SELECTING ARCHIVES—PRODUCING ORIGINAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION:

We all get bombarded with students “rushing” to the Internet or as soon as we ask a question, they click on “Google” for the answer. And yes, the answers are there.

A collaboration between a Professor in the English department and the College Archivist yielded two exciting groups of researchers. The assignment: Write a research paper on the history of Queensborough Community College, a part of the City University of New York. The students were given some topics, but as they browsed the collection, additional topics emerged.

Primary research has been proven to stimulate interest and provide a great source of information for student research.

BACKGROUND:

Slide 2:

Queensborough Community College is one of 21 colleges in the City University of New York. Within the five boroughs, there are now 7 community colleges. The College is located in one of the most diverse populations in the United States. Our Bayside, Queens campus sits on a 37 acre site.

Slide 3:

The Library is truly the “heart” of the campus. Students study, stop in after classes, during lunch breaks, socialize or just congregate!

Slide 4:

The Assignment: Students are each given a folder with an article from JSTOR discussing the history of the College and the riots from the 60’s, a listing of topics held in the College Archives, and permission forms to sign. Each student must only use documents viewed, scanned, or copied for research purposes only. The classroom Professor gives additional details of the assignment.

Slide 5:

Students are then permitted to go to the Archives and search for boxes with topics of interest. Each student returns with boxes, places on gloves and begins their discoveries.

Slide 6:
Documents include Letters, approximately 12%, diaries-6%, newspapers and transcripts-28%, photos-32% and artifacts-22%.

Slide 7:
Students consult with classroom Professor as information is located.

Slide 8:
A student enters information from documents in tablet and continues research.

Slide 9:
Student select most interesting finds to share with class.

Slide 10:
Library Assistant allows student to return to Archives to get additional materials.

Slide 11:
Student examines old Ektachrome slides and diaries.

Slide 12:
Students show enthusiasm and they delve into clues asking specific questions. Students made appointments with College Archivist to return for additional research time.

Slide 13:
Class Assignment: Chart shows Inquiry stage, Prior Knowledge, Gathering Primary Documents, Critical Thinking Skills and Need for Additional Resources.

Goals and Objectives:

- To elevate and enhance participants use and understanding of primary resources
- To learn to identify primary resources
- Example: Photos—learn to apply criteria to determine dates of photos—or even the decade. Participants will be asked to observe clothing, environment, hair styles, and body image to determine unavailable dates of photos.
- Students are taught to observe and discriminate materials that they examine.

“In the active learning classroom, learners fashion their own meanings by playing with concepts and discovering new knowledge, building on prior knowledge as they compare, interrogate, and challenge ideas. This process is most successful when students are given the opportunity to share, compare ideas and reason together”. (Cooperstein and Kocevar-Weidinger 142).

- **Inquiry**—is the process of learning that is driven by questioning, thoughtful investigation, making sense of information and developing new understandings.
“Locating and analyzing must be embedded in every assignment, class session and reading (Deyrup 46)

• **Prior Knowledge**-students must begin research without going to outside sources to frame process.

• **Gathering Primary Documents**-students must freely be able to browse collection and discover topics of interest.

  One starts with the gathering of data (knowledge), then the evaluation of those data (analysis) and finally the synthesizing of that analysis into a new whole (Deyrup 46)

• **Critical Thinking Skills**-Students construct their own understandings, draw conclusions, create new knowledge and share their knowledge with others. Students generate new standards emphasizing questioning and critical thinking which is as important to students’ learning as their information finding.

• **Need Additional Resources**-Students decide if databases or the Internet is needed to complete research paper.

  As the student examines documents, he either needs to prove or disprove the information located. At this point, additional resources may be required.

The College Archivist explained what to expect in the College Archives, how to navigate to find information needed. As boxes were located, the students returned to share their findings. Each primary source allows the researcher a first-hand response to items viewed. The individual decides how the information fits. A different perspective is possible at this point that leads the researcher to continue and delve further in databases, the internet or to continue seeking more primary resources to substantiate a theory or to prove what happened.

As students returned and began evaluating information located, interest peaked as each student viewed documents. Some asked, “Did this really happen?” Evaluating handwriting, fragile documents, and events that occurred before these researchers were born initiated interesting discussions among the professors and students. As a result of this encounter, students are better connected to the content as they observe, evaluate, and decide how the information fits in their research.