**The Value of a Student Research Assistant**

My research assistant helps me with archival research into the historical activities of settlers in the Shuswap River Valley, in the north Okanagan region of southern British Columbia. The RA’s tasks include reading historical documents that I have previously collected. With these documents, the RA takes notes and copies critical quotations related to the research objectives. Additionally, the RA prepares an annotated bibliography identifying the key published and unpublished sources. The bibliography explains why the sources are useful – or not – and thus provides a basic record of what research work has been completed. The RA is also looking for unidentified source material through internet and library research and through an online review of the BC Archives.

In doing this, my RA is learning the practical skills or professional research. This includes the importance of record-keeping and systematic review of sources. The RA is also seeing a research project at its initial stages and thus has the chance to see a project develop. More specific skills include learning about British Columbia history from settler perspectives and coming to some understanding about how settler history colours Aboriginal history and our understanding of it. It should not be lost that the student receives payment for these services and the work stands as employment relevant to his education.

The RA allows me to conduct research-related activities, and move my research agenda forward, during a teaching semester. If I did not have an RA, this work would have to wait until my non-teaching semester. The RA is providing me with a time-saving service whereby I gain a sense of where I will need to commit my research time in the future. He provides an initial assessment of source material.

Finally, RAs are important because they allow us, as teachers, to move the education of our students outside of the classroom. They allow us to provide students with practical skills and some funding. I can work on research projects during a teaching term.

**Summary Notes**

Do

* Internet-based research
* Archival research
* Reading
* Note-taking
* Writing (annotated bibliography), notes, overview assessments
* Data collection

Learn

* History of a part of BC, from settler perspective
* Differences between settler history and indigenous history
* Process of systematic, professional research – from conception of project to the collection of data

Helps Me

* Identifies the sources I need to spend time with
* Creates a research record of what’s been done and what’s still to be done
* Provides initial assessments of sources and their value to the research project
* Allows me to conduct research-related activities during a teaching semester!

Why RAs are Important

* Moves classroom-based learning into the realm of the practical and skill-oriented
* Allows faculty to pursue a research agenda in addition to teaching load