

Library Scholarship Application: Zina Scott

Last semester I was assigned a research paper for my Biology 265 “Animal Physiology” class. The subject was chosen by the professor at random so that very few people had the same topic. This was the first paper that I had ever been assigned for a science class, where the norm is usually lab reports and weekly assignments consisting of mostly math and definitions. Also, this was the first time that I was asked to seek out research on my own, rather than have it handed to me from class notes or the textbook, so I was a little worried.

When I received my topic “Why can’t sperm develop at core body temperatures? Do all mammals have these lowered temperature requirements for sperm?” I became even more apprehensive because I had been assigned a subject for which I had no class material, background knowledge, or luxury of a group to work with. In addition, it was asked that students limit the length of the assignment to one page, but use plenty of references. While some students rejoiced at the short length, as I began researching I found it very difficult to narrow my ideas down into what would become my one page final copy.

Since references from online publications were discouraged, I spent much time at the library trying to find more credible references to use in my paper. I had much to learn about the basics such as using the library catalogue, accessing journal articles, and locating books in what seemed like a maze of shelves on the upper levels. I asked for assistance at the information desk and one of the library staff was very accommodating in helping me narrow down my search to the research that best applied. I was given an explanation of how to find books by their specific call numbers and was encouraged to return if I had any other questions.

Once I had found sufficient text references, I began my navigation of the journals in the library catalogue. I found this particularly difficult not only because I had never used a journal article in a paper but because I had never had to cite one. When I returned to the information desk a different staff member showed me some citation websites online with specific formatting tools for citing journal articles, and even walked me through my first citation. After I had been given these tools, the remainder of my paper basically wrote and edited itself.

When I received my final grade for the paper I was surprised and pleased with my mark of 95 percent, but I was also very grateful to the library staff and valuable resources that the library had to offer that helped me research, write, and reference my paper. Even though I had made the decision to go over length by almost a full page, my professor was appreciative and even commented that my paper was “very thorough and well supported” with “a ton of supporting evidence.” My experience at the library gave me the confidence that I will need to complete challenging papers like this in the future, as well as the reassurance that someone is always around to help if I should need it.