**Course-Integrated Activities to Develop Students’ Research Skills**

*The following document identifies strategies for incorporating research activities into a course that will build and strengthen students’ ability to effectively find, evaluate, and use information.*

**Developing Research Skills**

The ability to effectively find, evaluate, and use information, known as Information Literacy Skills or Research Skills, is developed over time. Frequent practice in research activities that incorporate and repeat the process of finding, evaluating, and using resources is key to developing information literate students. Regular exposure to quality sources such as scholarly journal articles, books, government websites, and credible consumer health resources via class readings and assignments enables students to more easily recognize and use these sources in their daily lives. Equally important is an emphasis on encouraging each student to think critically, not only about the resources used to complete an assignment, but also about the research strategies and databases used to find the resources. If these steps are regularly integrated into the curriculum and supported by both faculty and instructional librarians, students will continue to develop and refine the skills they will need later in their academic and professional careers.

**Research Activities**

A research activity does not always need to be a formal research paper. It can be any activity or project that requires students to integrate outside information into an assignment, whether to make a point, support an argument, or augment an understanding of a topic.

Here are examples of alternative research activities:

* Presentation
* Debate
* Annotated bibliography (with evaluative or summative annotations)
* Letter to the editor to a local newspaper
* Poster
* Health Pamphlet
* Student-generated guide to the information sources on a particular subject

**Components to include into a Research Assignment**

When students are asked to use high quality resources for their assignments and to think critically about how they found their outside sources and evaluate the effectiveness of the sources in relation to their topic, then the assignment will serve to strengthen research skills. Adding one or more of the following components to an assignment will encourage the regular application of these research skills.

**To promote thinking critically about the research process**

**Post-Assignment Reflection**

Ask students to write a few paragraphs reflecting on their experience completing the assignment. This type of reflection encourages students to think critically about their research process and come up with solutions for improving their research skills in the future.

**Research Log**

Ask students to keep a record of the databases, websites, and additional tools that they used to find their sources. On this document, students can include search terms that they used and strategies that worked well for finding resources. Adding this component to an assignment encourages students to think strategically about how they go about finding their outside resources.

**Single Article Research Log**

Ask students to fill out a research log for one of their resources. This is a quick way to get students to explain how they found the item and evaluate its quality.

**Search History**

In most databases, students can print the search history that will show the terms that they used to find their articles. Including the search history with an assignment allows you to grade students on how they searched and the strategies that used to find their articles.

**To promote evaluating resources used for a project**

**Evaluation Sheet**

Provide students with a checklist or a series of questions that they must answer about each resource that they use. This will allow students to demonstrate that they know how to effectively evaluate the resources that they use and that they have gone through this process before using a resource.

**General requirements to consider**

* Specify which types of resources students may use and from which databases (e.g. *at least three scholarly journal articles from the last 5 years found in IPA or PubMed and two books found in the library catalog)*
* Be explicit about citation requirements (all outside resources must be cited)
* When offering course readings give the citation rather than the document, this encourages students to use library resources to access the articles (check with the library first to make sure that they own a copy of the item)