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UMD Library Research Award

Reflective Essay

My research paper, entitled “Cochlear Implants: Uniting Two Cultures or Pushing Them Apart?”, was the term paper associated with the College Park Scholars: Science, Technology, and Society (STS) program. The goal of the assignment was to investigate and present a controversy that exemplifies the core concepts of the STS program: the relationship between science, technology, and society.

I knew from the start that I would research the relationship between cochlear implants and the deaf community, due to my personal connections to the issue. I grew up in a deaf household (both my parents are deaf) and my parents, who both have cochlear implants, grew up alongside the advent of communicative technologies such as the hearing aid, instant messaging, closed captions, and cochlear implants. I arrived at my final question after learning of a recent controversy involving former Gallaudet President Jane Fernandes that surrounded the opinion that she was not “deaf enough” to lead. The fact that there could be such alienation within a social group that is already socially segregated from the majority population astounded me. The bulk of my early research was focused on discovering the different members of the controversy and their ideologies in order to establish a foundation for the actual analysis.

In order to properly research this topic, I took two different approaches to sources: a scholarly path, which focused on auditory and behavioral studies and academic papers,

and a more informal path, which focused on newspaper articles, interviews, and documentaries. I decided that this would be best because I was investigating this topic not only from a social perspective, but also a scientific and technological perspective, which warrants different types of information. The University of Maryland (UMD) Library Research Port served as a Launchpad in the search for disciplinary sources. Using keywords such as “deaf”, “cochlear implant”, and “language acquisition”, I searched through different databases such as Psychology, Science, and Linguistics. This search, in combination with one using Google Scholar, directed me towards journals such as the *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, the *International Journal of Audiology*, and the *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*. There were others too; however, many did not fit my selection criteria.

I narrowed my scholarly sources to those that could give insight into how this controversy differs based on different population criteria: gender, age, and race. To properly frame this problem within its specific contexts of the three major social groups (the hearing, the Deaf, and the deaf), it was necessary to organize the facts within these different subgroups so that the research findings would be easy to follow.

I narrowed my more informal, general sources to only those that were closely associated with the deaf/Deaf community. I knew that there exists a large divide between the hearing world and the deaf world, so I wanted to be sure that any sources were not too far removed from the issues for fear that they might be just “reporting” on the situation. This criterion led to the decision to interview a Gallaudet professor, use the Gallaudet

Library web page, and follow a web-log maintained by members of the deaf/Deaf community.

In the class, there were research milestones that set goals for us and allowed our professor to stay involved in our process. Not much assistance was needed, but Dr. Tomblin did advise me on how to extract the STS meaning from each source. Because applying the STS concepts was a critical part of the paper, his guidance was valuable in attaining a deeper understanding of how each source related to my investigation. Those concepts helped me organize my research into how the cochlear implant is perceived by the different groups, which was the focus of my paper.

I am confident in saying that this process has transformed me into a better researcher. From this project, I became more familiar with the University's library database, which contain a bevy of information useful for future proposals and research. Also, I gained more practice in citing sources, which is always an important skill to help avoid threats of plagiarism. Already in the two semesters following this paper, I have had to write 3 research papers and have been able to apply the techniques learned from this process. I feel as though I am much more resourceful and prepared for an inevitable future of professional writing and research that accompanies being an engineer.