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Library Research Award Essay
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For my ENSP340 class during Fall 2011, I wrote a research paper entitled “Addressing Leadership and Funding Needs for Great Lakes Restoration: Nearshore Health Concerns.” I completed an internship during Summer of 2011 for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Water in which I did research on Great Lakes beach water quality. I gained surface knowledge of the overarching policies that govern Great Lakes restoration priorities, but I knew I could delve deeper into my area of study through library resources like Research Port’s databases and journal article finder, as well as the Catalog’s numerous online and printed resources. Government and Politics librarian Judy Markowitz created a class resource page for my course, which was a helpful starting point for research topics.

I discovered my sources by starting with library tools such as the Catalog search and database searches. To get a broad overview of Great Lakes beach policies, I looked through news databases like “Greenwire,” “Climate Wire,” and “Environment and Energy Daily.” I was able to find relevant news articles about bacterial contamination of Great Lakes beaches. I found it very convenient that even when I was at home, I could still log into the library website and access database information.

After reading through current news articles, I searched through the database subject list, identified “Environmental Studies” as my main subject, and did keyword searches in the “Environmental Science and Pollution Management,” “Academic Search Premier,” and “Agricola” databases. From these databases I learned about the scientific aspects of beach bacterial contamination. I was also introduced to policy responses for bacteria testing results.

Once I had explored the news and science background of my topic, I used the Catalog search to find relevant policy resources. I had never heard of a SU Document before I did a Catalog search, but most of the online and printed SU Documents I found were very helpful. Because of the library’s extensive collection, I was able to read actual transcripts of Senate and House Subcommittee hearings that related to my topic. This information added credibility and substance to the political and ethical components of my paper. I also checked out books on the Great Lakes that provided me with background information.

Meeting with my instructor, Ms. Joanna Goger, and participating in a course-specific research session with Judy Markowitz greatly aided my research. Ms. Goger helped me narrow down my topic, and she reviewed my preliminary outline. Speaking with her allowed me to articulate the reasoning for my topic choice. In addition, the session with Ms. Markowitz provided me with tips on how to efficiently search through the library's resources. She reiterated the important concept of following the trail left by source bibliographies. I found research articles or government documents, and I was able to identify more authors and sources that were relevant to my paper.

Because my paper was very inter-disciplinary in nature, I chose a wide variety of credible sources. I searched for news articles that were both recent and relevant to my topic. I carefully evaluated any information by assessing each author's credibility and corroborating facts with other sources. The SU Documents were excellent primary sources that included hearing testimonies and background information about each hearing. The witnesses were generally from a leading restoration organization, serving in a public office, or working as a scientist in the Great Lakes region. I found out about many government documents and reports from reading news articles and policy papers. These government documents allowed me to verify information and look at the restoration situation from another perspective.

During the research process, I learned about perseverance during research, the wealth of information produced by the government, and how to incorporate a variety of perspectives into my writing. Before I began this assignment, I had never written a paper as long as twenty pages. I had to persevere in my research and follow available topic threads to find the necessary information. I relied heavily on government reports and legislative documents to understand the political side of my topic choice. I believe this knowledge of available resources will help me in the future if I decide to work for the government, an environmental consulting firm, or a non-profit organization. I also worked very hard to incorporate a variety of perspectives into my writing, which is important for any career and further academic research. I believe I represented a variety of viewpoints in this paper by using news articles, reports, and government documents as my sources.