Freshmen & Research at the University of Idaho Library

By Diane Prorak

“My first thought was that it was huge.” This is the reaction of one fairly typical first-year student to the UI Library. It’s the biggest library many new students have ever visited. Another typical comment, “Different set up than what I am used to,” refers to academic libraries using the Library of Congress call number system rather than the Dewey Decimal System.

Many freshmen say they have only done research on the Internet and many do not know searching and evaluation techniques that can help them find relevant and high-quality sources. Some new students report that they have never done a research paper, but within the first few weeks of school, many freshman at UI will be assigned one.

Through our library instruction program, some will have class sessions that help them with this potentially daunting task, but some will not. Perhaps they are not taking a course that typically has a library instruction component (e.g. English 102), or a professor may assume the students know how to do library research. Librarians reach out to students in many settings (orientation, online, social media, in the library) to let students know that they can get research assistance almost any time. However, some students are still overwhelmed.

Here are some ways you can help them be ready for college research:

1. Introduce students to LiLI article databases. Requiring sources that are more edited than websites will get them ready to use the library databases available in college libraries and necessary for college research. Students who use LiLI article databases in high school nod in recognition when we introduce them to ours.

2. Teach students to evaluate every source they consider for a project. Instruct them to be very skeptical; ask hard questions about possible bias or accuracy; and use the CRAAP test criteria (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy & Purpose).

3. Teach students to ask for help. The college library may seem huge, or organized with a strange call number system. But because information is a changing, complicated world, no one knows how to find all the information they need. Librarians are there to help—REALLY. They actually want to help! We tell our students: Don’t waste time—ask!

Find out more about what UI librarians teach our English 102 students about research at http://libguides.uidaho.edu/engl102 or contact Diane Prorak, Library Instruction Coordinator at UI Library at prorak@uidaho.edu.