2014 Undergraduate Research Award - Essay

Breast cancer is the most common malignancy in women both in the United States and worldwide. Women of African descent in the United States have a particularly high breast cancer burden, suffering higher breast cancer mortality rates compared to White/Caucasian women, despite lower breast cancer incidence among Black/African-American women (*Breast cancer in women of African descent*, 2006). This disparity is discussed in diverse academic fields, and for over two years, I have worked with UGA faculty members in Genetics and Anthropology to explore this disparity. I am currently working under the guidance of Dr. Susan Tanner in the Anthropology department to conduct interviews with breast cancer survivors of African descent and to extensively review journal articles in biomedicine and social science in order to compare breast cancer survivors' perceptions of factors contributing to the disparity with views reflected in social science and biomedical literature. Meeting with the research librarian (Elizabeth White) has been a critical turning point in my research process, and as a result of her guidance, I have discovered new sources for information on breast cancer, learned to use discipline-specific databases, and improved the quality and depth of my literature review.

For several weeks prior to my conference with Ms. White, I focused intently on searching for a complete list of relevant articles on the breast cancer survival disparity in the fields of biomedicine and social science. I initially used PubMed to search for journal articles by simply entering the words, breast cancer AND (African-Americans OR black) AND disparity, in the search bar. Next, I rated each of the 140 journal articles on a scale of 1 to 5, based on whether they discussed breast cancer (score 1), discussed breast cancer disparities (score 2), discussed Black-White breast cancer disparities in the U.S. (score 3), discussed Black-White breast cancer *survival* disparities in the U.S. (score 4), or discussed all of the above *and* focused on factors

driving the disparity (5). I identified 101 articles that met the criteria for a "5", but struggled to categorize these articles by discipline (biomedical or social science) and to find a significant number of social science articles. Attempting to eliminate these issues, I entered the search keywords above into the Web of Science database to identify articles, as I had learned from prior research experiences that this database allows users to search for articles by discipline. However, my search returned 993 articles, and several of these articles were clearly irrelevant to my research topic. At this point, Dr. Tanner recommended that I set up a conference with a research librarian in order to enhance my search results.

The conference with Ms. White was extremely helpful. She advised me to search discipline-specific databases on GALILEO and to adapt my searches for each database. She went through several databases in the social sciences, noting that each database uses certain subject headings to identify all of the sources that cover a particular topic and that these subject headings vary between databases. She also mentioned that PubMed has a special set of subject headings, known as MeSH terms. In addition, Ms. White showed me how to find books using GIL-Find.

Following this meeting, I used Ms. White's suggestions to discover new sources that have informed my interview questions and literature review and to identify more relevant journal articles in each field. Using the GIL-Find resource, I identified a book, *Breast Cancer Research in Women of African Descent*, which has been an invaluable resource as I currently work toward framing my literature review. Additionally, I identified several articles on the Sociology databases that have helped me to identify additional topics to cover in during interviews, such as the role of family and spirituality in breast cancer survival. Learning to subject headings specifically with the various databases offered by UGA's Libraries has been extremely instrumental in helping me identify relevant articles in both social science and biomedicine.

After the meeting, I explored databases and used subject headings specific to each database to obtain very precise results. I further refined my searches by adding modifiers for years and abstract contents in some cases. I also explored PubMed's MeSH keywords and used the MeSH browser's search engine to identify MeSH terms that are relevant to my study, such as "breast neoplasms", "African-Americans", "health status disparities", "healthcare disparities", and "mortality".

Using nineteen databases, I have identified over 300 relevant articles in the fields of social science and biomedicine. I am currently working to study each article and to determine whether the explanations that each article gives for the disparity are primarily behavioral, genetic, societal, or related to the health care system. Later, I will determine how many articles in social science and biomedicine give explanations that fall into each of these categories and whether articles in social science and biomedicine differ in their explanations for the disparity. I am also conducting interviews with breast cancer survivors to determine how they perceive the role of certain factors in driving the disparity. In the coming days and weeks, I will draw conclusions about the relationship between Black/African-American breast cancer survivors' understandings of the survival disparity and the perspectives of researchers in social science and biomedicine.

In each step of my research process, I am applying information and techniques from my librarian conference to improve my study. Before my mentor suggested that I meet with a research librarian, I was not aware that this resource was available to CURO students, and I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to meet with Ms. White. I hope to reach out to Ms. White and other librarians in the future, and I have encouraged my friends to do so as well. This experience has undoubtedly enhanced my development as a researcher, and it has been an

extremely important stepping stone as I pursue my ultimate goal of improving discussions on this disparity and enhancing communication between minorities and the medical and academic communities.

References Cited

Breast cancer in women of African descent. (2006). Springer: Dordrecht.