



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STAFF AND ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN  
WITH SUPPORT FROM THE W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION AND THE SID W. RICHARDSON FOUNDATION

## Curing Library Phobia

Five successful library assignments, made over the first eight weeks of the semester, help students become more comfortable with using the library.

1. **Oxford English Dictionary assignment.**  
Write three meanings for a word with an example of usage for each meaning. (The assignment is three words. Of course, everyone gets different words. This is a simple copying exercise, but the students get to use the "big" dictionary.)
2. **The biographical data assignment.**  
Given the name of a famous person, write a one-page summary of his or her life using a biographical reference other than an encyclopedia. Put a citation at the bottom of the page. (The latter instruction is to teach students to write a citation in Modern Language Association style. I suggest reference books to use: *Current Biography*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of National Biography*, *Dictionary of American Biography*, and *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*. I assign famous people whose essays appear in the students' textbook so that some relevance is attached to the assignment.)
3. **Team essay atlas assignment.**  
Write a short essay, including the number of maps and pages, about the purpose of the atlas; make explanations about two maps. Write a citation following MLA style at the bottom of the essay. (After a few weeks, it's time to get out of the classroom and go to the library. The students work in pairs to write a 1-2 page essay.)
4. **The New York Times assignment.**  
Write a summary of an article on the assigned topic. Use only 1989 or 1990 indexes. Put the appropriate MLA citation at the conclusion of the summary. (Often these topics are current and interesting enough that I will use the same list for research paper topics. The purpose of this assignment is to get the students accustomed to using *The Times* index, a little trickier to use than the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and other indexes. It also enables them to learn to use microfilm when they read articles.)

5. **Christian Science Monitor assignment.**  
Look up your birth date in the *Christian Science Monitor* and summarize an article from the day you were born. Write the appropriate MLA citation at the conclusion of the summary. (The students learn from this assignment that the *Monitor* is not published every day—take the day closest to your birth date—and that, in the case of this college library, files only go back to 1958. Again they learn about another publication, and they get additional practice with microfilm.)



Other than these library assignments, the students complete research on two of the four essays that precede a final research paper assignment.

On one, an explanatory essay, students must use encyclopedias to find principles to support simple products. For example, a student might investigate the principle of flammable butane needed to operate a cigarette lighter.

On the other, a causal analysis essay, they must use the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* to research statistical trends and develop theories about their causes. For example, a student may speculate on the causes for the decline of sales of black-and-white television sets in the last 10 years.



Many research tools that veteran library users take for granted are new to students.

After these assignments, students are no longer totally helpless when it comes to research. Certainly, they must still master specialized indexes—Humanities, Education, Science—but they know about some of the reference tools.

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## Encouraging Student Applications for Scholarships

Each year our college foundation offers several scholarships for students who will enter Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) during the fall, as well as scholarships for students who are currently enrolled and will return in the fall. The following are procedures that are used with currently enrolled students to identify applicants for scholarships and then to encourage qualified applicants to apply for scholarships.



To help me identify and encourage scholarship applicants, I keep a scholarship file in my office. The file contains requirements for college foundation scholarships, as well as any other scholarships that I have learned are available for community college students in our area. Usually the local newspapers list two or three available scholarships each year.

About one month before the dateline for our college foundation scholarship, I ask each student currently enrolled in my classes (about 150) for the following information on a 3 x 5 card: their name, grade-point average, number of credits completed, number of credits currently enrolled, major and/or occupation plans, and where they plan to be enrolled next year. The 3 x 5 cards are separated into two groups: students returning and students not returning in the fall. For the returning students, the cards are separated into those who have the minimum grade-point average for scholarships at PVCC and those who do not. The cards of the returning students with the minimum grade-point average are the basis for the next step.

I contact each qualified student (usually a total of 10-15) within one week and encourage each to apply for a scholarship at PVCC. The encouragements may be offered with a phone call, stopping a student in the hall, writing a note, or asking a student to stop by my office. The personal contact is the most important step in this process! While signs about the scholarships are posted around the college and information has been advertised in local newspapers, most students have not processed the information or think they are scholarship types; thus, these announcements don't apply to them. In a typical group of 10 students, only two or three have heard of the PVCC scholarships, and most have no plans to apply; they are now encouraged to apply. The others are unaware of the scholarships, and they

are encouraged, as well. Of the 10 students, usually five to seven apply eventually.

In my five years of informing and encouraging, only one student has known about the scholarships and has made plans to apply. In that case, I offered my congratulations!

Students with a B average who will not attend in the fall are encouraged to write their new college for scholarship information. Students with a B average, attending or not attending in the fall, are also made aware of scholarship opportunities from non-college sources for which they qualify.

Students are almost always in need of encouragement. Scholarship application is an area where we as faculty can offer very special encouragement to a group of special students.

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*Suanna D. Roueche, Editor*

February 22, 1991, Vol. XIII, No. 6  
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INNOVATION ABSTRACTS is a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), EDB 348, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712, (512) 471-7545. Subscriptions are available to nonconsortium members for \$40 per year. Funding in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation. Issued weekly when classes are in session during fall and spring terms and once during the summer. ISSN 0199-106X.