Strategies for Conducting Inquiry-Based Literary Research

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Rationale:

Before the COVID-19 coronavirus thrust everyone into the world of remote instruction, Barry Mauer (English) and John Venecek (Libraries) spent a year developing a series of research modules for literature courses that could be adapted to any instruction mode. The impetus behind this initiative was a decline in requests for library instruction sessions for upper-level humanities courses. We suspected this was due to an increased emphasis on hybrid, mixed-mode, and online instruction.

In the spring of 2019, John met with library liaisons, program coordinators, and department chairs throughout the humanities. The consensus from these meetings confirmed our suspicions; the variety of new instruction modes had reduced face to face class time, thereby making traditional library instruction less feasible. We needed a more flexible model that would capture the nuances of subject-specific research, satisfy the needs of upper-level humanities students and help embed information literacy principles into the curriculum.

Description:

This course, which can be integrated into existing webcourses, walks students through the process of conducting inquiry-based research into literature while helping to refine their library skills. It draws from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Framework. According to the ACRL, "Research is iterative and depends upon asking increasingly complex or new questions whose answers lead to additional questions or lines of inquiry in any field." We discuss this concept more in-depth throughout the course.

The course focuses on a research project created by Jada, an English major who conducted a literary analysis of James Baldwin's classic short story, "Sonny's Blues."

Instructor might require a research paper of 5-6 or 10-12 pages, but the knowledge students need to perform this task can fill up dozens of pages. Writing about literature is a complicated, often messy process that entails knowledge of language, genre, structures, styles, and more. Scholarly research and writing is complicated because it needs to meet high standards while incorporating knowledge and practices from other fields such as psychology, history, science, and other arts.

Although we discuss the research process in a linear fashion throughout these modules, we understand that, in practice, literary research is a highly recursive process. We're constantly circling back through the process as we write. Because writing instructors (even those who made this course) are locked into presenting the writing process in a linear way, we tend to discuss it in terms of stages such as preliminary research, drafting, revising, and so on. But writing a research paper requires us to rethink and redo our work at any stage. It's not uncommon for writers to be in the middle of proofreading (one of the final stages) and realize they need to go back and gather more research.

Here is an overview of the topics covered in this course:

Unit 1: Understanding the Assignment & Conducting Preliminary Research

Unit 2: Identifying a Problem & Considering Audience

Unit 3: Searching as Strategic Exploration & Scholarship as Conversation

Unit 4: Theory & Methods

Unit 5: Reviewing the Literature & Reading like a Researcher

Unit 6: Library Services & Resources

Unit 7: Using Google Scholar

Unit 8: Evaluating Scholarly Resources

Unit 9: Refining & Evaluating Your Research Question

Unit 10: Relating the Conceptual to the Concrete & Research as an Inferential and Critical Process

Unit 11: Positing a Thesis Statement & Composing a Title

Unit 12: The Writing Process

Unit 13: Revisions

Appraisal:
The modules were introduced during the spring semester and we received the following feedback from students who used them:

The section specifying "Overcoming the Anxiety of Influence" is a new concept for me that I believe will help me tremendously going forward for my research papers.

The most important new strategy is regarding the scope of a review... The information provided from Michael Patton on "intellectual heritage," and common mistakes made when conducting a literature review, will prove to be very useful.

The "Key Libraries Resources" was of huge benefit to me.

I have never written a literature review before, but I know that when I do, I will most definitely use Google Scholar.

As a former librarian, I can say that I am very impressed with the strategies put forth in this module on approaching a research paper.

References:
Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Framework -
http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework#inquiry

Link or explanation: 1.All faculty can self enroll: https://webcourses.ucf.edu/enroll/8H63KN. 2.In addition, the course is available in Commons (via Webcourses) as a compressed file. Search for

Strategies for Conducting Inquiry-Based Literary Research. Import the course into your existing webcourse.