

Library Award Essay

I began my research in ENGL 392 (Legal Writing). Our final assignment was to create a proposal to enact or change a current law or policy in the state of Maryland (the policy could be local or statewide). I felt that childhood obesity was a hot-button issue because data shows that it is on the rise all over the United States and that poor eating habits are a major contributor; however, public schools are reluctant to remove vending machines because contracts with vendors like Coca-Cola and Pepsi are a major source of revenue. I was particularly interested in the topic because I went to Prince George's County Schools and my high school had vending machines on every floor. There was also a snack line that was open during lunch and sold high calorie, high-fat items. Most students bought their lunch there instead of going through the cafeteria lunch line.

I discovered my sources in a variety of ways. I did not have experience with such an extensive research topic, so I just started with Google. I tried to find scholarly articles about childhood obesity but mostly I found newspaper articles. Those were somewhat informative but I felt that I should use more research-oriented sources. I started using Google Books to find books about childhood obesity and skim through them, if possible. If the books seemed helpful, I then used the library catalog online to find out if they were available to be checked-out.

Even though books on childhood obesity were a good start, I needed to find data that gave a local view because my proposal was targeted specifically to Prince George's County. Unfortunately, my Google searches were not turning up any statistics on the rates of childhood obesity in the county or even in Maryland. I tried using the library's research port as well but I could not find anything (I'd never used it before). At that point, I asked a librarian at the first

floor desk of McKeldin if she had any suggestions. She showed me how to use the research port to find scholarly journals and how I could filter the results to show, for example, medical journals only since those would be more likely to have research on childhood obesity. She also helped me find the Healthy Schools Act bill from the D.C. Council website (on my own, I was only able to find newspaper reports on the bill). Most important to my project, the librarian showed me how to navigate the Maryland Family Health Administration website, which provided very specific statistics by age and county of child obesity rates in the state. Without that data, I certainly would not have been able to make a persuasive argument for the necessity of removing vending machines from Prince George's County Schools.

I selected my sources based on credibility and the depth of information provided. For example, I used the Maryland Family Health Administration's website because the state was able to provide detailed statistics based on its data collection. Furthermore, it was local research, which was more relevant to my proposal than nationwide data on child obesity.

I feel that learning to navigate the library's research port was a great help to me academically. Now that I know how to use it, it has been much easier to find information and research. Before, I was limited to what I found on the online catalog and Google. Now I know that I can find a huge variety of scholarly journals on the research port, which is particularly helpful when researching broad topics. Research port allows me to tailor the search criteria specifically to the research or topic I need. I also like the that research port can be used for simple things, like finding homework assignments. This semester, I was assigned a political science journal to read but the Google Scholar link the professor provided did not work. But since I had the name of the article and journal, I was able to find the reading through the research port.