

Understanding How Students Search for Information: Key Observations



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**Students are
often fuzzy
about
instructors'
expectations
and research
requirements**



[Tambako the Jaguar](#)

“Yeah, [the instructor] definitely gave us a sheet, just a paper of the guidelines that he was looking for in the paper and I don't remember what they were.”

“When teachers are so vague I just kind of do whatever I want to do because if they don't give you all these set guidelines you don't have to follow those rules, there's no rules to abide by, so you just kind of make your own. Like you just make assumptions.”

“[The professor] showed us the school database, which I never even knew about until that class, and she had a lot of helpful forms. [Q: Tell me what you mean by database?] I'm not too sure. I'm assuming it's what the school has collected as actual original print forms of what we're reading, and then collecting it into a database in which it could be offered to all students here at DePaul. I'm not too sure if that's what it is, but I think so.”

Students are unsure of how the search process works



The young people's librarian points out "what to read" on the list of Books for Young People, published by the New York Public Library.

“The only roadblock I would say is too much information for my last research paper. There was a lot of information and I got a little worried that maybe if I read something in this book it would say something completely different in the other book, and then I would have to make that decision between which one do I agree with or which one is more relevant.”

“When it comes to history ... this level of resources is so huge and so you're not able to grasp it all within a 2 week timeframe. At the same time, you don't want to be rummaging through history textbooks. ... I mean, they're fabulous encyclopedias, but those are too short, so you've got a page and a half or an entire book, and there's very little in between. It would be nice if there were an online database that mimicked what Wikipedia did but was trustworthy for professors. Because the best equivalent that I can think of or at least that DePaul has is Encyclopedia Britannica, which is pure crap. There's very few articles, they're very short. They're sporadic in a weird way. They're unusable. I never use it anymore. It's awful.”

“I probably needed more time [writing this paper]. Just because I wasn't expecting to see so much stuff out there and having to wade through it all.”

Students stick with what is familiar and comfortable



“I’m part of the McNair Scholars program, so I went to [the assistant director] and he knew how to explain everything to me.”

