Research Assignment Design

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Why revisit and/or rework research assignments?

- Changing information environment
  - Information overload/ anxiety
  - Need for new (and many not so new) literacies
- Faculty frustration with student work product
  - Misunderstood or unmet expectations
  - Students’ lack of prior knowledge and skill development
What do researchers need to know?

What skills and knowledge do information literate people possess?
ACRL’s Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education

http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html

An information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the nature & extent of information needed
- Access the needed information effectively & efficiently
- Evaluate information and its sources critically & incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, & access and use information ethically and legally
**Standard:** Determines the nature and extent of the information needed.

**Performance Indicators:**

1. Defines and articulates the need for information.
   **Outcomes Include:**
   - Confers with instructors and participates in class discussions, peer workgroups, and electronic discussions to identify a research topic, or other information need
   - Develops a thesis statement and formulates questions based on the information need
   - Explores general information sources to increase familiarity with the topic

2. Identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information.
   **Outcomes Include:**
   - Knows how information is formally and informally produced, organized, and disseminated
   - Recognizes that knowledge can be organized into disciplines that influence the way information is accessed
   - Identifies the value and differences of potential resources in a variety of formats (e.g., multimedia, database, website, data set, audio/visual, book)
   - Identifies the purpose and audience of potential resources (e.g., popular vs. scholarly, current vs. historical)
Helping students develop information literacy skills

- **Teaching faculty**
  - Research assignments provide opportunities to ask students to demonstrate and develop skills
  - Grades motivate
  - Inclusion of information literacy skills in the curriculum lends authority and subject relevance

- **Library faculty**
  - Can collaborate in the development of assignments that take best advantage of local resources
  - Provide many opportunities for help and instruction for individuals and classes
  - Subject librarians select and teach/promote latest resources
Designing research assignments

- Be specific (and realistic) about your expectations
- Isolate parts of the process, stagger due dates
  (Assignment calculator
  http://www.lib.umn.edu/help/calculator/)
- Take advantage of library instruction (895-2123) and collaboration opportunities (& the writing center too!)
- Discuss research concepts and strategies- intellectual property, peer review, topic selection…
- Be sure the that the purpose and benefit of the assignment is obvious to students
- Emphasize analysis over answers. Encourage reflection on the process, use failure and frustration as an opportunity for feedback and as a teaching moment
Sample assignments

- Students are given a failed search strategy and must troubleshoot to produce better results
- Students create a reading packet- an anthology-type collection for which they write an intro
- Students read selected materials and rank them, with justifications, as more or less scholarly
More sample assignments

- Students keep a log of search process, noting search terms and/or resources tried (log efforts via threaded discussions on WebCT so students can learn from each others mistakes).

- Students examine the submission guidelines for journal, serve as mock editors in a peer review process (could use own work or could pull material from a paper mill)

- Students write questions on a topic that demonstrate understanding of the issues
Even more sample assignments

- For every opinion there is an equal and opposite opinion. Students examine letters to the editor for dubious statements & develop a well supported response
- Students prepare a resume for a person they have researched
- [http://www.bvu.edu/departments/academicaffairs/library/faculty_support.html#ideas](http://www.bvu.edu/departments/academicaffairs/library/faculty_support.html#ideas)
- [http://www.library.ohiou.edu/inst/creative.html](http://www.library.ohiou.edu/inst/creative.html)
- [http://www.gustavus.edu/academics/library/facultyresearchassignments.html](http://www.gustavus.edu/academics/library/facultyresearchassignments.html)