

Making Friends with the Librarians

New Faculty Orientation, Fall 2006



Why Make Friends?

The realities:

- ▶ Many students today are not full-time students, even if they take a full course load – they have jobs, families, other interests
- ▶ Some students are technologically savvy (they grew up on computers), but most are not “information” savvy
- ▶ Many students do not learn how to research or use a library in school
- ▶ Studies have shown that among college students, their epistemological abilities (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, analytical thinking, etc.) are not mature until they reach their late 20s

Librarians help your students by:

- ▶ Guiding them through a complex information environment
- ▶ Teaching students to be analytical and critical about the research process
- ▶ Teaching students concepts, as well as skills
- ▶ Teaching critical thinking and problem solving in context

Librarians help you by:

- ▶ Staying on top of available resources, interface changes
- ▶ Making available high quality resources that support the curriculum
- ▶ Supplementing and complementing your content knowledge through knowledge of how information is created, communicated, stored, and accessed (disciplinary discourse)

What’s In a Research Paper?

- ▶ **Discipline Knowledge:** able to select a researchable topic within a specific context; knowledge of what’s “hot” in a discipline or course context
- ▶ **Resource knowledge:** academic/scholarly vs. trade vs. popular; primary vs. secondary; books vs. articles vs. media vs. “grey” or ephemeral literature; electronic vs. print; library catalogue vs. article indexes vs. web vs. ???
- ▶ **Searching Skills:** determining vocabulary; selecting appropriate resources and anticipating best results
- ▶ **Citation Skills:** citation style; quoting vs. paraphrasing vs. summarizing (and when to cite)
- ▶ **Epistemological Skills:** choosing best sources for paper (involves understanding and being able to apply criteria to determine authority, objectivity, currency, quality); comparing and evaluating differing viewpoints; applying logical reasoning (rhetoric)

How To Make Friends

Talk to us

- Get to know your liaison librarian.
- Send us a copy of any assignment that will involve research.
- Ask us to provide an orientation to your students when you assign a research assignment.
- Involve us at all stages in planning your assignments.
- Ask us for resources or services the library has created that would be helpful to your students, for both your course and any assignments.
- Keep us informed about your students' progress on their assignments.

Help your students out

- Design your assignment so that students are asked to find information and use it in a meaningful way, applying information not just retrieving facts, constructing meaning not just regurgitating it.
- Clearly define the task and identify any sources students should or should not use.
- Work through the assignment yourself, even if you're just revising an old assignment, making sure that the assignment does what you want it to and that the library has the resources you're requiring students to use.
- Give students a copy of the assignment, which, if you have very specific requirements, includes a list of resources you'd like them to consult. Also check to see if the library has already created a research guide for your subject area; these include commonly used reference materials, research databases, and web resources.
- Put materials on reserve if many students will need to use the same resource (except for reference books, which do not circulate).
- Give students enough time to complete the assignment successfully. Remind students that even under the best circumstances, research takes time.
- Use complete and accurate titles when referring to a particular resource. For example, don't tell your students to use Standard & Poor's since S&P publishes many well-known reference books – be more specific by asking them to use Standard and Poor's *Industry Surveys*.
- Make sure the library owns any sources that students are required to use.
- Avoid “scavenger hunts” or assignments that ask students to find answers to hard-to-answer trivia questions or use a specific resource to find a particular fact; students generally do not learn anything, because librarians often end up giving students the answers.
- Avoid giving students a generic assignment out of a handbook or textbook, unless you've already tested it to make sure it works for our institution.
- Avoid blanket statements preventing students from using Internet or web sources

[Adapted from *Effective Library Assignments*, Bowling Green State University Libraries, <http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/infosrv/lue/effectiveassignments.html>]

Some Light Reading

If you read nothing else about why you should make friends with your librarian, read this:

Shapiro, J. & Hughes, S. (1996). Information literacy as a liberal art. *Educom Review* 31(2). Retrieved August 22, 2006 from <http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/review/reviewArticles/31231.html>