

Effective Library Research Assignments: Guidelines for Instructors

An effective library research assignment should teach undergraduate students the basic skills in both research methodology and information retrieval, as well as augment their understanding of the subject studied. The following guidelines are suggested to provide a positive library experience for students as they develop their research skills.

- **Consult with a librarian while developing the assignment.** Stevenson Library's librarians offer direct support the University's mission and the goals of its curriculum.
- **Consider the goals of the research assignment:** do they pertain to the goals and the objectives of the course? Is the assignment result worth the level of effort required? "Treasure Hunt" assignments for obscure bits of information do not develop efficient research skills, and they are frustrating for both students and librarians.
- **Design assignments so that students may use several different library resources.** Be sure to assign criteria to information sources to be included in research assignments, especially to Web/Internet resources (librarians can help you with developing research criteria).
- **If your library assignments are limited to a single source,** or a limited collection of library resources, place this material on Reserve at the Circulation Desk well in advance of class assignments. This kind of preparation on your part lessens the possibility of materials being hidden, hoarded, or defaced by the students who locate them in the Library.
- **Do not send your students to Pattee Library (Penn State)** to conduct research. Refer them to a Stevenson Library reference librarian.
- **Never assume Stevenson Library has a particular book, journal, or other material on a topic.** Search PILOT, Stevenson Library's online catalog, to develop reading lists for assignments. Call numbers will vary from one library to another: double-check the call numbers and holdings. ALWAYS verify citations you give to students.
- **Assume minimal library knowledge on the part of your students.** Freshmen, and returning students in particular, may be intimidated by the size of the Library or of information technology. Alternately, many students may rely solely on the Internet to provide information, and may not check the academic databases available through Stevenson Library's web page.
- **Few students voluntarily develop library use and research skills.** Your attitude about research and using libraries will influence your students' value judgments about using libraries.
- **Schedule a formal library instruction session.** Library instruction can be designed to fit research criteria, curriculum goals, time constraints, subject area, and ability level(s) of any class. Library instruction exists to bridge the gap between the classroom/lecture experience and the independent learning students are expected to accomplish outside the classroom.
- **It is our goal to help you to help students succeed.**