

# RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

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**UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**  
 **University College**

STATE UNIVERSITY  
GLOBAL CAMPUS



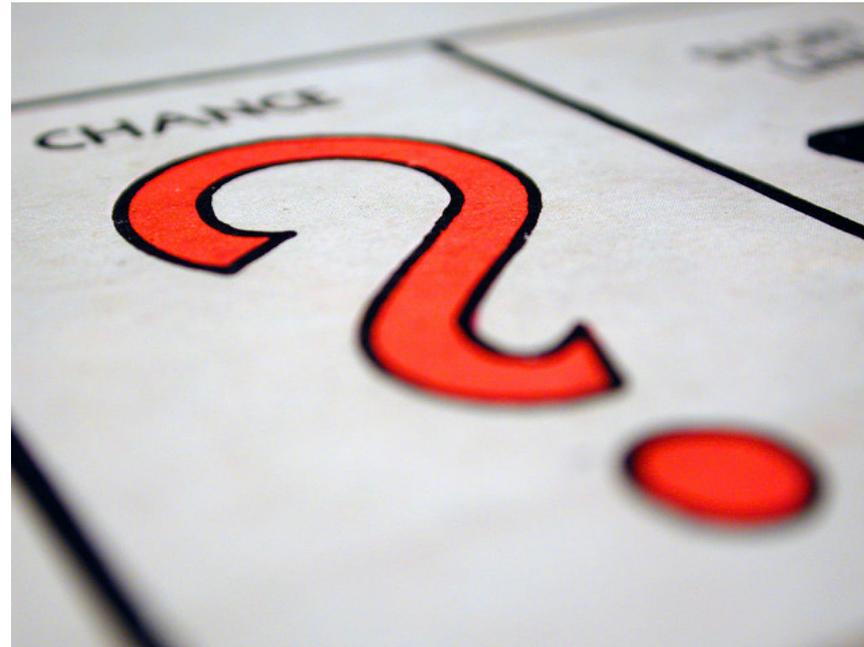


# Assignment design at UMUC

- Assignment design takes place at the departmental level
  - Department chair
  - Course chair (SME)
  - Instructional designer



# Rethinking course (and assignment) design



# Our guidelines

- [https://sites.umuc.edu/library/libservices/research\\_assignment\\_guidelines.cfm](https://sites.umuc.edu/library/libservices/research_assignment_guidelines.cfm)

## Research Assignment Guidelines

Research assignments may prove difficult for students who have limited experience with conducting college-level research. Based on UMUC librarians' extensive work helping students with research assignments, we offer the following guidelines for effective assignment design.

- **Test the assignment** before it goes live, to make sure that students will be able to find relevant information sources in the time period available to them to complete the assignment.
  - *Example:* If you are choosing a topic for the class to research, try first researching the topic yourself. For instance, if the topic has to do with a company's financial performance, is there enough publicly available financial information that a student can easily access and use?
  - Similarly, when students propose their own research topic, try quickly searching for information about it; it may be that a topic is too obscure to be viable and the student who proposed it may need to be steered toward a topic that's more suitable.
- **Build in effective instructions** within the assignment.



# Our guidelines

- Test the assignment before it goes live
- Build in effective instructions
- Require the use of appropriate sources



# Test the assignment

- Just . . . test . . . it



# Build in effective instructions

- Link to helpful websites and databases
- Suggest keyword searches
- Suggest search strategies
- Define unfamiliar terms (*peer reviewed; primary source*)



# Require appropriate sources

- Depending on the topic and the class's level of expertise, students often are well advised to use sources other than scholarly journal articles:
  - Subject encyclopedias
  - Trustworthy websites
  - Newspapers & magazines
- “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual”



# Other guidelines

- Encourage student questions about the assignment
- Actively solicit feedback from students about the assignment
- Be transparent! Explain to students:
  - What you're asking them to do (the “task”)
  - Why they have to do it (the “purpose”)
  - How they'll be graded (the “criteria”)
    - Berrett, D. (2015, September 21). The unwritten rules of college. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.



# Libguides we link to

- Seneca College's Libraries' [Building better assignments](#)
- Carnegie Mellon University's Eberly Center's [Creating assignments](#)
- Gettysburg College's Musselman Library's [Integrating information literacy into your classes](#)
- University of Pennsylvania's Penn Libraries' [Creating successful research skills assignments](#)



# Moving forward

- Scalability
- What will competency-based, workplace-oriented assignments even look like?



# Intentional design

“We all have these things that we’re subconsciously looking for when we grade assignments . . . that we’re regularly disappointed with. And then you get to poking around in your assignments and realize that nowhere in there do you ever really ask [your students] to demonstrate those things.”

Hutchings, P., Jankowski, N. A., & Schultz, K. E. (2016). Designing effective classroom assignments: Intellectual work worth sharing. *Change*, 48(1), 6–15. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.umuc.edu/10.1080/00091383.2016.1121080>



# Please be in touch

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