Syllabus Language - Academic Research and Writing Requirements

Rationale for including section in syllabus:

Students usually do not have the skills necessary to conduct academic research.

Course project instructions are often inadequate in addressing the skills needed to be successful in completing a research/writing project. Most of these projects congregate in the second half of a semester; if a student sees the basic skill requirements all semester long, they may not be caught off-guard when it comes time for the actual assignment.

Students are not motivated to learn to use the correct tool (book, reference book, specific scholarly journals, database) – the single search box or “just Google it”.

Students lack the critical thinking skills needed to judge the quality of Googled resources in relation to the assignment.

Today’s students need more things spelled out: more details on the assignment, more details on the writing requirements, why wouldn’t they also need more details on what we tend to call information literacy skills?

Developing the syllabus language may allow for opportunities to re-visit assignments, not just as they are written, but also to look at the learning objectives for those assignments, which may need to be adjusted/further elaborated. Some scaffolding techniques may be incorporated that were not before, such as scheduling one or more instruction sessions with a librarian, assigning the use of a LibGuide or working with a librarian to create a new LibGuide, incorporating lists of specific tools that must be used. Some examples of scaffolding include control over topic selection; requiring students to keep a research journal, requiring an initial list of resources, requiring a first draft and a final draft, moving from a group project to an individual project, moving from a written product to a written product plus a presentation (PowerPoint, poster), requiring something other than the standard research paper (however that is defined in your discipline); re-evaluating when assignment is given and when due, and how much time is allotted (whether to use in-class time, schedule work sessions in library)
If students see similar information across their curriculum, it may impress upon them that we are serious about their needing to learn how to use and then actually use the many resources tied to their academic path.

For faculty within a specific department, adding language like this to all courses, not just first-year, may create opportunities to discuss requirements for research papers. For example, are there standards such as minimum number of pages/resources for your first-year courses? How do those requirements change/build thru the upper courses? Do additional components need to be built into projects?

**Elements I’ve identified for the syllabus language fall into the following categories:**

1) Basic information statement
2) Student responsibility – research
3) Student responsibility – writing
4) Professor/teacher responsibility
5) Librarian support
6) Library resources
7) Web-based resources
8) Citation
9) Writing Center
10) Plagiarism

The language on the chart is divided into 4 levels and can be adapted/revised to fit any course. The goal is to have succinct but relevant information that is then enhanced by more specific language on specific assignments.

**Related documents:**


Resource Quality Grid (developed for social sciences-based research project) – one version available here
http://libguides.indstate.edu/loader.php?type=d&id=270832

Library Research Planner (generic
http://library.indstate.edu/about/units/instruction/researchplan.doc or adapted - example: Social Work – part of
http://libguides.indstate.edu/socialworkpopulation at
http://libguides.indstate.edu/loader.php?type=d&id=462246)

[The 4 items above created by Marsha Miller]

Research Guidance Rubric for Assignment Design (Grand Valley State University Libraries) http://gvsu.edu/library/research-guidance-rubric-for-assignment-design-175.htm [then click on PDF link in first paragraph]

Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (includes standards, performance indicators, outcomes)
http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency

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