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### **Legal Research and the Writing Process**

As society continues to develop by advancing technology and continuing resource use, the way we interact with the environment and how it affects humans is quickly becoming a pressing issue. Among many controversial topics in my environmental law class (ENSP330) of fall 2010, I chose the use and regulation of bisphenol A (BPA) as the topic of my term paper. Current events surrounding BPA interest me because of the breadth of products that use this chemical. BPA is considered a miracle chemical by some manufacturers because it provides durability and flexibility to items that we constantly use of a daily basis. I felt that by discovering the legal framework surrounding BPA regulation I could better understand its inclusion to the list of chemicals and additives that concern the average consumer.

The research process began with a presentation by Judy Markowitz, Government and Politics Librarian. This presentation showed me that legal research and writing was very different from other types of research because previous laws set a precedent for how I would synthesize my writing into a proposal for changes of BPA regulation. The legal research guide that I used after the presentation was helpful in gaining new resources because I relied on Credo Reference and Science Direct, sources that were new to me for legal research. One unique part of this project was finding actual cases and applying them to my new proposal. The Westlaw research database was effective in finding cases that showed the patterns of consumer unrest regarding BPA in products they bought. This legal research guide also helped with the basic legal citation format because that too was very different from the usual MLA citation I was most familiar with. I evaluated these sources based on the perspective they gave to the use of

bisphenol A. I evaluated the bias of chemical industry publications and looked at the purely scientific approach of resources such as *Green Politics: An A-to-Z Guide* where BPA was described as an endocrine disrupter. My goal was to find a variety of sources with different views. This allowed me to see where the controversy of BPA usage arises. Some sources agreed it was an endocrine disrupter and mimicked human hormones but there were discrepancies regarding the extent of the effects of the chemical on the human body.

I sought out the help of my teacher, Joanna Goger, for assistance in writing my paper. This was an incredibly valuable experience because she gave me a better visualization of the final product that should result from all the sources I collected. Through a conference, Ms. Goger and I discussed that when we look at the nature of BPA and industry, what exactly should be altered about it. This helped me focus my research methods so that I would find the legal framework specific to different demographics. In the end, I formed my proposal by noting how laws should be changed to protect children and babies as the ultimate standard because they are the most vulnerable consumer demographic. Conferencing with Ms. Goger allowed me to think of my proposal in less theoretical terms and made me formulate a real world outline. I researched possible BPA alternatives because I wanted to create a proposal that was economically feasible in the industrial sector. Even though there was consumer unrest, the bottom line of profits were important in my decision of how we can protect consumer health and still use the convenient plastics of our daily lives.

Without exaggeration, writing this proposal was truly an eye opening experience. I learned to take what I read from simply being facts in an article or case document to properly synthesizing the information and applying it to the goal of a new proposal. The research process helped me further my academic career because it showed me the power of information. When I

realized that I needed to connect my final proposal decision to the real world, I looked deeper into my research to find information on current substitutes to BPA. This showed me that by thinking critically there is no limit to gaining knowledge and achieving a thorough end product in my next research assignment.