



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS FOR PRODUCTIVE LIBRARY ASSIGNMENTS

To fulfill a faculty development requirement at my college, I took a college teaching course at the local state university. I was the only librarian in a class primarily of teaching faculty from many disciplines. Our final assignment was a 20-minute teaching demonstration on some aspect of our disciplines that our classmates would find relevant, instructive, and useful, regardless of their field. I chose to dispel a few myths about libraries and librarians, and to guide my colleagues in rethinking how they assign research projects. Along with some class activities, I provided handouts about information literacy and library assignments that included some of the following suggestions.

Identify the reasons for assigning a paper that requires library research.

- To promote information literacy in students
- To prepare students to be lifelong learners in an information economy
- To provide students with an opportunity to navigate various types of information sources, in various formats
- To teach students how to evaluate, think critically about, and apply the content that they find in these information sources

Know that librarians are your friends and your partners.

- Library Science is a discipline.
- Librarians know how information is produced and packaged, and where to find it.
- Librarians are trained to connect information-seekers with the material they want or need. We know “where the good stuff is,” and we can help you find it!
- Librarians want to work with you and help your students succeed.

Schedule a library orientation session for your class.

- Work with the librarian to make the session assignment-specific.
- Assign a graded task that will require students to use knowledge and skills immediately—i.e., finding a source that they will use for their paper and justifying their selection of that source.
- Prepare the class. Tell students that they will be going to the library, and explain the research assignment before the session. They will be more “primed” to pay attention during the library session.
- One 50-minute session is barely enough time to skim over the basics of where things are located in the library or the mechanics of accessing a database. If possible, work with the librarian to schedule more than one session to cover different resources, topics, and skills.

Be there! More of your students will attend the library session and get more out of it if you are present. Your presence validates the importance of information literacy. (Conversely, your absence sends the opposite message.)

- Students are accountable to you, not to the librarian, for their grade.
- You can provide course-related context to a principle or skill covered by the librarian.

Avoid scavenger hunts.

This is a favorite fallback strategy which accomplishes little except to create frustration and wasted effort for students, as well as the librarians who are trying to help them. Often, it is the librarians, and not the students, who end up locating the information.

Plan library research assignments well.

As with any other component of your lesson plan, the library research assignment should attempt to achieve specific learning objectives. Your students will learn course content better, as well as improve their information literacy skills, if you try the following:

- Do the assignment yourself first to test its do-ability and to see if the information is really there. For example:



– Refer students to specific websites, with navigating instructions, so that they can find information that you *know* is there. An open-ended assignment (e.g., “go on the Internet and find...”), in which students are simply left to navigate a search engine, can result in wasted effort and little learning. Remember that web-based information can often change or go away. Check your sources often!

– Assign a task referring students to one or more specific reference sources that you know are in the library, with instructions to look up a topic that you know is in the index—e.g., “Source: Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History. Call #: REF E185.E54 1995. Topic: Jim Crow.”

Ask the librarian to review available sources with you.

- There may not be a sufficient number of circulating books available for everyone in the class to check out.
- Consider placing items on reserve.
- Discuss reference books, e-books, and other useful sources, other than circulating books, that may be available, with the librarian.
- You may be surprised to learn a thing or two about sources. There is more to the online world than the free web. For example, instructors often give their students the URL for a newspaper or magazine web site, with the instructions for locating articles there, but may not realize that:
 - (a) these sites usually allow users to search for articles, but the articles themselves, or most of them, are not free;
 - (b) the library subscribes to databases that provide full-text access to articles from many different periodicals, and these databases are accessible to students and faculty with current college identification; and
 - (c) the librarian may be able to suggest quality web sites that relate to your curriculum, or specialized topic—i.e., plagiarism—that you can share with students. Again, we know “where the good stuff is.”

Suggest items for purchase.

It may not help for the current assignment, but your library colleagues want to hear from you—the discipline expert—about your suggestions for books, DVDs, videos, journal subscriptions, and other materials that the library should purchase to support your curriculum.

Conclusion

My fellow instructors in the class learned a few surprising facts about their librarian colleagues and the resources available through their library. Most important, they learned that positive relationships between classroom faculty and librarians are keys to achieving information-literacy goals, as well as content-specific learning objectives, for students.

Other content I provided the class can be found at these sites:

- Information Literacy—An Annotated Webliography
<http://www.hccfl.edu/facultyinfo/aellison/infolitlinks.html>
- Effective, Meaningful Library Assignments—An Annotated Webliography
<http://www.hccfl.edu/facultyinfo/aellison/libraryassignments.html>

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