

From the beginning of freshman year, the Gemstone program teaches their students how to best utilize all the amazing academic resources the University of Maryland has to offer. I am a member of Team DIET, which stands for Dietary Information and Evaluation Technologies. Through Gemstone classes entitled “Research Topic Exploration” and “Team Dynamics and Research Methodology,” I was introduced to numerous tools that have ultimately helped my team further our research. We have utilized the online catalog, various research port databases such as the Academic Search Premiere and Medline, online chatting with the librarians, and have learned how to locate volumes in different stacks. Over the next two and a half years, we will build a computer system that will integrate UMD students’ dining plans with a nutrition intervention program, and then study the results our intervention has on their diets. Our study is unique because it will not involve self-reporting, as nutrition intervention studies generally require. Our research topic came together from two separate ideas that arose from our class on topic exploration. One topic proposed investigating the legendary “Freshman 15” and the other proposed researching the status of our dining halls and finding a way to change the nutrition habits of our students. At the end of the Spring 2010 semester our team was formed and after countless hours of researching and brainstorming we reached our current proposal.

Last semester, my team wrote a Research Proposal Draft in which we had to write an extensive literature review. We found the vast majority of our sources through the University’s online research port. Reviewing the literature was a major step in our research process, since our project is building off the current research on nutrition interventions that exist in the field. Our research stemmed from a list of key words we

compiled as a team. The topics we researched extensively were the importance of healthy eating, the nutrition habits of college students, the theory of planned behavior, the Healthy Eating Index, and website design. Exploring these topics was extremely important for developing our project and without the online resources of the University of Maryland's library, we would not have been able to attain the same quality of academic research.

Another resource we used during our research for this assignment was the assistance of our team's librarian, Ms. Judy Markowitz. Judy guided us towards appropriate searches when looking for specific articles, and she provided feedback on our proposal draft before submission. Our team has two faculty mentors, Dr. Bruce Jacob and Dr. Nadine Sahyoun, who work in computer engineering and nutrition, respectively. Our mentors help us explore the directions we wish to study, weigh in on their previous experience with similar work, and connect us to experts in the nutrition and computer engineering fields.

Our team continually researches new topics related to our study since there are constantly contributions to the field. Every few weeks, all thirteen of our members find two new academic articles, which we then discuss during our team meetings. Some of the main criteria we look for in our articles are that it is peer reviewed and published in a scholarly source. Our team then discusses if the article can add anything to our research, and if so, we use that as a starting point for further research. Since our project is so multifaceted with a distinct technology aspect as well as a nutrition aspect, there is so much room for research and academic exploration. Through our research we have learned that the best way to further our learning is to utilize all available resources, and

seek guidance with experts whenever possible. The ability to find scholarly support for an idea in a library is a key skill for any graduate school or job, and the skills we have been developing will surely help us in the future. Additionally, the critical analysis skills I have learned crosses over into other areas of life, not just for library research. A monetary award would not be compensation for our previous work, but rather an aid in our further exploration and provide necessary funds to expand our study to create the greatest effect possible.