

*Enhancing Student Research Abilities: Information Literacy Stipend Proposal 2021*

“Communicating Expectations and Reflections on Communication & Media Research”

FINAL REPORT

Brian J. Snee, PhD  
Department of Communication and Media

Please accept this **final report** re: 2021 Information Literacy Stipend.

**Course:**

COMM 240: Communication Research Methods (Q)

**Proposed Student Learning Outcomes:**

Upon the successful completion of a series of information literacy project, students in this course will demonstrate the ability to:

- Define “research” as they understand it in the field of communication and media;
- Articulate both their expectations and their subsequent experiences locating, critically reading and concisely summarizing primary scholarship in communication and media studies;
- Reflect upon the nature and process of research in their field and speak to benefits of sharpening one’s information literacy skills.

**Proposed Assessment Plans:**

- Prior to a guest lecture by Prof. Francis Conserette, students will be required to complete a pre-questionnaire that includes at least the following questions: “How do you define ‘research?’”; “If you were given a topic you’ve never seen before, what would your approach be to research the topic?”
- Students will be required to research and write a 5-10 page Literature Review that summarizes primary scholarship in the field of communication and media. The Lit. Review should focus on a particular topic (e.g. culture and nonverbal communication) and a particular communication context (e.g. interpersonal communication).
- Students will be required to write a short (2-page) reflection paper after Prof. Conserette’s lecture that addresses definitions of research and the process by which students would now approach a research project.

**Faculty Librarian:**

Prof. Francis T. Conserette III has graciously agreed to collaborate on this project should it be funded by the committee.

**Projected Timeline:**

To be implemented in the spring 2021 section of COMM 240: Communication Research Methods (Q)

## **Final Report:**

At the beginning of the spring of 2021 semester, students in my course – COMM 240: Communication Research Methods – were asked to respond to two simple prompts about the process of conducting a research literature review. After doing so, Prof. Frank Conserette guest-lectured in my class (via zoom) and reviewed the process by which students may find primary research using the library’s online databases. Prof. Conserette also addressed the importance of distinguishing between primary sources and secondary sources, which may be found using search engines like Google and through some of the library databases. All of this was done in preparation for the final project for the semester: a 10-page thesis proposal for an independent project – one that would include a literature review of 10+ peer-reviewed academic journal articles.

Four months later, the literature reviews and thesis proposals were better than expected. Although I am new to the University of Scranton this year and thus have no benchmark for my current students’ research abilities, I can say that far more students found and reviewed acceptable material than what I have experienced at other institutions when I have assigned similar work and NOT collaborated with the library faculty. Indeed, greater than 90% of my students located and submitted papers with all, or nearly all, primary, peer-reviewed articles in relevant journals. I have not seen this result in nearly 30 years of teaching.

The final step of this semester-long experiment was to ask to the students to respond once again to the initial prompts listed above and to compare qualitatively their responses to those submitted at the beginning of the semester. The goal of course was to offer them the opportunity to reflect on what they had assumed, on what they learned, and on what they had accomplished. Although I had initially intended to ask them to write a short paper, I opted instead to have them retake the 2-question “quiz” used earlier in the semester so as not to take time away from the completion of their thesis proposals.

It is apparent that a far greater percentage of the students now have a much better understanding of both the process of research and of the difference between primary, peer-reviewed publication and other secondary sources than at the beginning of the term. The collaboration was therefore an undeniable success.

Once again, I wish to thank the committee for the time it has devoted to reviewing my proposal and now final report, and especially Prof. Conserette for collaborating on this project. My students clearly benefited from his insights and instruction.

Brian Snee, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Communication & Media  
Brian.Snee@Scranton.edu