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Dr. Matthews

Library Award

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### Reflective Essay

For a senior science major, learning experiences can get repetitive. However, Science Writing stands out from the rest. We were asked to research a scientific topic we were passionate about, but one that was also relevant to the broader public. Free to break out of the bubble, I turned to the debate on genetically engineered (GE) foods. As a member of the scientific community, I have come across studies on GE foods offering to solve food shortages that stem from overpopulation. But the public perceives GE foods as possibly adverse to their health. What is the basis for this intellectual divide? How can policy makers bridge this gap to devise meaningful legislation? Is the public right: are organic foods safer. or is our best solution something else entirely? For my final paper, I wanted to discover the truth about GE foods so that I could make the best dietary decisions for myself and make recommendations for that of others.

The public's values and beliefs influence the debate on GE foods significantly; therefore I expected to find several biased accounts in the research process. From previous courses, I knew I could turn to the University's Research Port to find up-to-date, accurate, and peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles to serve as the foundations for my argument. I appreciated that the University subscribes to an array of academic journals, and so I was able to read the full text version for every research study I found. I also appreciated that I could access these online at any time, whether I was on campus or at home. Searching with the asterisk proved essential, as authors can refer to GE foods in many ways. This allowed me to find many more relevant sources in one search. Later in my research, I was referred to the Chemistry Library, where I found a large collection of books related to GE foods. Consulting such a great variety of printed sources helped me fully round out my research.

Throughout the semester, I had several personal meetings with my professor, Dr. Matthews, who monitored my progress and offered suggestions for moving forward. I initially thought of writing my report as a resource for an advocacy agency, but this felt like a typical research paper; I needed something that served a greater purpose. Dr. Matthews suggested that I

look into policy groups and write a paper to them with recommendations elucidated from my research. From there, I found a current bill in the House of Representatives, H.R. 1699, which proposes labeling for all GE foods. I also learned that this bill has strong opposition for seeming ineffective in serving the public. I knew that this was the creative outlet I was looking for. I would gather research and compose a set of improved labeling recommendations to propose to the congressman who drafted H.R. 1699.

Over the course of the semester, I found far too many sources to be able to use in my report. Therefore, first, I organized my sources into broader topics, such as “History,” “Safety,” and “Public Perception,” each of which would become a main section of my paper. Then, I posed myself the questions: what would the Congressman sponsoring H.R. 1699 need to know in order to trust my recommendations, and what would I need to know in order to offer them credibly? For each section, I made sure to consult sources encompassing all viewpoints, so that all my recommendations were as unbiased as possible. Additionally, as these recommendations were for the American economy, I made sure that all of the research on the public perception of GE foods pertained to the U.S. To further address opposition concerns, I included a section at the end specifically dedicated to deal with lingering questions. Ensuring that all sources used were relevant and current was essential for this paper, as new legislation must reflect the current attitudes of the people.

The research process for this paper helped me discover a passion for the intersection of science and policy. As a science major, my appreciation for the sciences has been strong for years, but I was always unsure about what sort of career I would want to pursue. A Congressional internship last summer made me think about science policy, but I dismissed this career choice because I did not think that it is the right fit for my degree. However, this class and this project have helped me realize that science policy work is my goal after graduation. I appreciate this project for helping me in this regard; perhaps this is why I was so dedicated to it.

Overall, I wish there was a more efficient way of finding articles. The literature on GE foods is lengthy and diverse, so I would have greatly appreciated a library resource to help me curate only the best of the best sources for my research. I would have also liked having access to more journals in physical versus digital copy. These changes would have made a very positive research experience even better.