: Level 4 students need to find three journal articles on assigned topics (such as euthanasia and gun control); Level 5 students need to find five articles on topics of their own choosing.

Collection and Examination of Data

The evaluation of the worksheet took place after I had collected all of the worksheets at the end of each session. Four Level 4 sessions and five

Level 5 sessions were conducted resulting in a total of 135 worksheets being collected, 68 coming from Level 4 and 67 coming from Level 5. The criteria targeted for assessment was a goal of 50% achievement for each question on the



worksheet. Achievement was defined as having answered the question appropriately. This goal was met for both Level 4 and Level 5 students, although Level 5 students showed stronger evidence for learning overall.

In terms of specifics for each of the four questions asked on the worksheet (see Figure 1 above), 100% of the Level 4 and 5 students were able to articulate their topics and identify keywords from their thesis statement. Only 60% of all students, however, were able to identify further synonyms. About 75% of all students could identify phrases from their thesis statements, but only about 30% could offer further phrases. About 85% of all students were able to find one good article. About 50% of Level 4 students could write a full citation, but only about 25% of Level 5 students could do so. In terms of what they thought was the most useful information learned, 25% of Level 4 and 20% of Level 5 students answered this with content gleaned about their topic, not about the searching process.

The percentages above came from first determining the number of students in each level who had participated in the data collection. This included four Level 4 sections and five Level 5 sections. The number of participants came from the number of forms collected in each section and then adding all of the section numbers together. Results were then separated into two piles of forms: one that represented adequate responses and one that represented inadequate responses.

Whether or not a question was answered in an adequate way is of course a judgment call on the part of the librarian. The first question on what the topic was would have to be both understandable in English and a subject that could be researched in a library database. Because the students in these classes had already been exposed to possible topics and had already begun thinking about them, this first question did not prove to be problematic when this tool was

used. The second question on what keywords were used would have to include appropriate keywords for the stated topic, something that was described and modeled at the start of each library session. The third question requiring one good article to be listed would have to be answered with a full citation to a journal article that appeared to have something to do with the topic, something that was worked on during the library session. And the fourth question on what was the most important information learned today was quite open, and any response including any sort of library information was deemed adequate. Examples of adequate responses for question four included the use of good keywords, knowing where to begin searching, knowing library help could be requested, and so on. Once the responses were determined to be adequate or not, the number of both adequate and inadequate responses were divided by the total number of students, and that is how the percentages were found.

What was Done with the Data

There was no previous library data on ESL students to compare this current data to when this instrument was put to use. As such, the numbers presented above can only show a baseline of responses to these prompts. Should this tool be used again in the future in a similar manner, there would be a basis for comparison.

In terms of immediate application, however, the data collected from this project did inform my ongoing work with ESL students in library instruction workshops. Following this project, I was able to recommend that the online library tutorial, Advantage Plus, be made mandatory for the students in these classes before their library sessions took place. My reason for this recommendation was to give the students prior and longer exposure to the topics I talked about in the first 15 minutes of the class since not all students could successfully answer all four questions based on one in-house library session.



Another recommendation I made was for the ESL instructors to become more actively involved in these library sessions as co-presenters with me to reinforce the importance of the content. And the final change I made was to more sharply differentiate the library content between Level 4 and Level 5 sessions. I did this by using different examples for the two different levels (with Level 4 topics being simpler and less multi-faceted than Level 5 topics), and by giving Level 4 students more time in class to finish library searching exercises.

The data was put to further good use on a larger stage, after the project was completed. Once the data was collected for this project, written up into a report, and presented to the ESL instructors, the report was then sent to academic administrators looking to capture teaching and learning inputs from the wider University community. In this way, this project served to inform the ESL curriculum designers about library educational inputs, and it also served as a benchmark of learning to the wider campus. Through its presentation to senior administrators like the Vice President of Teaching and Learning, the results of this small project served a very useful wider purpose in helping the Library in general demonstrate that we too contribute to student learning on campus.

Overall results indicated that library learning did take place with all of these students, with even a further unique indication that language learning in terms of vocabulary knowledge may also have played a role. Because the Level 4 and 5 students were high intermediate and advanced English language proficiency students, the language finding was very interesting. It seemed to show that they were able to not only identify phrases for searching, but that they also had some knowledge of synonyms which could further help their library searching efforts. For those readers who may be interested in reading the entire project report which cannot be copied

within this article due to space considerations, please contact me at kbordonaro@brocku.ca.

Advice for Other Librarians

Replicating this assessment project in other libraries would not prove too difficult. The lesson plan could be tweaked to different library search tools and the open-ended questions on the worksheet would work in many different library environments. Calculating numbers of responses deemed adequate or inadequate should also prove not too difficult, which could in turn lead to capturing percentages from those numbers.

