

Effective Library Assignments

Library / Research Assignment Creation Assistance

The Librarians at Thigpen Library are available to collaborate with faculty in designing research / library assignments for their courses.

The purpose of this service is to assist you in creating assignments that integrate the Library's resources into your classes. Each year brings changes in both the resources available to us and the interfaces for using them. It can be very difficult to keep abreast of what is available. A successful assignment will avoid unanswerable research questions and frustrated students and will produce great results.

The Research/Library Assignment Assistance will:

- Make sure the information can be found via one of our available databases.
- Confirm sources listed on your assignment are available in Thigpen Library.

Effective Library Assignments

Well-designed course-related library assignments are an effective way to introduce students to library research. The following guidelines are meant to insure students a positive library experience and reinforce library use as a means of learning.

1) **Consult / notify Librarian about the assignment**

- a) Librarians will work with you to design an assignment that will achieve your course goals/objectives.
- b) Sending a copy of the assignment to a Librarian before you give it to your students will ensure that the library staff is ready to help your students when needed. We are better able to help your students if we are aware of the particulars of the assignment.

2) **Assume minimal library knowledge**

- a) Although many students may be familiar with using some library tools, few really understand the intricacies of using the catalog, databases or searching for electronic journals.
- b) Clarify terms that may not be understood by students. Do they know what an abstract is? How likely is that they know the difference between a magazine and a journal? Or the difference between an online journal and a website?

3) **Be sure the library holds the needed information**

- a) It is frustrating looking for what does not exist or has been checked out.
- b) Send an advance copy of the assignment and its due date to a Librarian.
- c) Check your titles if you provide resource lists for your students. Or a Librarian can check the list for you.
- d) If the library needs to add something to its collection to support your course, please let the Library Director know before the semester begins.

- 4) **Avoid the mob scene**
 - a) Dozens of students using just one book, article, or index, or looking for the same information usually leads to misplacement, loss, or mutilation of materials.
 - b) Place an item on Reserves for the assignment if an entire class will be looking for the same thing. Unfortunately, students often stash items somewhere in the stacks for their own personal use. Placing it on Reserves will ensure all students in the class have equal access to the item.
 - c) Give students a variety of topics and sources.
- 5) **Avoid scavenger hunts**
 - a) Searching for obscure facts frustrates students and teaches students little about research.
 - b) These assignments are extremely time consuming and make library use seem unnecessarily difficult. Often it is the librarian, not the student, who ends up locating the information.
 - c) Examples from course textbooks are rarely effective in teaching research skills and are frustrating for students.
- 6) **Teach or review research strategy**
 - a) Include a list of steps involved in the research assigned.
 - b) Invite a Librarian to review strategies for the assignment with the class and discuss appropriate tools or types of materials.
- 7) **The Web is not a four-letter word**
 - a) Depending upon the assignment and the topic, websites may be a good information source of option.
 - b) Recommend specific sites, specific expert lists of links, or specific directories to help them find authoritative, timely and useful information. Librarians can help with recommendations.
- 8) **Students need to search for "articles" not "journals"**
 - a) Modern library tools are more geared to finding articles in databases than looking for individual journals by title.
 - b) Telling students that they need to get some "articles" on a subject rather than "journals" goes a long way in avoiding confusion.
- 9) **Librarians are here to help**
 - a) Refer students to the Librarians if they have any questions or problems. Provide students with library's telephone number and email address.
 - b) With sufficient lead time, librarians can provide materials geared specifically to your course and assignment.
- 10) **Types of Information required**
 - a) Be clear about the kind of material they are expected to locate.
 - b) Don't confuse the medium, print versus digital, with the quality of a source.
 - c) Make sure the assignment and information sources are compatible.