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

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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.

Keywords
research consultation, reference services, research assistance

Disciplines
Information Literacy | Library and Information Science
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 typing (they’ll remember more). Ask questions and guide, but let the student do it.

STEP 3
MIRROR THE RESEARCH PROCESS
Outline the 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-HANDED
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 in the library or on campus, ask how that paper or project is going. 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.

YOU’RE NOT THE RESEARCHER
As with any reference interaction, 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 plan 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 related to their individual information needs.

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

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