2010 Faculty Institute Assignments: A Summary

On the first day of the three-day Faculty Institute, you were all presented with the Albert’s Model of the Research Process. For the developmental level of an undergraduate researcher, this model consists of six steps including: the refining of questions posed by others; guided construction of methodology through the application of methods/ techniques; being guided in methods of primary data/source collection; analyzing data for results; being directed toward scholarly sources of knowledge; and being coached in disciplinary modes of communication.

Many of the assignments created or revised during the Faculty Institute focused on one or more of the steps in the Albert’s Model and integrated Institute principles aimed at student success and assignment scalability including breaking the research process down into manageable steps (scaffolding) over the course of the semester and assessing assignments using criteria that are clearly articulated and available to students in advance (rubrics). Below are some examples of these assignments.

Research Skills Emphasized

- Students in PSY 101 (General Psychology) will be asked to develop a general research question, access a relevant empirical journal article on their topic, understand the structure of journal articles in psychology, use that article to increase their understanding of the topic, and refine their initial question based on the new information. This is a distance course, so the learning is augmented by a Web-based tutorial on finding journal articles in one of psychology’s primary databases, PsycARTICLES.

- In a Spring pilot, students in SCI 101 (First Year and Transfer Science Major Orientation) have already benefitted from more intentional scaffolding of an existing assignment, which culminates in a poster presentation on research ethics. A new component of this assignment focuses on critical reading of a scientific abstract and later, writing their own abstract to describe their poster. The assignment integrates team work with a peer, finding and analyzing an article, writing skills, and a new and improved rubric.

- Students in PHIL 101 (Introduction to Philosophy) will be guided in the application of methodology as they practice constructing valid arguments with distinct premises. They are provided with a model—a step-by-step illustration of how to construct and defend an argument that will be highly similar to the one they are developing.

- Students in MUS 125 (History of Rock Music) will be asked to take on the persona of manager of a solo artist or band and promote their artists through the creation of promotional “PR” packets. Using a “recommended resources” guide co-created by faculty member and librarian, they will locate credible information and synthesize it into a press packet template. This assignment makes use of graduate assistants as “booking agents” for grading the assignment and includes five steps scaffolded over ten weeks.
Research Skills Emphasized (cont.)

- Students in HIS 100 (Historical Issues and Contemporary Society) are being guided in the methods of primary source selection. After class discussion on the distinction between primary and secondary sources, students attend a session at the library and search for primary sources (newspaper articles) on upcoming course topics. They will then answer three questions on the relevancy of the sources they selected—which may be selected for discussion in the upcoming lecture. This assignment is also supported by a LibGuide online resource.

Process Steps Implemented for Developing Student Skills

- In addition to a content report on the history and mission of a feminist organization of their choice, students in WMST 101 (Introduction to Women’s Studies) will be asked to write a 1-2 page summary of their research process requiring them to document and reflect on the steps they took in locating their source materials.
- Students in PHIL 102 (Critical Thinking and Reasoning) are asked to find, analyze, evaluate, think critically about, and report on reasoning (or lack thereof!) found in blog entries on the web—or “in the wild.” This assignment makes intensive use of scaffolding over the course of the semester, outlines individual rubrics for each element, and includes a peer evaluation component.
- In the distance learning environment of HIS 102 (United States Since 1877) students will be working on a research project with both individual and group contributions, focusing on particular aspects of Nevada history, which relate to the larger study of U.S history from 1877 to the present. Students are required to keep, and submit periodically for feedback, a research log, which requires them to note details about the origin and purpose of the primary and secondary sources they select to include and “think like a historian” by being cognizant of the context of their sources.

As you peruse these examples and talk with your Faculty Institute colleagues about the assignments they created or revised over the Spring 2010 semester, you can see their attention to the specific learning context, their thought and creativity, and already some tweaking taking place based on results of Spring pilot testing.

We look forward to continuing the dialogue this Fall as you implement your assignments.