

Christina Parisi

Library Award for Undergraduate Research

My assignment was to write a proposal to fund a study in community health; the situation was hypothetical, but would give good experience in writing academically and applying concepts learned in HLTH200. The subject could be one of three provided topics. I pursued the topic which interested me most: the link between alcohol, athletes, and injury. As a member of CHOICES, the alcohol peer education group, I was fascinated with the consequences of alcohol on athletic performance and what it meant for student athletes to whom I could provide information.

From past classes, I had familiarity with the University of Maryland Library website. I first went to UBorrow, and began my search with “alcohol athlete.” Most of the results were over ten years old, although one book was relevant enough that it was helpful to my writing process. I read through it in its entirety, and was able to use the information in my paper and to inspire my search online.

One scan of PubMed with the keywords “alcohol athlete” yielded too many results. I narrowed the search to include only articles published within the last three years, which proved fruitful. Then, I accessed Google Scholar and searched for “alcohol athlete,” again limiting the earliest date of publication to 2012. I began writing my findings and creating a bibliography.

Only five sources were required, but I found far more than that. Though I limited the date of publication, many sources cited older articles. For both databases, the keywords “alcohol athlete,” “alcohol athletic performance recovery,” “alcohol athlete injury,” “alcohol athlete recovery,” and “alcohol athlete physiology” were used to gather results. To determine whether a

paper was relevant, I read the entire paper. On Google Scholar, I was able to see how many researchers cited the article in other publications, which indicated its prominence in the field; and gave me links to related articles. The process took days scattered over weeks to complete, as not every article I found was the best fit for my material.

“But what isn’t being addressed?” Dr. Arria wrote in the margins of my first draft. Realizing I needed guidance to take my paper to the level I desired, I asked to meet with her in person to exchange ideas.

Speaking with her is gave me the clearest idea of the direction I would take with my research. She encouraged me to look for what was missing, what the research had not covered. She asked why what I was doing was different than what had been done before.

Did college athletes know all the information I found? Little was said about whether athletes knew the risks of drinking; even less was said about interventions combatting binge-drinking in student athletes, a heavily at-risk population. I had discovered my research topic: designing an intervention to inform athletes about alcohol-related consequences and reduce problem drinking. Dr. Arria seemed as excited about the idea as I was, and recommended I search for measures to include in my intervention survey to give it more power.

Many of the articles I had already found included references to measures of alcohol use, such as the CAGE and Daily Drinking Questionnaires. A database scan for alcohol use measures provided numerous results, and a Google search allowed me to find copies of the exact questionnaires. Based on my findings I created my own measures, tailoring the survey questions to be specific to athletes—for example, asking about coaches’ attitudes and performance impact. Using facts I deemed important, I created a survey to measure baseline alcohol knowledge; my

peer education background helped me in this endeavor as well as the information gathered from my research.

The information I learned and the research skills I gained over the course of this project are incredibly important to my current work. Upon completion of the project, Dr. Arria invited me to work with her to create a fact sheet on college athletes and alcohol use for distribution to schools in the Maryland Collaborative. My duties include researching online databases, books, and other resources such as fact sheets from other institutions as well as the synthesis of my findings into a literature review, which will be broken down and organized graphically into a fact sheet. Moreover, I wish to pursue a career in medical research, and this project has given me the opportunity to inspect the available data, determine what is missing, and develop a way to make that new discovery.

Looking back, there were few things I think could make the research process easier. McKeldin Library is an expansive place, and I feel that with some reorganization the space could be utilized to create more area for studying. That way, if I had a question or was looking for a resource I could ask a librarian or specialist instead of trying to figure it out from home. The seats in McKeldin could have outlets built into the tables so that students could work longer hours on their laptops without having their batteries die. The thing that would have been most helpful would have been a way to pay for the databases more simply. It was frustrating to read the perfect abstract and then have to pay through a second party site to access the work. Often, I would get turned off by the idea of paying a second party I had no affiliation with or knowledge of. If possible, I think that organizing the payments for articles with a system like Terrapin Express would make research easier. I could pay the University of Maryland who would then

pay the database from my pre-charged card, and I would know that the money was going someplace reliable. I also would not have to share my credit card information with the databases.

Though my project is completed and the semester over, the topic is significant to what I do as a peer educator and a researcher, and I have been able to use the information and skills I gained for my current work.