

Reflective Essay: Library Award For Undergraduate Research

I began writing my research paper, “The Link Between Cardiovascular Disease and Chronic Kidney Disease: A Literature Review,” for Professor James Goodwin’s ENGL395 professional writing class. The assignment was to construct a literature review of recent literature on a topic relevant to health professions. I strive to attain a career in medicine, and it was this drive that motivated me to pick my topic.

I did not know exactly what I wanted my topic to be when I began this assignment, all I knew is that I wanted it to be related to the medical field as closely as possible. I am a behavioral and community health major, and in our major of study we learn all about public health and what can be done to alleviate health issues in the community. This led me to begin searching for cardiovascular disease research topics, as cardiovascular disease is extremely prevalent in the United States, with heart disease being one of the leading causes of death. I figured that I might learn something new about cardiovascular disease, so I began to search for causes of and linkages to cardiovascular disease. That is when I came upon the link between kidney disease and cardiovascular disease. I had never heard that this was an issue before, so I decided that I may as well learn something new while completing this literature review.

I began my research by first going to the UMD library main page and accessing the worldcat database. This led me to my first source, as well as many others. Worldcat, in combination with Google Scholar and a few other databases customary to the academic community, became extremely familiar tools in my possession as I continued my research. I began to search for key words and phrases such as “renal failure,” “end stage renal disease,” “mild renal insufficiency,” and “serum creatinine concentration.” I utilized the ILL (Interlibrary Loan) system to acquire several sources that I could not find online for free through the UMD databases, which helped me complete my literature review. Without these sources, I fear my literature review would have been missing crucial information pertaining to my topic.

A few librarians in Mckeldin Library assisted me through the Interlibrary Loan process, as I had not used it before this literature review. The expertise and knowledge of the librarians working at the libraries of the University of Maryland was paramount in my effort to obtain sources via the ILL system. They walked me through the process and seemed to know it like the back of their hand. A few librarians directed me to print sources that I would be able to use for my research paper, but as I flipped through some of the sources, I recognized that the information presented in some of them was outside of the acceptable date range my professor had provided for the assignment. Thus, I utilized electronic journals and databases to the fullest extent possible.

Selecting resources was not so much the difficult part of the research process as was the procedure of sorting sources by relevance. In my literature review, I organized the sources by their focus on a certain aspect of my topic as opposed to organization by date or some other categorization method. Sorting the references I found by subtopic was strenuous, but after diligent and thorough scanning of the resources, I ended up with a finalized references section. Evaluation of the credibility of the sources I found was relatively simple, as I did a quick search on the authors of each resource I selected as well

as looked into the journal they were published in. These inquiries into the credibility of the sources I was reviewing helped me to evaluate whether or not they warranted a spot on my references list.

The process of researching this topic shed light on several aspects of cardiovascular disease and kidney failure that I had not previously known. At the beginning of the research process, when the literature review was assigned to the class, I was not even aware of the fact that there was a link between cardiovascular disease and kidney disease. Performing research for this literature review provided more knowledge to me than any other research project I had previously completed. The knowledge that I gained from performing this literature review has the possibility to help me further advance my interests in medicine and could provide a stepping stone in the research process needed to attend medical school. I now have valuable experience utilizing online databases and library resources to efficiently find resources and information on a wide array of topics that can allow me contribute to the overall academic body of knowledge.

Reflecting on my research process, I think I would add a few more sources to my literature review. I plan on furthering my research on this topic, and possibly attempting to publish my material after the research is completed. However, I am deeply thankful to the library staff at Mckeldin for providing me with the tools I needed to complete this literature review, and for introducing me to the Interlibrary Loan system, a system that I could not have completed my research without. I would also look to see if the library carries current editions of medical journals, so that I may browse for more recent research on my topic. The library system at the University of Maryland is very well conducted, and more students should utilize the great resources available to them.