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ESSAY

- **How did you begin your research? Explain how you came up with your research query/topic.**

I have been passionate about my research topic ever since my younger brother was born twenty-seven years ago. Back then I was still very young and lived in Cameroon, Africa. My brother was born with spina bifida and growing up my parents did not explain the medical condition my brother's medical condition because they were not given any clear explanation by healthcare professionals. My siblings and I would just watch my brother experience motility and incontinence problems.

It was not until I moved to the United States of America for my studies that I decided to research on spina bifida and its etiology. I did some basic research on neural tube defects and most specifically spina bifida and it affects children in Africa. Then I researched on the etiology of the disease and the preventive measures that had been developed to reduce the prevalence of the disease.

During my senior year of undergraduate school and when it was time to write my capstone research paper, I thought it would be interesting to have some statistics on neural tube defects in the U.S. and how researchers have come along in reducing the prevalence of neural tube defects.

- **How did you discover your sources? Which library or other information sources did you use? Explain particular techniques or strategies that you used while searching and discovering information.**

To help me write my research paper, my professor and advisor Dr. Alyssa Brooks introduced us to different librarians and taught us how to find the information we needed for our paper in the UMD Library database. Additionally, I have used the UMD library database for all my academic papers and I have always been delighted to find all the resources I needed. Because my main campus was at the University at Shady Grove, but was also taking few classes at main campus at College Park, I used both libraries for my papers. Additionally, I enjoyed the online access I had, and it was easy for me to work on my assignments from home.

- **Did you seek assistance from a librarian, a professor, or someone else? If so, how this interaction impacted your research process? Was there anyone in particular who gave you the inspiration to turn your research in a different direction?**

For my capstone research project, Dr. Brooks was extraordinary in providing me with great feedback as I progressed on the paper. Furthermore, I had the help of the writing coordinator from the writing center and the librarian at the USG campus. The help from these advisors helped me find academic articles, figures and statistics for my topic. Dr. Brooks and the writing coordinator were very involved in guiding me to the right direction and kept encouraging me.

- **How did you select and evaluate the sources you found? Explain which criteria you used for selecting sources.**

During junior year, my public health biology professor, Dr. Jessica O'Hara prepared us on how to write research papers. She taught us how to search for primary and secondary sources and how to employ them in research papers. I followed her instructions throughout my years as an undergrad and continue to do so now that I am preparing to get in graduate school. Dr. O'Hara's instructions helped me to successfully write my research paper in my capstone course. In brief, she taught how to search for academic articles from the UMD database. She taught us to distinguish between primary and secondary sources, how to get important information from the articles and analyze if they are relevant the topic we are working on. Finally, she taught us how to paraphrase and write a summary of the article and how to properly cite our sources. These instructions will forever follow me during my academic journey.

- **What did you learn during the research process that will help further your academic or professional career?**

This research paper helped me understand many concepts about neural tube defects. Such concepts were unclear to my family and I twenty-seven years ago. Upon completing my paper, I was very excited to call my parents and brother back in Africa and explain to them about spina bifida in a way that they could understand what doctors or nurses back home were not able to explain. This paper made me realize what my brother has gone through for the past twenty-seven years and this paper has helped me help others who may be in similar situations. My next academic journey is to enroll in the Clinical Nursing Leadership Master Science (CNL) Program from the University of Maryland Baltimore. Upon completion of the program, I intend to utilize both my public health and nursing degrees to educate mothers at high risks for giving birth to babies with neural tube defects. I plan on helping mothers not only in the U.S., but also in Africa.