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Library Awards Reflective Essay 2012

Though my paper "The National Obesity Problem and a Proposal for a Cure" was not the first research paper I had written, it was the first that required a deeper scope of research as well as an understanding of argument composition and style. As an Academic Writing (English 101) class, we were given the prompt of choosing an even from our memory to help brainstorm potential topics for our paper. Out of several experiences that stood out in my memory, a recent radio show that forecast the national obesity rate as reaching 50% in this decade commanded my attention. Surely, the host was exaggerating? Of course obesity was a problem, but no way one in two adults would become not just overweight, but obese in the next few years, I thought to myself. And yet, knowing next to nothing about any aspect of this problem, I had to find out more. It won out over my other potential research topics because it potentially affected the largest portion of the US population.

I began my search when we had a library session as a class aimed to teach us how use the resources available to us to the biggest advantage. I expanded on the techniques presented and went a step further by using many different search terms to locate reputable sources for my research. By using seemingly unrelated search terms I was able to find relevant information on topics that contributed to my paper such as obesity rates among the United States citizens, various causation theories, treatment proposals, and so on. It is unlikely that I would have found such a diversity of information in one article had I just used variations of the same "obesity in the US" terms.

Knowing that different search engines likely had different algorithms, I used a variety of search means with the same terms, including Research Port and Google Scholar. Since the focus for this paper was academic sources Research Port was invaluable to me. As a commuting student it was very convenient to be able to continue my research from home as well as on campus.

I n addition to the convenience of online access to peer reviewed publications, I was able to also use inter-library loan to complement my research sources. Even with the variety and volume of materials available on campus to UMD students, it's great to be able to expand the search outside my campus.

Once I had found several sources I had to determine whether they had information relevant to my purpose. I must admit to having, to a degree, "judged a book by its cover". I read the abstracts and summaries of articles with titles that had seemed promising to determine the degree of relevance of information I would likely glean from it. For longer pieces with multiple segments, I would often focus on some sections rather than others. I would look up book reviews before requesting them through the library system to make sure I would be able to use the information therein to make my argument more robust. I can't say there was any one trick to determining the value of sources for my particular need. At times, I have even found a small but important bit of information in writings that were otherwise too technical, too focused on a certain aspect, or too outdated.

The entire process from start to end of writing this paper has been a terrific learning experience. I was certainly not thrilled by the idea of having to write such an involved project, but as I got the hang of what was required and began to take advantage of the variety of resources available to me through UMD, it became a much more pleasant experience. I am proud to say that I now feel confident composing a research paper based on academic sources through all the steps from choosing a topic to properly citing works in a variety of media. The skills I have acquired will no doubt serve me well in my chosen field of chemical engineering while still in school and beyond.