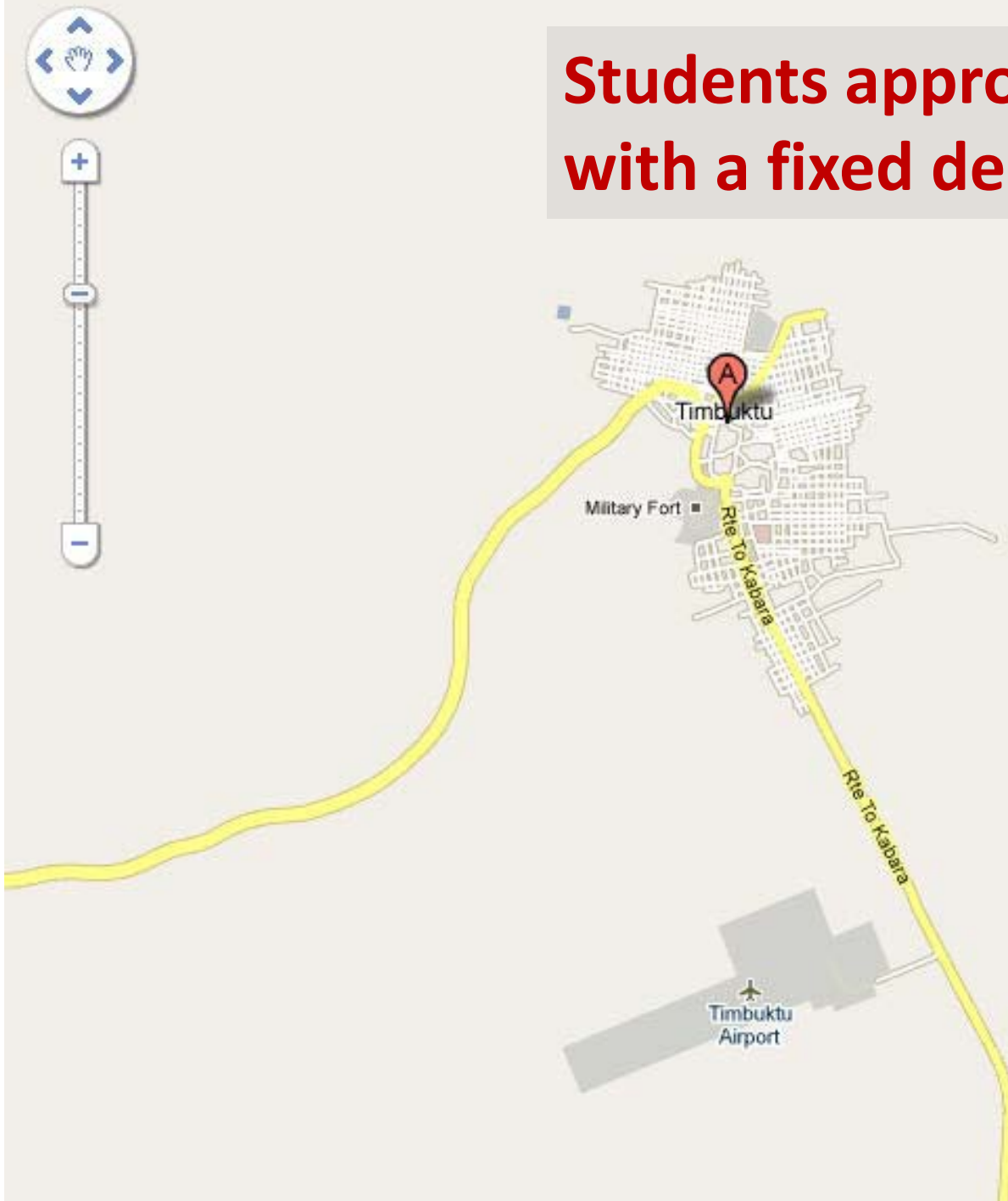
“I used a lot of information from one of my professors. He’s published a lot of articles and books.”

“A lot of the problems I've encountered had to do with reliability. I mean, if I'm looking for movie fads and I type in "High School Musical" I'm going to get a lot of Disney hooah saying, "Oh, this is the best movie ever." But nothing really supporting my idea unless I really dig deep and go to page 64 of 4000 in Google.”

“Teachers would actually bring us to the library and librarians would help us out and stuff, but in the end I wouldn't end up using it. I would just browse the internet rather than the school database or anything. I just find that a lot easier.”

“I shared my topic [with my friends] and what I thought about it and just asked them what they did, and just see some similarities between what I would read on the internet and then what they actually thought about it. Pretty much that. Using their words was easier to convey in my paper than sometimes the scholarly articles. They are pretty much the same thing, but it was just a lot easier to understand.”

Students approach research with a fixed destination in mind



“When like well, I would come up with an idea first like the one issue regarding bilingualism, education I thought that first and then when I would look through the source I would read things that the author said that was really pertained to how, it’s like the author was saying what I wanted to say, so I used their ideas, you know but put it in my own words.”

“I was able to find articles that pertained to the topic, but not articles that necessarily supported my view. Or even supported a particular viewpoint more that said this is the problem, we think you should consider this, this, and this...part of it too was just I chose a hard topic. You know, I think that if I had chosen something a little bit simpler I might not have run into these issues as much.”

“I basically Googled and Yahooed everything. ... I just used online articles. Other than that one specific research assignment where they forced us to use libraries, I never used any books in any classes ever. And I got all, like B+s and above. ... It just felt like it was a lot of work, like having to go to the library, look through all the aisles, find the books...I know that's not even the hard part, it's just the fact that I know I've got to read the books. It was just like why am I even going to go over there if I'm not even really reading? ... But my friends all use the internet, and we don't go to the library. That's kind of why I think I feel comfortable not going.”

**Knowing this, what do
we do differently?**

