

Team Food Desert: Essay

Our team consists of eleven undergraduate students of academically diverse backgrounds, with majors ranging from business to public health to anthropology to environmental science. Despite these differences, we are united as a group in our research project, Team Food Deserts. The idea for our project was conceived by one of our public health majors, who was intrigued by the nutritional disparities between more socioeconomically advantaged and less advantaged neighborhoods. After much deliberation and background research, we decided, as a group, to focus our research more specifically on analyzing the effects of placing the machines necessary for using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) in farmers' markets in Prince George's County. Our team will also administer a survey to SNAP recipients shopping at these farmers' markets to determine the relationship between parents' self-efficacy and the home nutrition environment.

After identifying our research question, we hoped to begin our data collection immediately. However, we quickly realized that, before we began our project, we needed a greater understanding of the enormous amount of preexisting research that related to our topic. We needed a literature review to better understand our topic and, thus, our research at the library began. Through this review, we wished to gain a more thorough comprehension of several different aspects of our project including: the concepts of self-efficacy, the effects of nutritional interventions, and the history and current situation regarding SNAP.

We found the majority of our sources through the databases provided by the library. In particular, we used the JSTOR database, the databases provided in the public health section of ResearchPort, encyclopedias, and government sources. Our strategy for discovering useful information varied based on what information we needed: in some instances, we searched for specific terms in a particular database and, in others, we searched for general words or phrases in the library's entire catalog. Ordinarily, we preferred to start with broad search terms and gradually narrow our searches to more specific topics. In this way, we were able to incorporate in our paper both a substantial quantity of information and a large variety of sources, from government reports to papers on public health theory.

During this process, we have been privileged to have the assistance of Judy Markowitz, a librarian at the University of Maryland, and our mentor, Dr. Stephanie Grutzmacher. Both Ms. Markowitz and Dr. Grutzmacher have proved themselves to be invaluable resources to our team, helping us not only in locating and correctly citing sources, but also in shaping the direction of our research in general. Dr. Grutzmacher, who specializes in family science and nutrition, was especially helpful in identifying gaps in the current literature and, thus, in narrowing and sometimes changing the focus of our project.

As mentioned previously, the library's catalog and ResearchPort sources were our main tools in finding sources, including journal articles, encyclopedia entries, government documents, and public health reports, for our research. To ensure that we were using reliable sources, we were strict in our use of peer-reviewed journal articles, unbiased and factual data, and current, relevant information. We were interested in finding information about past studies, similar to our proposed research, which would provide us with a firm foundation in the topics of food security, federal aid programs, and family health behaviors. In addition to background research that we included in our literature review, we also looked for sources that emphasized the importance of our research, and helped us in creating a project that would produce unbiased, reliable results.

Although we have only completed the initial stages of our project, our team is now more confident, adept and efficient in our research methods. Specifically, we have learned the importance of reliable sources, and the necessity of allocating enough time to find the most relevant information. Our communication within the group has also developed, as we have come to realize that no matter what role a person plays, everyone must be equally informed on new information and discoveries in our research. The library has been more than simply a resource to us; through continued use of the library and its online databases, each member of our team has not only collected useful information for our project, but has also gained the confidence and research ability that only comes from hands-on experience.