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Mary C. MacDonald
University of Rhode Island, marymac@uri.edu

Amanda Izenstark
University of Rhode Island, amanda@mail.uri.edu

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Instruction @ the URI Libraries

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Assigning Effective Information Research Assignments

Should we abandon the traditional research paper?

Librarians often hear instructors remark on the lack of quality information sources used by students in their research papers. This is especially common with beginning researchers in the freshmen and sophomore levels. What can be done to both improve student information research skills and provide meaningful evidence of the research?

"We should abandon the traditional research paper," writes Barbara Fister, librarian at Gustavus Adolphus University, and a blogger for Inside HigherEd. In her blog post of April 12, 2011, Fister states:

"If you want students to learn about a topic and be able synthesize information effectively, fine – but don't call it research. Turn it into a presentation, an informational brochure, or a Wikipedia article. If you want students to make an argument, start from something that they know and care about, something that matters to them and about which they can hold an informed opinion. If you want them to read and understand scholarly material, focus on close reading and have the class jointly prepare an annotated edition. If you want them to write academic prose, wait until they know enough about the discipline to know what they're talking about and how to ask meaningful questions about it."

Instructors who heed Fister's advice may also focus more attention on the quality of the information sources students use to support these "non-research" research projects. Require students to annotate their citations with brief evaluative comments that address the author's credentials, the relevance of the source to their topic, and other important evaluative criteria. Asking students to determine the authority, accuracy, purpose, relevance and currency of the information sources will go a long way to providing high-quality information for their projects – and develop strong information literacy skills in the process.

Fister's entire blog post is available at http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/library_babel_fish/why_the_research_paper_isn_t_working

Tips and Ideas for Library Research Assignments

Librarians at the University Libraries recommend offering students a variety of information research activities that lead to and support increased information research ability. We are happy to assist in the design of information research assignments that will support student information literacy competency.

For more ideas, please see ***Creating Effective Library Research Assignments*** at http://www.uri.edu/library/instruction_services/effective.html.

The University Libraries: Supporting Summer Session Students

Students take summer classes for many reasons, and in the case of online courses, from many locations.

While many students visit us for help in person, many of them use the Instant Message widgets located on LibGuides targeted to specific classes or topics, or find us when they're using any of our EBSCOhost databases like Academic Search Complete, CINAHL, America History and Life, and others. We help students with questions like these below:

- *How can I find articles on my topic?*
- *How can I tell if an article is peer-reviewed?*
- *How can I find this item that I found information about online?*

As part of our mission as a teaching library, our goal is to teach students how to search for themselves - essentially teaching them how to fish.

If you would like to set up a library session for your class(es), please contact Chair of Public Services Deborah Mongeau or Information Literacy Librarian Mary MacDonald. Deborah can be reached by e-mail at dmongeau@uri.edu or by telephone at (401) 874-4610. Mary can be reached by e-mail at marymac@uri.edu or by telephone at (401) 874-4635.

By the Numbers

In Spring 2011...

2,330 *total* students attended information literacy instruction sessions at the main library in Kingston. *This includes:*

1,052 WRT 104/105/106 students who learned how to find credible articles to support their writing projects, and...

1,278 students in Art History, Business, Education, History, Human Development & Family Studies, Library & Information Studies, Natural Resources, Nursing, Psychology, and Sociology, who learned about finding information in their disciplines.

Related Updates

Welcoming and Supporting Talent Development Pre-Matriculation Students

The Carothers Library will welcome approximately 400 pre-matriculating Talent Development students when they attend one of 24 library instruction sessions during the week of June 20-24. Students will be introduced to the libraries' services, the HELIN catalog and a general purpose article database.

Are you teaching a course for Talent Development this summer? Consider contacting your library subject liaison (http://www.uri.edu/library/selectors.html) for assistance in planning information research assignments or to schedule a library instruction session to support a class assignment.

For more information please contact Deborah Mongeau or Mary MacDonald. Contact information is above.

Instruction @ the URI Libraries
provides updates and tips related to the URI Libraries' instruction programs and offerings, and is distributed in January, May, and August.

Newsletter produced by:
Amanda Izenstark
Reference & Instructional Design Librarian
amanda@uri.edu • (401) 874-4582
Mary MacDonald, Head of Instruction
marymac@uri.edu • (401) 874-4635