

Reflective Essay

Presented in my University Writing Program course with the challenge of writing a 10 source minimum review of literature on a women's health topic, I panicked. This assignment required me to read current scholarship on a topic and create something new out of the information I obtained. At first, I did not know where to begin because I lacked a specific topic and the skills to find relevant scholarship. My instructor encouraged the class to watch UC Davis librarian produced videos in order to learn how to navigate the library's resources to find current scholarship. I learned that the PubMed database should be my top resource for a health science related topic and it quickly became one of my most frequently visited websites.

Beginning with a broad search for "women's health" eventually led to an article that discussed how long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs), like intrauterine devices, are not the most commonly used method for contraception, despite being one of the most effective methods. This made me wonder what led women to choose other options and it became the subject for my review of literature. Using "long-acting reversible contraceptives" as a search term, I found countless articles which suggested that women do not always have the all of the information necessary to make informed decisions about their bodies, or that women have misconceptions regarding their contraceptive options.

I fell down a rabbit-hole of research leading me to construct a new story from a lot of information. By searching "long-acting reversible contraceptives," I learned that women have inaccurate or incomplete information about LARCs that discourages their decision to use these methods. Curious about from where these misconceptions originate, I searched "contraceptive information source" and found that most women report obtaining this information from their physicians. Making the connection that physicians are most likely the source of these misconceptions, I wanted to know why. I sought articles which discussed physicians and LARCs, using keywords such as "misconceptions" and "myths." The scholarship indicated that physicians also hold misconceptions about LARCs and that this influences their prescription and discussion of these methods, thus creating physical and mental barriers for women to access LARCs. The scholarship I had read suggested that a shared decision making model for contraceptive choice might work to reduce these barriers, so I then researched this model in order to assess its current use. While somewhat effective, I learned that the barriers to LARCs remain and still pose an issue for women who wish to explore their contraceptive options.

By reading current scholarship, I was able to identify barriers to LARCs, their likely cause, and why they still persist despite methods in place to reduce them. I would not have been able to accomplish this if it were not for the library's resources, including access to PubMed. The most useful tool that I utilized was the "similar articles" side bar on PubMed. In a review of literature, having sources that 'talk to each other' is crucial, and this feature made the discovery of relevant and related scholarship possible. Despite its usefulness, I ventured beyond this side bar because I wanted to obtain articles from a variety of sources so that my review could be more than a discussion about highly similar articles. I sought to locate different perspectives on the same issue from around the world, in order to objectively present women's limited access to LARCs as a global phenomenon.

Though searching on PubMed fueled the beginnings of my research process, my discovery of scholarship was not limited to this resource. After discovering articles from PubMed, I noted the journal from which they came and searched that journal's archives for additional scholarship that might help me in my search to understand the complicated nature of

LARC access. Because of the library's subscription to various journals, I was able to access full-length digital copies of most of the relevant articles.

The library's subscription unfortunately does not cover every journal, so a few times I came across the abstract of an article which I felt would contribute to my review of literature, however, I could only obtain access if I were to pay for the journal subscription. Instead of ignoring these articles all together, I extracted as much information out of the abstract as possible, including authors' names and keywords. From there, I searched these terms in journals I knew I had access to, so that I might gain similar information.

Before committing a research article to my review of literature, I evaluated its ability to strengthen my work. I only chose articles from peer-reviewed journals, because I knew that multiple field experts had analyzed the scholarship and it was thus more likely to be scientifically valid. I read the entirety of each article, especially paying attention to the methods, discussion, and conclusion sections to ensure that the authors' claims were well supported and logically sound. Additionally, I attempted to gather articles which focused on women of varying ages and from various locations in the world so that my review of literature would present a more objective viewpoint. My last criteria required articles to have been published between the years of 2014 and 2017, although I made two exceptions for articles I felt crucial for my review of literature. This time frame reaffirms that women's access to LARCs remains an important issue in today's society that should be discussed.

Through this assignment, not only did I learn about an existing problem in health care, but I also discovered how to find and evaluate current scholarship, a tool which will assist me as I advance in my academic career. Although I originally began this assignment with little direction, the resources provided by the UC Davis library guided me in the direction of a topic that I grew deeply passionate about, and one which I hope to continue researching throughout my life.