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10-22-2013

Behind the Scenes: Secrets of Preparing for Successful Research Appointments

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Myers, Sarah, "Behind the Scenes: Secrets of Preparing for Successful Research Appointments" (2013). *Blogging the Library*. 59.
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Behind the Scenes: Secrets of Preparing for Successful Research Appointments

Abstract

Have you ever noticed how librarians are stereo-typically portrayed in movies and on TV? There is the perception that librarians are extremely uptight, awkward, and boring, that they require nearly complete silence, and they rarely offer any actual help. That is definitely not what being an academic librarian is about. For me, it's about helping, learning new ideas, exchanging information, and making the research process (which I love!) a bit easier. Remember the librarians in Matilda or on Arthur? They were always willing to help and make the process of finding resources a little bit easier. That's what I want to do. Over the last couple weeks, I have been helping students navigate the research process through one-on-one research appointments. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Reference Intern, Research Appointment

Disciplines

Information Literacy | Library and Information Science

Comments

The Interns at Gettysburg College's Musselman Library captured their internship experiences since the spring of 2011. Over time the blog has featured Fortenbaugh, Smith, and Holley interns. They shared updates on semester long projects, responded to blogging prompts, and documented their individual intern experience.

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Behind the Scenes: Secrets of preparing for successful research appointments

October 22, 2013

By: Sarah Myers

Have you ever noticed how librarians are stereo-typically portrayed in movies and on TV? There is the perception that librarians are extremely uptight, awkward, and boring, that they require nearly complete silence, and they rarely offer any actual help. That is definitely not what being an academic librarian is about. For me, it's about helping, learning new ideas, exchanging information, and making the research process (which I love!) a bit easier. Remember the librarians in *Matilda* or on *Arthur*? They were always willing to help and make the process of finding resources a little bit easier. That's what I want to do. Over the last couple weeks, I have been helping students navigate the research process through one-on-one research appointments.

With my background in secondary education, I enjoy the opportunity to teach others. The experience to lead research appointments is unique because it is a personalized chance to work with students and hone in on the availability of specific resources found in print or online. Students come with a wide variety of questions on a range of topics. I love doing pre-research to determine the best paths for information. Before this semester, I had little knowledge of the economic impact of machine guns on WWI, social perceptions of women with short hair, or 20th century architecture in Barcelona, but I do now! Students are writing on specific topics and need help refining their searches. I'm happy to be that person to help.

While every librarian's style of preparing for a research appointment is slightly different, we all likely begin by gathering some background knowledge. Where do you search for background knowledge? How do you know the key terms, ideas, and figures that are part of any given topic? I might start with a reference book like a general or specialized encyclopedia. The reference collection on the main floor of the library has a plethora of sources to start any search. Did you know that Musselman has an [encyclopedia of hair](#)? Nearly every discipline has a subject specific encyclopedia or

dictionary. Online, there's also the Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL) and the Oxford Reference Library that have sizable online reference collections that are easily keyword searchable. And, if you don't tell anyone, my background research also might involve a visit to Wikipedia. As you know, it's not a source to be cited, but it can provide some useful context to a topic. From all of this pre-research, I find keywords, subject terms, dates, and figures that will be useful to a more thorough and advanced search. After researching a bit about the topic, next I determine which databases may be relevant. There are so many databases; how do I decide which one is best? There is a [LibGuide](#) for that! Every discipline has its own LibGuide that denotes relevant databases.

I think I've given away enough of my secrets for preparing for a research appointment for one day. Just know, a lot of time and preparation goes into each one. Part of the thrill of librarianship is the ability to continually learn. Information and knowledge is endless. For me, part of the process of being a reference intern is knowing what students are learning and what information needs they have. Research appointments provide that glimpse into students' academic life, their classes and assignments. Learning about new topics at the same time as helping students make these discoveries is just one of the benefits of being a librarian.

<http://blogging.musselmanlibrary.org/2013/10/>