The biggest challenge toward implementing the use of a tool like this would most likely not be the initial creation or design, nor the calculated percentages. Instead, it would be gaining an opportunity to put something like this to use in library instruction sessions if the librarian has no embedded presence in the curriculum of the unit offering these classes. Embedding our presence in the curriculum speaks very strongly to the need to build initial collaborations with ESL instructors, and then to invest ongoing time in nurturing those alliances. The tool described above could serve as a starting point for these wider goals.

Initial Collaboration to Alliance Building

The assessment tool described above could serve as an initial shared project between librarians and ESL instructors at many universities. It offers a way to build a bridge between libraries and ESL instruction programs because it serves a pedagogical purpose for both through its aim to measure student learning.

Other forms of initial collaboration could also be considered as well. Martin, Reaume, Reeves and Wright¹⁵, for example, offer a number of ways that librarians can build relationships with ESL instructors that include:



- focusing on key classes
- participating in orientation sessions for international students
- targeting new ESL faculty
- attending department/college meetings
- attending department/college lectures
- attending international student group events
- regularly communicating via email or phone
- distributing a regular newsletter
- publishing a targeted library guide
- surveying faculty and students
- conducting workshop for faculty
- holding office hours in the college/department
- embedding library services
- supporting instructor research
- supporting curriculum development
- collaborating with other campus offices to arrange and promote targeted programming

Engaging in any of these activities as an initial collaboration between librarians and ESL instructors can open the door to relationship building. In order to build continuing alliances between librarians and ESL instructors, an ongoing relationship needs to take hold rather than a one-time collaboration. This could potentially be accomplished through engaging in collaboration in an ongoing cycle, for example, attending departmental meetings every semester or conducting workshops for faculty annually. Having a librarian embedded in ESL classes in an ongoing manner is another way to move beyond the one-time, initial collaboration stage.

Constraints need to be considered as well for initial collaborations to lead to more ongoing collaborations. If they are not, then the best of intentions to work together in the future could be derailed for both librarians and ESL instructors. Common constraints to be aware of include

time, for example, how much time a librarian could reasonably commit to working with ESL classes given other work responsibilities. Lack of resources is another constraint if ESL students do not have the same student privileges at a university as students in degree-granting programs. For example, if access to particular databases is restricted, it could limit how a librarian embeds information literacy into an ESL curriculum. Fiscal resources could also be a constraint if librarians cannot order library materials that support the needs of ESL students, such as English language learning materials.

Other constraints may be more ephemeral but may also play a role in holding back alliance building between librarians and ESL instructors. These include a lack of management support from supervisors in both the library and the ESL instruction departments, a lack of understanding within the library culture on the importance of engaging with ESL students, or a deeper lack of university institutional commitment to support ESL.

And as to how to work around these constraints, awareness is crucial. In order to counter them librarians need to first become aware of them, and then articulate and prioritize their work with ESL instructors to move forward. Articulating the library need to work with ESL constituents could take the form of addressing this particular student population in a strategic report. It could also take the form of stated accomplishments on a librarian's annual report for a performance review, or it could involve writing and disseminating reports on how a librarian has engaged in this type of work and what the benefits were. It could also include writing articles such as this, or presenting at library conferences to inform the wider profession.

Prioritizing librarian collaboration with ESL instructors could counter constraints as well. This could involve librarians working with ESL instructors under the auspices of campus teaching



and learning centers to give university-wide workshops or programs. Or it could mean publicizing collaborative work through campus media such as newsletters or announcements on web sites. It could potentially even mean re-writing librarian job descriptions to explicitly include provision of library services to ESL students and instructors.

Moving from an initial collaboration and then considering how to deal with constraints could lead librarians and ESL instructors further forward in building an alliance. Becoming aware of commonalities between the two professions is another step that could propel this alliance building.

Commonalities

Awareness of commonalities can help cement a budding alliance and nurture its ongoing development. The two professions of librarian and ESL instructor are rife with commonalities.

Similar educational background is one such commonality. Both librarians and ESL instructors generally require a Master's degree in order to practice their professions. In the case of librarians, this degree is usually an M.L.S., a Master's in Library and Information Studies, or some such variation. In the case of ESL instructors, it is generally a Master's in TESOL, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, or a variation. Both require a year or two of graduate education in order to enter the profession.

Common educational frameworks are another area that librarians and ESL instructors share. Both sets of professionals work with students in developmental ways. In the case of librarians, it involves working with students to learn how to effectively find and use information through the library, and introducing them to academic culture and to the community of scholars who fuel research. In a similar way, ESL instructors work with students to develop their ability to under-

stand, use, and produce academic English in order to join this same academic community. Both sets of professionals therefore work with students as a means to an end; and both sets of professionals focus on process to help the students achieve these ends. Both sets of professionals also strive to set students up for success in future degree programs.

