

As a microbiology student and alumni of the global public health scholars program, when Professor Angelella revealed the lengthy and public health focused research paper assignment, the decision to choose my topic as sexually transmitted infections was easy. I chose the topic because I am interested in addressing and understanding public health problems related to the transmission and pathogenesis of disease. While this assignment was not heavily focused on the biological mechanisms of sexually transmitted infections, it was still undoubtedly relevant to my career goals, as it focused on understanding and addressing a prominent public health problem related to bacterial and viral diseases. I also chose to research this topic because I am a member of the population most susceptible for contracting and transmitting sexually transmitted infections wanted to further educate myself.

Due to the amount of research that is available on STIs, discovering sources that were specific to college students and their susceptibility was difficult and required strategic searching. The two main resources that I used to find my sources were the library database finder and Google Scholar. Particular techniques and strategies that I used while searching and discovering information included searching key words from sources that proved promising (i.e., “college students,” “STIs,” “STDs,” “sexual risk taking,” “high risk sexual behavior,” etc.) with AND commands, looking at the references of relevant papers, using advanced searches to select for research based articles of specific time frames, and reading the abstract to determine if the current source could potentially be one that was appropriate to use.

During this assignment, we had an in-class peer review session. While that was helpful in gaining basic feedback, perhaps the most helpful assistance that I received was from Professor Angelella, who I scheduled a meeting with to review a draft of my research paper. This greatly impacted my research process, as during this meeting, I made the decision to change the direction of my research. Much of the research done on STIs as they relate specifically to college students is not recent, so my sources spanned across two decades of literature. As a result, the present day credibility of some these sources needed to be established. In discussing how to do this with Professor Angellela, I decided to change my paper to a historical analysis that spanned decades worth of literature and compared it to its connection to the current college student STI epidemic. I did not seek direct help from a librarian for this assignment. However, I used many of the skills that I remembered being taught in a first year global public health course from a librarian who presented in our class, Nedelina Tchangalova, when we were tasked to write a public health current issue research paper.

My research came from a variety of journals and sources. Though the majority of my sources came from academic journals, a few of my sources were required to come from other sources (i.e., articles and government reports). As a result, it was crucial to evaluate the validity and credibility of the sources I cited. There are a few criteria I used to select my sources. The sources were evaluated based off 1) presence of a clear, undergraduate student specific focus on STIs 2) analysis of the author’s credibility and objectivity in presenting information 3) analysis of the journal or source’s credibility 4) the date that the information was published and 5) the potential contribution that the source could make to the historical analysis.

Writing this research paper has reinforced my passion to combine microbiology and public health in my graduate studies and eventual career. Writing this paper has also personally served as a major eye opener, as the depth of the literature review and analysis that I performed provided me with an education and perspective on STIs and my risk that no other outlet has ever provided. Additionally, the invaluable information about the research process that I learned through writing this paper will undoubtedly serve me in my current pursuit of on honors research

thesis in STEM and planned pursuit of a research-based STEM PhD program. I gained knowledge on how to critically select sources through picking the appropriate databases and using appropriate key words. I also learned that writing a strong and objective research paper is a difficult task that dedicates a considerable amount of time just to reviewing the literature, selecting appropriate sources, and critically analyzing these sources. Finally, I learned that a strong research paper requires multiple revisions by not only the author, but by professors and peers. Each of these lessons will undoubtedly aid me in my future academic and professional career, whether it is through helping me select a research paper to present during the laboratory journal club, aiding in my own independent research, or through helping me synthesize research and information for my honor thesis and future dissertation.

Reflecting back on my research process, one thing that I would change is starting the assignment a little bit earlier so that I could dedicate more time to the historical analysis portion of the paper. As a result, I would also see my professor for feedback a little bit earlier than I did, as that was when I decided to shift my research paper to a historical analysis, and seeing him sooner would have given me more time to do so. The library could have been a better resource for my research needs and students alike, by having librarians give advanced research tutorials for juniors and seniors in professional writing, instead of just during students' first semester as a college student in academic writing. Aside from that, I feel as though the library is already an excellent resource, especially due to the easily navigable database finder.