

Faculty Information Literacy Stipend  
Final Report

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Course: PLSC 4332, "The Supreme Court Seminar"  
Semester: Spring 2023

Introduction

The assignment that utilized information literacy skills is the core of a seminar that I've now taught six times: a 250 (for a couple of students 45+) page original research paper.

This "library" research work set the students up for the archival work they did over five days of spring break in the Madison Building of the Library of Congress. Here they used skills I taught and ongre (s)-1.3 | C. (ills)- Brtect8 98 ()-e 60K9 (y)-7irbha (-)-0.8 3 (ild)tauv(g)2..001 Tgf.9 (4

Method of assessment

her and led them to be more comfortable in asking questions of her they might not have asked otherwise. The sequence of topic acquisition, research question conceptualization, project design, and project execution makes sense and is helpful to students; it creates an order rather than suggesting they just sit down and write.

That said, the two biggest issues with student preparation for researching and writing the research paper were 1) focus and 2) organization. They are obviously linked.

**FOCUS** Moving the students past the idea of a general topic to a narrower aspect and then, once there, getting them to focus on one or two closely researchable questions; there is, even in our best students, a high school tendency to mushroom questions and lose their focus. If everything interesting then nothing is interesting. Once they develop that focus, getting them to take the time to use the search tools Megan and I introduced them to and not just grab the first few pieces they turn up regardless of their close fit to the question(s) they are investigating. There is still a “this is close enough” sense we need to get them past... the classic “if I read it, it is going into the paper” mindset.

**ORGANIZATION:** There is a difference between writing an essay and a research paper and college students struggle with this. The paper asked the students to think in terms of “sections” and “subsections” of their research and writing. The prospectus/research design asked them to outline the path their research and writing. My discussions with students and Megan’s presentations to them – stressed the different components of this process: setting the question to be addressed and its significance, laying out how others have addressed it, and then addressing it oneself with the data that

a problem), to finetune what we talked about in respect to their topic/question/research might help. I plan to ask Megan if she is up for such a thing for my Fall semester Supreme Court class (PLSC 3330).

Appendices(This includes the assignment sheet, rubric if used, and example(s) of student work.)

A. Proposed Topic and Research Question

- Topic
  - What general topic will you choose?
  - Why is it important and worthy of study?
- Research Question(s)
  - What interesting and important questions arise out of your topic?
  - Why are they significant questions?
  - How do you propose to answer them?
- Justices' Papers
  - At what Justices' Papers will you look?
  - In what boxes of what collections will they be found?
  - Why? How specifically, are these papers relevant?

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- What are the best things about this proposal/prospectus?
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