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Research Process: Current Connections Between Genetics and Obesity

In my advanced nutrition course last year we were given a semester-long assignment to produce a research paper on a topic of our choice that was pertinent to the course and time. I decided to investigate causes of obesity because I plan on going into a health career in the near future and it is one of the most prevalent chronic diseases in the United States. I began in the reference section of the Von der Ahe library, where I used LINUS to locate a two-volume encyclopedia on obesity. After looking through the index of each, the topic I was most intrigued by was the relationship between genetics and obesity. As intimidating as the subject was at the time because of the complex nature of genetics, I could not get my mind off of it.

Now that I had a topic for my research project, I had to figure out where to start. I was overwhelmed by all of the different media available in the library, but was able to distinguish the good sources from the bad after having a class meeting with one of the library staff, Glenn Johnson-Grau. He created a webpage called a library guide specifically for our class, and included on it a variety of journal indexes, e-books, encyclopedias, and books available in the library. The library guide was an extremely helpful compilation of resources and indirectly accounted for much of the information I came across and ultimately used in my research paper.

The majority of my research came from journals that I located using MEDLINE and Biological Abstracts. Much of the research on genetics and obesity relies on comparative clinical studies that are more often than not published in journal articles instead of books. Looking back on my research I think that journals were ultimately the most conclusive source of information, but searching through all of the articles returned from the research databases was extremely tedious and at times, frustrating. During the research process I developed the valuable skill of being able to distinguish just how specific I needed to be in my search; too general and thousands of articles are returned, too specific and you end up with absolutely nothing.

The four books that I located in the Von der Ahe library were more helpful than I originally thought they would be. It was not until exhausting all of my journal-search options that I turned to printed books, simply because of the fact that I thought they would be out of date and not as applicable. During one of my numerous visits to the library during this research project I sat with Glenn at the library help desk and used LINUS to locate relevant books in the library. He was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about what books to use and what books to avoid. If I had done the search by myself it would have taken much more time and ultimately not return the same quality of work.

Although I have been doing research projects since my freshman year at LMU as well as during high school, I honestly believe that this was the most helpful in terms of the skills that I will take away from it and continue to use in my studies and career. The library staff was more than accommodating to our needs as a class and individually. Something encouraging that I noticed during my time in the library was how many LMU alumni continue to come back and use the on-campus services; the resources provided, including the staff, have made me feel that I will forever be welcome and worthy of help in the Von der Ahe library.