The Research Consultation: What Do You Do When You're Meeting with a Student?

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Keywords
research consultation, reference services, research assistance

Abstract
Research consultations are individualized research sessions tailored to meet a student’s particular information need. This infographic outlines six best practices for reference librarians or other information professionals providing research consultations to an undergraduate population.
The Research Consultation

What do you do when you’re meeting with a student? A few best practices for working with a student or small group in a research consultation

Getting Started

STEP 1
ASK QUESTIONS
The more you know beforehand, the better prepared you’ll be. What is the question they’re trying to answer? Where do they feel they’re struggling? Where have they been looking so far?

STEP 2
GIVE UP CONTROL
Keep it student-centered. Listen. Let the student do the talking (they’ll remember more). Ask questions and guide, but let the student do it.

STEP 3
MIRROR THE RESEARCH PROCESS
This is a teaching consultation model in the spreadsheet. Outline logical steps through the process that the student can follow. This is about more than finding sources for a paper; it’s about helping students become information literate, independent information users.

Wrapping Up

KEEP THE STUDENT ACTIVE
This isn’t a lecture. The student should be searching, taking notes, saving or printing articles, and recording call numbers and subject headings. They should be able to jump back into searching when on their own.

DON’T LET THEM LEAVE EMPTY-HEADED
While each student’s information need is unique, they should leave with an action plan, a guide to what to do next. If they found articles, print them. If they found books, volunteer to help them find them in the stacks.

FOLLOW UP
When you see the student again, ask: How was the process? How did they do with their research? Did they find what they needed? If not, invite them to come by the reference desk or to send you an email. They’ll remember your interest and come back again.

YOURS NOT THE RESEARCHER
As with any reference encounter, sometimes students want you to do the research for them. Try to keep it focused on search strategies. Don’t just hand them sources. Make sure they learn to evaluate and check if a source really meets their information need or if they need to revise their search.

WHAT’S NEW LATELY?
Research consultations are just another part of our information literacy instruction program. Through consultations, students are able to receive personalized assistance toward their individual information need.

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FINAL DETAILS

RECORD THE CONSULTATION:
Don’t forget to record all of the details on the consultation sheet. Making that part of your process is a good way to remember.

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2013