

## Library Award Essay

As a Public Health Science major, many of my papers have required heavy research and efficient research strategies, especially for Introduction to Environmental Health: A Public Health Perspective (MIEH300). Such an engaging course that focuses on the human health effects of exposures to chemical, physical, and biological agents in the community, workplace, and home requires strong scientific research and data. The fall 2018 final assignment was to write a persuasive essay focusing on an environmental health issue connected to human health, utilizing a principle of sustainability in to provide a solution to the issue. It was crucial in our essay to use scholarly-peer reviewed sources in order to establish ethos, pathos, and logos to support our topic. Finding the proper resources and evidence to strengthen a persuasive essay can be extremely tedious, especially if the source is not credible or accurate. My research was conducted with the help of online Public Health Research Guide developed by Ms. Nedelina Tchangalova, the Physical Sciences & Public Health Librarian and highlighted as a resource to our class by Dr. Payne-Sturges in MIEH300. This tool was crucial in finding valid and relatable research for my persuasive essay.

My paper, “The Effects of Climate Change on Mental Health” focuses on the detrimental effects that climate change will have on a college student’s mental health. Climate Change has always been an interest of mine and MIEH300 further stimulated the questions I had about the social impacts climate change may have on people. I then questioned, how will climate change affect me, as a college student? Although I may not experience the immediate effects of severe weather patterns caused by climate change, I was interested to see if there was a correlation between the effects of climate change and mental health prevalence. Mental health is another topic that I have dealt with personally, and have a particular interest in. Therefore, I really wanted to research how climate change will affect my peers and the future leaders of our society.

The first requirement of our paper was to find a recent source that gave credibility to climate change and mental health. First, I used the Public Health Research Guide to search multidisciplinary databases that would be required for my extensive research done on the topic. I mainly used EBSCO and PubMed to find credible and sometimes alarming research. The article, “Empirical evidence of mental health risks posed by climate change” by Nick Obradovich and his colleagues was the first article used as a basis for my paper. Once I established there was a correlation between mental health and climate change, it was essential to back up this information with other articles such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support the argument.

The next big challenge I encountered as a researcher was to establish that there are mental health concerns on college campuses. Mental health is a very controversial and often ignored topic because of the stigma still attached to mental illness. Through researching our own Counseling Center and other schools, I found the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD) survey, which UMD participated in. This not only led to a ton of research about the prevalence of mental health on college campuses, but also discussed the limitations that many college campuses experience due to a lack of funding or disparity of mental health services. I have personally struggled with mental health conditions, so I had a general knowledge of what the UMD counseling center offered (or lack thereof). My research then focused on using the AUCCCD and UMD’s counseling center website and policies to establish that there is a major risk of a mental health crisis due to climate change on college campuses, especially here at UMD.

I then utilized many peer-reviewed research papers such as the U.S. Global Change Research Program in order to discuss what types of climate change patterns (heavy rainfall, global warming, and loss of environments) will affect college students. NASA’s undeniable

evidence of climate change was crucial to disprove any skeptics on the reality of climate change. After I looked at what, why, how, and who is affected, I needed to focus on who will experience negative mental health outcomes the most. Since minority groups disproportionately experience environmental disparities, I focused on how certain minority groups of race, class, those with pre-existing conditions, etc. will be affected more severely by climate change and mental health among these communities. After all of this research, we were prompted to provide solutions that a UMD student environmental group could participate in and advocate for utilizing the precautionary principle.

This research definitely reinforced the ways that environmental health contributes to a person's social, environmental, and physical well-being. The persuasive essay also emphasized the need to open up the discussion of mental health in order to destigmatize, advocate for, and implement a change in mental health services. My research was very efficient and effective but there was a lack of data about the prevalence of mental health conditions specifically at UMD. The library could have helped my research by providing our own communities' data and statistics about mental health. Since it appears the counseling center is underfunded due to service limitations, it would have also been beneficial if I had access to UMD's budget and funds allocated for the UMD counseling center compared to other services such as our sports teams or advertisement. Finally, research about the effects of climate change that UMD and the surrounding area are directly experiencing would have made my persuasive essay even stronger and allowed me to provide more effective solutions. Overall, my research provided surreal evidence on the severity and relevance of the mental health crisis due to climate change which emphasizes that social issues such as mental health and environmental health will be big factors in the developing field of Public Health.