Designing Effective Library Assignments

DO:

- Encourage your students to use the STL Information Desk, and to schedule one-on-one consultations with a librarian. Suggest that they brainstorm and conceptualize their research projects, even before going to the library.
- Assume your students have minimal knowledge of the library. Demonstrate what resources you'd like them to use (e.g. "scholarly" works).
- Specify the level of research expected of your students. Articulate your objectives clearly. Incorporate critical thinking and problem solving into your assignments.
- Compare personal and commercial websites with scholarly materials available online e.g., e-journals and subscription databases.
- Consult with a librarian. Provide the library with a copy of your assignment.
- Arrange for one or more library instruction sessions to teach research strategies and demonstrate online and print research tools. Plan to have your students attend a session when they are ready to begin their projects (not before the assignment is given).
- Make sure your students have done some thinking about their topics before attending a library instruction session.
- Check DYNIX & Metalibrary, the STL online catalogs, to find out if we have the resources you plan to recommend to your students.
- Discuss plagiarism with your students. Model the citation format (APA, etc.) and consult with the librarian about our many citation and style guides.
- Try out the assignment yourself, to make sure it can be completed realistically.

PLEASE DON'T:

- Arrange for scavenger hunts. Roaming around the library looking for trivia is not research and tends to promote learned helplessness.
- Give students incomplete or incorrect citations to sources you wish them to use. If you need a complete and accurate citation, contact the library.
- Limit research to one particular resource. Thirty students trying to use one or two books or journal articles is stressful for everyone: it shortens the lifespan of the resource, and increases the opportunity for it to be misplaced. Consult with a librarian about placing specific items on Reserve.
- Find yourself saying, "I'm sure you'll find it on the Internet," "It's somewhere in the library," or "Don't use Internet resources," without discussion or examples. The information universe is enormous and often overwhelming. Students will be empowered to do their best if they are given more specific research instructions, parameters, and guideposts.

Sojourner Truth Library
SUNY New Paltz
http://lib.newpaltz.edu
Information Desk 257-3710
Circulation 257-3714