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Encouraging Student Research and Writing
in the Humanities

WHY HERE & NOW

Research is new knowledge. New to whom? Research projects at all levels are interesting to the learner. It's a way to get students invested in their learning, decentralized and anti-authoritarian.

New knowledge is a charged environment. Questions of epistemology, method, and authority are long-standing. You know it; students don't. Remind everyone what this means pedagogically and socially (language, race, gender, class, etc.). Discuss literacy explicitly as a research tool and a marker of class.

II. CUNY, New York City. Student body brings in a great variety of alternative epistemologies. Humanities can suggest to students how their knowledges matter. Research is one way to formulate questions about the form and purpose of education, relationship between institutions/teachers, and students.

Arts&Humanities are the fields of optimism when conventional political venues have been exhausted, i.e., now. Offer art, history, philosophy etc. as ways of asking crucial questions that others don't know how to articulate because they were not encouraged to go 'that far.'

WHAT TO DO:

Listen to students' reactions to assignments in class, to reading and writing. Encourage whatever excitement and learn to sustain it. Allow independent projects or build them into the syllabus. Students sometimes freak out about this; you can become the person who knows not the material, but that the work can be done.

Assign phased research projects: students should bring in questions, key words, drafts, presentations (instead of hear lectures, take exams, write polished papers). Allow genre experiments; discuss why questions of form are crucial (literacy, competence, tone, media).

Consider teaching a research-intensive undergraduate course (LIT379 in English). No permission required, and a great 'sequel' to a 300-level course in the major. [historical perspective, major req. LIT374 19th-C Lit: Literature and Revolution > LIT379 Women and Revolution]

Use amazing research resources in NYC: CUNY and other academic libraries (e.g., Tamiment at NYU), research branches of NYPL, New York Historical Society, MoMA, etc.

Mention or offer Independent Study sessions to potential researchers (currently 0.3 for work with one student for a semester): meet regularly and push the student to investigate confusions and big questions, to follow their hunches about what's interesting and how interests shift with learning. Establish clear deadlines, so Honors projects end honorably.