Designing Effective Research Assignments for City-Centered Learning

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What you will learn today:

- The purpose of research assignments and the value of incorporating city-centered assignments into your course.
- Common problems and challenges faced by student researchers.
- Best practices for designing effective research assignments.
- The value of collaborating with librarians to design effective research assignments and support student learning.
"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."
- Zora Neale Hurston

**Research Defined:**

- searching for and gathering information, usually to answer a particular question or problem (College of San Mateo Library).
- the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions (Oxford Dictionary).
- a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue (Creswell, 2008).
What is the purpose of Research Assignments?

- Research assignments are an integral part of the college experience and offer students the opportunity to learn a variety of valuable skills sets. Skills: locating, evaluating, effectively using information, etc.

- The skills and knowledge that students gain during the research process are transferable life-long learning skills that will be valuable in their educational, career, and personal lives.

Q1: What is the purpose of research in your discipline or subject area? What role does research play for students pursuing a degree in this field?
City-Centered Research Assignments Defined

- City-centered research assignments help students to define and connect with real-world issues that are important to them.
- Helps students answer questions about racism, discrimination, disparities, environmental issues, health issues, economic justice, civil liberties, etc.
- How their world/Chicago got to be this way?
- Personal research interests related to their family history, neighborhood, peers, etc.
- Engage with the world and serve with purpose and intent.
City-Centered Research

- **Primary Research** - Research that students will go out and collect themselves. Examples include, surveys, interviews, observations, and ethnographic research. After conducting primary research, students will need to analyze the primary data, figure out what it means, and what they can learn from it.

- **Traditional Research** – Research that students will find, gather, and analyze – both primary and secondary sources. This includes traditional print and electronic resources like books, journal articles, newspapers, government documents, statistics, multimedia, websites, etc. After conducting traditional research students will need to analyze their findings, discern gaps or inconsistencies, establish facts and new conclusions.
**Research Assignment Alternatives**

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<th>Research Paper Alternatives</th>
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<td>Have students create a detailed timeline on a particular topic.</td>
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<td>Have students develop a research guide or website for finding information on a topic.</td>
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<th>Mini Conferences/Poster Sessions</th>
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<th>Research Log/Journal</th>
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<th>Research Teams/Debate</th>
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Q2: How can city-centered research enhance student learning in your discipline or subject area? Provide 2-3 city-centered research ideas that relate to a course you currently teach.
Common Student Researcher Problems and Challenges

- Students don’t have the prerequisite research knowledge and skills, but you think they do.
- Students don’t have a clear understanding of the research assignment expectations.
- Students are not aware of sources to satisfy their information need.
- City-centered research is a more advanced skill set for students. Some of the information may not be as easily accessible, may require critical thinking skills, analytical skills, and other skills.
  - Data literacy, visual literacy, news literacy, etc.
Common Student Researcher Problems and Challenges

- Choosing the “right” topic
- Evaluating Information
- Finding Sources
- Navigating research tools
- Organizing Research

- Information Overload
- Research Anxiety/Library Anxiety
- Integrating Sources
- Citing sources/Ethical Use of Information
Assignment Prompts

- Key findings from the Information Literacy Project Report, *How Handouts for Research Assignments Guide Today’s College Students (2010).*

- **The majority of handouts they sampled:**
  - Emphasized the mechanics of compiling college research papers rather than guiding students to finding and using sources for research.
  
  - Handouts advised that students use their campus library’s physical and online sources when conducting research. However, the handouts failed to mention details on what specific databases students should search.

  - Very few handouts advised students about using internet sources.

  - Very few handouts recommended consulting with a librarian about help with the research assignment.

  - Handouts also lacked info about evaluating information, plagiarism, and instructor’s availability to help.
Assignment Prompts

- Assignment prompts are a support mechanism for the research assignment.
- Providing other channels of communication with students is great, but assignment prompts provide students with a situational and informational context for the assignment.
- Assignment prompts should provide guidance and details about the assignment.

City-Centered Assignments: Do students have access to the resources to support the assignment? Has enough time been allocated to allow students to conduct and analyze primary research?
What Happens to Your Research Assignment at the Library

- Open-ended unfocused questions:
  - “I have to do a paper. Can you help me __________?”
  - Where do I find books on ______________?

- Research/Reference Interview
  - Defining the assignment
  - Assess their knowledge of the topic
  - Assess their stage in the research process
  - Search strategies
  - Focusing/narrowing the topic
Assignment Scaffolding

- Scaffolding a research assignment allows you to build in “benchmarks” throughout the research process.
- Ensures that the student’s topic and sources are viable and appropriate before it’s too late.
- Allows you to provide formative feedback/assessment during the research process.
- Allows you to break a complex assignment into small components.
- Helps prevent student procrastination and plagiarism.
## Assignment Scaffolding Ideas

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<th>Smaller Assignments to Help Master Steps</th>
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<td>Working Thesis Statement</td>
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<td>Research</td>
<td>Search Strategy Worksheet (librarian)</td>
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<td>Evaluation of Sources</td>
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Librarian Collaboration

Marielle
Patty
Sarah
Steve

Matt

Contact Info: http://library.northpark.edu/about/people/staff
City-Centered Research Guide:

http://guides.northpark.edu/chicagoresearchassignments