SAMPLE
First Year Seminar
Successful Research Assignment

→ Library Day 1: Tuesday, September 10th.
→ Library Day 2: Monday, September 23rd.
→ First draft due Monday, October 1st.
→ Final draft due Friday, October 12th.

The prompt: Pick a particular skill/craft/technique and write a research paper comparing and contrasting some aspect of that skill through time. The major goal of this assignment is to practice evaluating, interpreting, and citing authoritative information.

You may pick from the following list or email me your pitch for a different option (note the format of the options below before you try to pitch your idea to me). I need to know that there is enough authoritative information available and that the topic is well-developed enough to fit the prompt above. If you want to choose a topic other than those below, you must finalize this with me prior to Monday, 9/23.

- Knitting is often a social activity today – McDaniel has a knitting club (ask Dr. Mitchler!), baseball teams hold knitting days at some home games, and most yarn stores have space set aside for people to hang out and knit. Knitting guilds started in the 1400s in France, but were exclusively male. Yet, knitting has been characterized as a more typically “female” activity over the last century. You could write a paper comparing and contrasting modern knitting circles with those old knitting guilds: what drove those movements, what changed it from a “male” activity to a “female” activity, why did people knit in the 1400s versus now, etc.

- The term “homesteading” comes from laws called “homestead acts”, which were used in the 19th and 20th centuries to encourage citizens to populate certain areas of the country. For example, the Homestead Act of 1862 granted any U.S. citizen land in the west (about 160 acres) so long as they were willing to farm and live on it for at least 5 years. Currently, “homesteading” refers to a social and economic movement that focuses on self-sufficiency and getting “back to the land” – growing your own food, sustainable homemaking, etc. Some homesteaders have taken so far as to generate their own electricity and live off the grid. The U.S. has seen two homesteading movements after the homestead acts: one in the 1960s, and one that started in the 1990s and continues today. You could write a paper comparing and contrasting homesteading in the late 1800’s/early 1900’s (using the modern definition of homesteading), the 1960s, and today: what kinds of things did people do in the three time periods, what was their motivation, etc.

- Victory gardens (also known as war gardens or food gardens for defense) were food gardens planted in both public parks and at people’s homes during World Wars I and II. The idea was that by having people grow their own food (and some for the war effort), costs for food would decrease and therefore cost the U.S. less money to feed its troops. These types of visible food gardens in people’s front yards and in public areas lost favor after the war, to the point where in many neighborhoods it is currently against code to have a front-yard vegetable garden. However, public and visible food gardening is becoming popular again. In Westminster, for example, we have community food gardens in public places, there are gardening classes in Carroll County that you can take for $10, and recently, McDaniel students won a grant to start a composting initiative on campus. (Also, ask Professors Scullion, Ambrose, and/or Martinson about the McDaniel farm!) These are all community-driven efforts. You could write a paper comparing and contrasting home and public food gardening during WWI and II with today’s home and public food gardening: the purpose of doing these types of gardens, why they fell out of favor and have come back, etc.

The assignment was originally created by a Dr. Lisa Whitenack at Allegheny College and was modified by a member of the McDaniel Faculty.
Comparing and contrasting:
Note that for all of the possible topics, I am asking you to compare and contrast two or more time periods. It is not enough to say “there are some similarities and some differences”. You need to actually talk about what those similarities and differences are. In addition, you don’t want your paper to be a list of similarities, followed by a list of differences. Before you start writing and organizing your information, you should check out the following webpage: http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/comparing-and-contrasting/
I really like this particular resource because it gives great advice for organizing your information so that you know how to focus your paper, how to construct the thesis statement for your paper, and how to organize your paper.

About resources:
I am asking you not to rely on webpages as resources for this assignment. As you move through your career at McDaniel, websites and similar internet resources will generally be considered to be off limits as a source for a paper. What does this mean for you today?

- An e-book or a paper that you read online is not an internet resource. For example, if I find an electronic copy of a paper published in a research journal on knitting in the 14th century, we do not consider that an internet resource.
- Wikipedia is an internet resource. It’s ok for background to get you up to speed, but it is not ok to cite as a source for a paper.
- Big Bob’s Homesteading Resource Page is an internet resource. It’s Bob’s personal homepage about homesteading. This is not ok to use as a source for a paper.
- Anything you find using Hoover library’s website (and usually Google Scholar) is an acceptable resource.
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<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citation of authoritative information</td>
<td>- Selection of sources showed considerable/advanced discernment for choice of quality and appropriateness to meet the requirements of the assignment</td>
<td>- The majority of the resources cited are of acceptable quality and derived from an authoritative source.</td>
<td>- Citation of sources showed little discernment of the author's authority on the topic.</td>
<td>- Student cited sources that have little information about authorship or cited authors that have no credentials for providing expertise on that subject.</td>
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<td>Incorporation of information resources in the body of the work</td>
<td>- Consistent incorporation of sources. - Considerable / advanced discernment for choice of quality &amp; appropriateness.</td>
<td>- Incorporated sources to support premise contextually and appropriately most of the time.</td>
<td>- Sources were incorporated out of context or the author’s views were used inappropriately to support paper’s premise.</td>
<td>- Few sources uses. - Little backup to arguments. - Failed to provide sources in key places to support the research. - Not possible to determine how many works cited were used in the body of the work.</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
<td>- Purpose clearly stated in introduction - Subject and theme clear and maintained throughout piece - Has effective conclusion</td>
<td>- Purpose/theme stated in opening or conclusion - Subject and theme clear and maintained through majority of piece - Has conclusion</td>
<td>- Purpose not clearly stated, but hinted at - Subject and theme sometimes maintained - Ends abruptly</td>
<td>- Reader must completely infer purpose/theme - Unrelated ideas included throughout piece - Ends abruptly</td>
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<td>Elaboration and Supporting Details</td>
<td>- The paper compares and contrasts items clearly. - The paper points to specific examples to illustrate the comparison. - The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison</td>
<td>- The paper compares and contrasts items clearly, but the supporting information is general. - The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison.</td>
<td>- The paper compares and contrasts items clearly, but the supporting information is incomplete. - The paper may include information that is not relevant to the comparison.</td>
<td>- No attempt at description or confusing description - The paper compares or contrasts, but does not include both. - There is no supporting information or support is incomplete.</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>- Clear sequence of episodes, moving logically through time - Use of paragraphs to organize events/themes - Use of transitions to move between thoughts</td>
<td>- Most paragraphing is appropriate - Most transitions are appropriate</td>
<td>- Narrative structure is noticeable, but with gaps - Some paragraphs do not work with the narrative - Transitions are simplistic or redundant</td>
<td>- Random presentation of ideas - Confusing paragraph structure - No transitions</td>
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<td>Mechanics</td>
<td>- Consistent noun/verb agreement - Consistent verb tense - Complete sentences - No grammar issues - No punctuation issues</td>
<td>- Consistent noun/verb agreement - Consistent verb tense - Complete sentences - Correct use of grammar and punctuation with minimal issues</td>
<td>- Occasional errors in noun/verb agreement - Occasional incomplete or run-on sentences - Occasional grammar and punctuation errors</td>
<td>- Frequent errors in sentence structure, noun/verb agreement, grammar, and punctuation</td>
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