

At the beginning of my GVPT200 course last semester, I was made aware of the research paper requirement that would account for a very large portion of my final grade. Having never completed any sort of research in high school or in my few semesters at Maryland, I was absolutely mortified. I consulted with my TA and she told me to search the Internet for interesting international topics to get my feet wet. After hours of Google searches, I had about given up. We were talking about human rights in lecture and an example was human trafficking. I had seen enough Law and Order episodes to know the gist of what I would be researching, and even though it is a rather morbid topic, I felt, and still feel, that it is a really important issue that often gets overlooked. I decided that since I was interested in it, I would be more willing to spend hours reading about it, and I was surprised at how passionate I became about the topic once starting my research.

To prepare us for the amount of research we were supposed to be doing on our topics, my class had a librarian come and show us how to use Research Port, the catalog online and how to reserve books from other schools. This was probably the most helpful step in my research process because I didn't even know Research Port existed. I knew there were scholarly articles online, but I didn't know there was a whole database accessible from home. I used a lot of the articles to get background information on my topic, and it made me feel less worried about having to write ten pages about a topic I had just started learning about. Once I had some articles to get a foundation, I tried my luck with the database. During the presentation, the librarian said that if you find one book on the shelves, the books around it would most likely be about the same topic. I found six or seven books about my topic and they gave me different perspectives on the whole issue, which I think helped my paper a lot.

In the beginning, the thought of having to write ten pages made me nervous, so I really used my Teaching Assistant as a resource while writing my paper because she seemed to be interested in my topic as well, and she led me to resources I probably wouldn't have found on my own. Looking back on it, I feel like I was in her office each week with a new version of my paper asking for guidance and opinion. She really helped me feel comfortable in my writing and without her I probably would have counted myself out before I had even started writing. I remember I came to her with pages and pages of sources, so excited that I had found so much information, but she soon told me that I couldn't use sources that weren't "authoritative" or trustworthy; so Wikipedia was out of the question.

Searching McKeldin library for authoritative sources wasn't hard at all; each had a list of the sources used to write the books, so I knew the information in the book was true. For websites, however, finding out whether they were authoritative or not was pretty hard. When I found a web site I thought could help me write my paper, I would have to Google the information or statistic to see if it was true or not. Reading the books helped a little because I would remember some of the information I had previously read so I didn't have to Google as much.

Writing this paper really made me reconsider going into international relations. When I came to college, I wanted to work at an embassy or as a Foreign Service Officer, but when I took American Government, I changed my mind. Researching this topic made me realize that there are important issues being put on the backburner, and it made me want to work in a field that would allow me to help people around the world.