Librarians at BGSU formed “Understanding Student Information-seeking Behaviors to Enhance Student Learning”, a faculty learning community through the campus Center for Teaching and Learning. Members of this learning community are BGSU faculty from several disciplines across campus. Through the community we have explored ways to improve students’ abilities to contend with obstacles inherent in the research project. The community has also had opportunities to become more familiar with the University Libraries’ research tools and reflect on ways to enhance student learning. This guide pulls together readings on student research habits and recommendations from faculty about how to improve the student research experience.

The following assignment was created by one of the members of our learning community. It was reviewed by the community and established as meeting the above criteria. For additional sample assignments or information on creating effective research assignments, visit our LibGuide:

http://libguides.bgsu.edu/studentresearch

2011-2012 Understanding Student Information-seeking Behaviors to Enhance Student Learning

Learning Community Facilitators:
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RESEARCHING AND WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER 4000 LEVEL TOPICS CLASS IN JOURNALISM

Prepared by Dr. Catherine Cassara, ccassar@bgsu.edu

Identify broad research subject… Send me a paragraph or two about what interests you … week 4

Explore your topic using a broad range of research tools

Formulate a more focused research topic...begin to consider what might be your research question ... this time you will send me a couple paragraphs about your topic and an annotated bibliography of ten sources you have found that have helped you focus your focus… week 6

Return to research now with keywords directly related to topic

You will need to read some of the articles or book chapters you find that are central to your topic and skim others...

Your source materials must include a mix of kinds of sources: academic sources—scholarly articles and essays, journalism, government reports, international organization’s reports, reports from non-governmental organizations, personal communications, etc.

It will strengthen your work to have a mix of primary and secondary sources and there are a number of sources we will talk about that will help you identify which kinds of sources are important for your topic.

Nail down your research question... Send me your research questions and the general kinds of research materials you need to work with, identifying which are the new areas you need to add … week 8

This will again shift your search for sources—narrowing it in some places but providing new directions for exploration that might not have been obvious in your earlier explorations

Now you need to outline your research paper ... Send me the one-two page progress report, plus the outline, and a 15-20 item bibliography. In the progress report, identify which areas you have material to cover and which areas still need work, include with the outline an expanded and refocused annotated bibliography, only include those items from the first bibliography that are still relevant... week 10

The exercise of outlining the paper should help you figure out whether you are on track with your research.

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1 Make sure that whatever you read at any stage of your you keep a copy of until you complete the paper – and if you take notes record the page where you found the information, whether you have taken a quote verbatim or have paraphrased... and keep all the information about the work that you will need to cite it in your reference list.
If you are doing things right, it should you the areas you have begun to cover well but it should also show you where the holes are that require you to go back for more a little more research.

With the paper outlined, marshal your resources, go through all the essays, articles, chapters, books, etc., you have gathered, and you start reading, taking notes and digesting the ideas.

As you encounter material you decide what part of your paper the information will serve.

This is an iterative process...

This means that the very process of doing the research may change the questions you are asking. In other words, as you learn you may find that your original understanding of the topic was incomplete or off track and as a result your research question was off track.

It is alright in this kind of research to improve your work as you become more informed about the subject, but it is only necessary when the original question was seriously flawed.

If the original question was a based on commonly held beliefs that your exploration will explore and challenge there is no need to change your question.

If you have questions at any point be sure to come discuss them.

The best way to find out if your research is complete is to write a rough draft of your paper... Turn one in to me the Monday of the next to last week of classes, it should be as close to finished as possible, complete with bibliography or reference list... week 15

Preparing a rough draft will allow you to identify the areas where you still have holes in your research. One of the ways this happens is that you find there is a segment of the outlined paper that you get stuck on is the area where you haven't finished your work. Or you are getting stuck because there is something else that you need to include in the paper that you didn't know about at the earlier stage when you wrote the paper. If you want to include a note flagging the trouble spots I can see if I can help.

The final paper is due on the last day of class. During the last week of class you will present your research to your classmates... week 16