

Dr. Prell, my research methods professor, had announced during the semester that we would have two research projects: one qualitative and one quantitative. Originally, I had felt that my mind was oriented towards qualitative methodology, and that I wouldn't enjoy working on my final project which was the quantitative project. In fact, when brainstorming ideas, I originally drew a blank. I wasn't sure if my research interests aligned with quantitative methodology because I felt as though I liked making sense of sociological phenomena instead of trying to quantify and generalize results to large populations. It is important to note, that Dr. Prell gave us the freedom pick a topic of our choosing as long as it fell in line with the variables in the General Social Survey.

I started to think about my interest in the war on drugs. The General Social Survey (GSS) had a variable that looked at attitudes towards national spending on drug addiction, and I used to play around with this particular variable in my labs for class. Actually, I've always been interested in the phenomenon known as the war on drugs, and my interest reached an all-time high after reading Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" last summer. Her book framed the criminal justice approach to substance abuse as a phenomenon that was systematically and deliberately stratifying communities and families. It was a concept that was helping to maintain social control and ensure that minority communities (who often lack power and proper political representation) remain in the same positions and classes.

I went back and forth between choosing the war on drugs idea and another topic because I wasn't exactly sure if the GSS variable would capture exactly what I was looking for. Additionally, I was afraid that the war on drugs would be too simple of a topic and that I wouldn't be able to write anything particularly "insightful". However, it couldn't have been any clearer that I needed to write on the war on drugs for my final project because I could indeed capture opinions on the topic by focusing on the attitudes towards spending on drug addiction. It is to say that these attitudes, like "we're spending too much" do say quite a bit about one's opinions towards how the nation is dealing with the war on drugs. I

had much to say on the topic and my ideas were typically supported by scholarly literature.

Speaking of literature, I was able to discover my sources in a variety of ways. Dr. Prell and my TA, Tuesday Barnes, had introduced our class to a sociological database called SocIndex which they had found on UMD's library site. This site was a hub for sociological journal articles, and in fact, Tuesday was able to point me in the right direction in order to find articles in leading sociological periodicals. Admittedly, as a student who is new to research, looking at search bars and queries in sociological databases is intimidating. You're not sure exactly what key words should go where, and what articles will come up as a result. However, Dr. Prell and Tuesday were able to lend their expertise and best practices for finding articles from the database. During a one-on-one meeting with Dr. Prell, on a basic level, she also suggested that I just search simple key words into google and see on the surface what type of discourses are being had on my topic. I'd say that both Dr. Prell and Tuesday made the research process less intimidating and more fun, just by leading from their own example and encouraging students to come see them one-on-one for their projects.

As I began to find literature, I decided that the best way to evaluate my sources was to read the abstract of each selected article. Who has time to fully read 20+ pages of at least 8 articles? By reading the abstracts, I was able to save myself a lot of time, and verify whether or not the articles would be relevant and pertinent, which was the most important thing that I was looking for, for my project. Based on the abstract, if I considered the articles irrelevant, I would go back into SocIndex and search for more articles. On the other hand, if I found the articles to be relevant, then I would take the time to read the article all the way through and take notes of important points.

Learning how to scan and evaluate articles was a pretty important aspect of the research process, and these are skills that I believe will help me in my academic career. However, learning how to use a statistical software package like SPSS was probably the most beneficial part of the research

process, especially because I had to apply my results to my project and analyze what the statistics meant. Statistical analysis is just a smaller aspect of critical thinking, and critical thinking is a skill that can be used in various jobs and situations. Moreover, as I continue on with more advanced research, I will be expected to be able to adequately use SPSS and other statistical packages like STATA. As such, I am grateful that I acquired an important skill in the realm of research.

Looking back at my research experience, I wish that the library could've held a workshop for doing research, specifically in the social sciences, or best practices for social science research for my particular class. I believe that there's a floor in McKeldin that is dedicated to or has numerous social science books. However, I don't know much about this floor or how the books could be a helpful resource to students in the social sciences. All in all, although the research process was long and arduous, I am extremely excited to share my research paper with McKeldin library.