Creating Effective Research Assignments

In the last issue of Academic Announcements, the article “News You Can Use from the University Writing Program” presented four strategies for getting better writing assignments from your students. As a follow-up, here are some helpful hints for creating effective research assignments:

- **Use current resources.** The library regularly updates and adds resources. Each semester review your assignments to make sure that you are not asking your students to use outdated or withdrawn library resources.
- **Use unambiguous terminology.** Students will interpret an assignment literally and get confused by unknown terms. Avoid confusion by explaining what is meant by terms like peer-reviewed, scholarly journal article, primary vs. secondary sources, and the web.
- **Explain assignments in writing.** To make sure your expectations are met, give assignments in writing rather than verbally.
- **Investigate library resources.** When creating a research assignment, investigate resources currently available through the library. Several thousand e-resources including journal articles, books and other publications may be a good fit for your research assignment objectives.
- **Consult a Reference librarian.** Reference librarians are happy to assist you with designing an effective research assignment, taking full advantage of readily available library resources. Working with you, librarians can identify potentially valuable resources which could be purchased for the collection.
- **Avoid scavenger hunts.** Assignments which send students on wild goose chases result in frustration and often misplacement or mutilation of library materials. Furthermore, these types of assignments do little to teach students real research strategies. Assignments that have a purpose, especially those relating to class content, benefit students more by familiarizing them with a research strategy and the various types of resources available.

You may e-mail a copy of your research assignment to Anita Dey (adey@svsu.edu), Head of Reference Services for review, or bring it to the Reference Desk on the first floor of the library.

**Chickering & Gamson’s Fourth Principle: Give Prompt Feedback**

When should you give feedback to students in an online or hybrid course? When should you post grades?

First, let’s define the difference between the two. Grades are just that - evaluating students on their work in an objective manner and assigning a grade in the Gradebook. That part is pretty easy, hopefully painless, and some students may never even know you’ve done it. You may want to send a message letting them know it is done. Grading is pretty final because most students can’t correct their work once it is done. Hence the importance of feedback. Feedback allows you to help students correct what they are doing before you grade them on their work. So, how often do you need to send feedback? Ideally, the answer, as with everything, is “it depends.” It depends on the following:

- When you meet with your students (in a hybrid course)? If you are meeting with them every other week and giving them feedback on their performance in person, then online feedback may be overkill.
- What is going on in your online/hybrid course? Are you giving tests/projects every other week? If so, give corrective feedback often so students know what to work on.
- How active you plan to be in the discussion board? Can you gently correct the discussion (the WHOLE discussion, or provide gentle correction to a person without the whole class realizing it)?
- Do you plan to give a “feedback report” to each student on a regular basis? (I show an example of this below.)
- Is there a major assessment/test/project coming up that students are panicked about and need some reassurance on before they do?
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Events & Schedules

Faculty & Staff Development Workshops

Tools for Online & Distance Education

"VSpace Introduction"
Friday, October 1, 2:00-3:30 p.m. Z-302 x2730

"VSpace Advanced Course Development"
Thursday, October 7, Noon-1:30 p.m. Z-302 x2730
Friday, October 8, 10:00-11:30 a.m. Z-302 x2730

"VSpace Gradebook 2"
Monday, October 18, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Z-302 x2730

"VSpace Test Center"
Tuesday, October 19, 2:00-3:30 p.m. Z-302 x2730

Library

"Google Scholar"
Monday, October 4, 11:30-Noon Z-235 x7054

"Discover Encore"
Wednesday, October 6, 3:00-3:30 p.m. Z-235 x7054

"Coffee with the Library Director"
Thursday, October 14, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Cafe 3rd Floor x7054

Office Productivity

"Taking Screenshots: Print Screen, PrintKey, Jing & SnagIt"
Friday, October 1, 1:00-2:00 p.m. C-154 x7471

"Typo3"
Wednesday, October 6, 1:00-2:00 p.m. C-154 x7471

"Vmail"
Wednesday, October 6, 2:00-3:00 p.m. C-154 x7471

"Excel 2007: Level II"
Monday, October 11, 10:30-Noon C-154 x7471

"Newsletters, Flyers & Brochures: Publisher"
Wednesday, October 13, 2:00-3:30 p.m. C-154 x7471

"Word 2007: Level I"
Wednesday, October 20, 2:00-3:30 p.m. C-154 x7471

Lunches - Teaching Tables & New Faculty

"Teaching Table: Working with International Students in your Classes"
Tuesday, October 12, Noon-1:00 p.m. Emeriti Room x4387

"New Faculty Lunch: Perspectives on Exemplary Teaching"
Friday, October 15, Noon-1:00 p.m. Emeriti Room x4387

Academic Affairs

"Brain-Based Learning"
Friday, October 8, Noon-1:30 p.m. SE-221 x2130

"Rush Lecture" Robert Maurovich
"Tomorrow's College Student: A Changing Landscape"
Thursday, October 14, 4:00-5:00 p.m. Founders Hall x2130

Online Instructional Design

"Create Active & Engaging Learning Activities for OL, Hybrid or Web-Enhanced Courses"
Saturday, October 2, 12:30-2:00 p.m. Macomb x4387

"Online & Hybrid Professional Development Course" 7 week course. Begins October 4; Ends November 21 x2025

"Streamlining the Online Feedback Process"
Wednesday, October 20, 1:00-2:00 p.m. Z-302 x2025

Sponsored Programs

"Collaborative Research - Register for IRIS"
Tuesday, October 12, 10:00-11:00 a.m. Z-235 x4295
Wednesday, October 13, 1:00-2:00 p.m. Z-235 x4295

Classroom Presentation Technology

"Audience Response System"
Tuesday, October 26, 2:00-3:00 p.m. C-154 x7471

Faculty Association

"Search Committee Procedures Workshop"
Thursday, October 7, 4:00-5:00 p.m. C-100 x4366

Visual Arts

Marshall M. Fredericks Sculpture Museum

University Gallery
The Michigan Watercolor Society's 2010 Traveling Exhibition September 27 through October 16.
Artist Reception Thursday, October 7th, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

Performing Arts

The Elves & the Shoemaker
Saturday, October 9, 3:00 & 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 10, 3:00 p.m.
Malcolm Field Theatre for Performing Arts
For ticket information, please call the Box Office: (989) 964-4261