Mutually shared organizational motivations are another area of commonality. As much as librarians may sometimes feel themselves regarded as academic inferiors to the professoriate, ESL instructors may feel even more so. ESL instructors are generally not part of faculty unions because they are hired as instructors only and are not required to do research. The general lack of a Ph.D. on the part of most ESL instructors also parallels the academic level of many librarians. Both sets of terminal degrees may fuel the perception of being academically inferior to professors as similar groups of professionals usually outside the tenure track. So, mutually shared organizational motivations to be taken more seriously as part of the academic culture of a university seems common to both librarians and ESL instructors.

The inhabited spaces occupied by both sets of professionals is another aspect of university life in which they share. These spaces are generally different than the spaces tenured faculty work in, such as specialized labs, particular classrooms, and faculty offices. In contrast, librarians often work in open instructional spaces such as shared computer lab/workshop spaces inside libraries, and ESL instructors usually work in generic classroom settings not needed by students in degree programs. In terms of office spaces, ESL instructors, as with many librarians, may have cubicles or shared office spaces with their colleagues, in comparison to many tenured professors' separate and individualized office spaces.



Centrality of work space, however, may differ between the two groups, with libraries still often physically located more centrally on university campuses but with ESL teaching spaces often physically located more on the periphery of a campus. Even with this one potential difference, however, many commonalities between librarians and ESL instructors can still be seen.

Mutual Benefits

Just as with commonalities, exploring potential mutual benefits librarians and ESL instructors can gain by working together is also worthwhile in alliance building. Recognizing that benefits could accrue to both librarians and ESL instructors could be a powerful stimulant to propel a budding alliance forward.

Mutual benefits could include stronger support of ESL student needs, affirmation for the presence of ESL instruction at universities, underscoring of the importance of the library in academic life, and profile raising for both sets of professionals.

Stronger support for the needs of ESL students could occur through ongoing collaboration of librarians and ESL instructors in curriculum enhancement, as well as in the joining of their voices for additional social and cultural support for these students. In terms of curriculum enhancement, librarians working with ESL instructors could hone learning objectives to include both introductions to and ongoing assistance with library research. In turn, working with librarians on research skills also helps these students develop their English proficiency skills. And with librarians joining voices with ESL instructors, the university may be better prepared to provide support both inside and outside the classroom for new ESL students to be recruited.

Affirmation for the presence of ESL instruction at universities is mutually beneficial for ESL instructors and librarians as well. The benefit to

ESL instructors is more obvious in that its presence on campus offers them employment as well as a reason to be part of a university environment. For librarians, its presence attests to the diversity of the students supported on campus in that ESL students should be as worthy of library support as any other students. Their presence also gives librarians a prime opportunity to embed library research skills in an area that can lay the groundwork for future academic coursework.

Underscoring the importance of the library in academic life can also be mutually beneficial to both librarians and ESL instructors. In this instance, the most obvious beneficiary is the library since it serves as a strong justification for its continuing existence. It also offers an opportunity for librarians to broaden a common faculty view of the library as important for collections only, because ESL student support can give librarians a stronger instructional role on campus. For ESL instructors, the benefit of emphasizing the academic role of a library can help both their students and themselves feel more connected to university-wide academic life and the greater community of scholars, of which they are also a part.

Raising the profiles of both librarians and ESL instructors as dedicated professionals on universities also offers advantages to both. Both professions could benefit from being seen as important contributors to campus life. This could occur by their presence being requested on university-wide committees and in university-wide programming. It could also potentially figure into recruitment efforts for new students and retention efforts for current students. And it could aid university efforts to promote current strategic initiatives and directives in internationalization, diversity, intercultural and multicultural awareness.

In supporting and working with each other in ongoing ways, many of these mutual benefits



could come about for both librarians and ESL instructors.

Conclusion

Librarians and ESL instructors can become campus partners in collaboration and alliance building. In this article, the example of an information literacy assessment project was offered as a way to begin collaboration. Its use as a tool to assess student learning could potentially open the door to further collaboration.

Knowing that one initial collaboration cannot sustain the growth of an alliance, librarians and ESL instructors need to additionally consider ongoing ways to collaborate. Possibilities include embedding continuous library instruction into ESL classes and regularly meeting each other. Constraints to alliance building such as

lack of time, resources, support, and institutional culture need to be confronted as well. Through awareness, articulation, and prioritization, librarians and ESL instructors can potentially overcome these constraints.

Alliance building can be further propelled by librarians and ESL instructors considering commonalities between them, as well as how an alliance can mutually benefit them both. Commonalities include similar educational backgrounds, common educational frameworks, mutually shared organizational motivations, and commonly inhabited spaces. Mutual benefits can include stronger joint support of ESL student learning, affirming the importance of ESL instruction at universities, emphasizing the role of libraries in academic life, and raising the professional profiles of both.

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