

Library Award for Undergraduate Research Essay

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As a student in the Research Methods in Family Science class, I was presented with the opportunity to conduct a research project, along with three other students, in whichever topic we chose, provided it related to families. I was instantly drawn to the topic of military families, being that my husband recently completed a 4 year enlistment in the U.S. Air Force. My group and I decided on our research question after much debate. Our topic had to be something that encompassed families and the military, as well as something that we would be able to survey our classmates on. We decided to research the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy because it was beginning to gain attention politically, as well as in the media. We also believed this was an issue that most everyone would have an opinion on.

After determining our research question we set out to collect other research to build our study around, which is where the University of Maryland libraries was a tremendous help. We not only spent time in the libraries physically researching, but also searched Research Port for any information related to our topic, whether it discussed military policies, behavior of service members, or political and religious ideology. Since there are limited resources for this type of research, we were forced to be creative with our search topics. For example, there were no articles found specifically about “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, so instead, we looked at any articles that focused on LGBT individuals and the military. We also utilized the library’s resources when entering and analyzing our survey data. The program we used to do this, SPSS, was only available to us through the WAM labs throughout campus. These labs were an integral part of our project. Without the ability to enter, sort, and analyze our data we would be unable to determine if the information we collected was helpful or whether or not our research question was supported and our hypothesis correct.

Fortunately, our group had an extremely helpful TA to assist us with our project, Emily. We struggled in the beginning of our literature search to find articles that dealt with politics and religion within the context that we were using them. Emily met with one other group member and myself and searched Research Port with us, helping us find new literature on religiosity and political ideology. Without these articles and this new information our project would not have gained the structure needed to support our work. It was because of Emily's guidance and these articles that we were able to form a more solid relationship between religion and political affiliation, as well as shape more adequate survey questions to gain the information required to make the correlation we sought.

As a group we decided that each member would find three resources each, at which time we would pool them all together and decide which ones had the most impact and supplied the best information for this particular study. Unfortunately, due to the lack of research on the military, in general, and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, more specifically, we decided on using slightly broader articles for our peer reviewed sources, such as those discussing women and sexual orientation in the military or the relationship between political ideology and religiosity. This led us to more contemporary sources when discussing this subject specifically.

I learned quite a bit during this process, not only from the results of our study but also from doing the research to conduct it. It has been my hope, since my husband's enlistment in the military, to work with these families as a part of my professional career. After being a part of this project I discovered there is a lack of information about our nation's military and their families, not only from an LGBT perspective but in all aspects of family life. This project reaffirmed my belief that this population is greatly underrepresented in research and it is my hope to develop a career around learning about and working with military families on all levels.

The University of Maryland library system has been a tremendous resource throughout my education at this institution and continues to provide me with information on many topics, scholarly and otherwise.