Maria Dittman Research Competition Essay: Annie Richmond

My research paper is entitled: The Disadvantages of a Disparate Health Care System, A Spatial Analysis, and was written for my Urban Economics class in the fall semester. The paper investigates the current disparities that exist between urban and rural health care and aims to answer the question: does location affect the quality of care that residents in these areas receive? I have always been interested in health issues in the United States and I thought that by combining what I was learning in class with a topic that I was already interested in would produce a better quality paper.

I began my research project using Raynor's website specifically under the Research Guides' Economics tab. I used EconLit and EbscoHost primarily in the beginning stages of my research. From there, I searched through many medical, economic, and urban academic journals in Marqcat. I supplemented this theoretical research with some more data-driven websites such as the American Community Survey and the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) which gave me some insight on which to base my theoretical evidence. While most of my sources were online, I did find many of the articles that I looked up in Marqcat at the library in print which made it much easier for me to read all the ones that I wanted to.

I selected these sources because I knew they would be credible and I wanted to make sure that the product of my paper was something that I could be proud of. The articles that I found from EconLit and health economics journals from Marqcat seemed especially trustworthy because of the associations that they were commonly linked to. For example, many of the articles I found from these search engines were written by economists, doctors, and urban planners who did their research in addition to their everyday profession.

In order to choose what I thought to be the most valuable sources, I printed the online articles and gathered the print articles from the library even though I did not know which would be helpful or not. I absorb much more when I am reading print and so I took a couple of days in my research process to simply read and learn about the issues at hand before beginning to form my thesis. I highlighted everything that I thought might have a place in my paper and other information that I thought would help me to organize my paper. It was very helpful to see professional writing at work and I tried to imitate it as best I could. Through this process, there were definitely some articles and data that did not fit with the theme of my paper. These sources either did not seem in-depth enough for my analysis or did not have a profound enough argument for what I wanted to showcase in my paper. However, I did learn some interesting details that helped me to formulate my own opinion and thus added to the depth of my paper in an indirect way. I used MLA format to source all of these articles and my other data.

The principal difficulty that I faced writing this paper was organizing my thoughts. There is such an abundant amount of information regarding rural and urban health care, urban

economics issues, and health economics issue and it was very difficult for me to piece it all together at first. One night I laid all of my articles on the floor around me and made a physical map of my paper – this became the breakthrough of my research. After taking care of the logistics, writing the paper seemed much less daunting. I worked with one section of the "map" at a time, writing each piece as its own mini-paper. I then went back later to ensure that the transitions between the parts were fluent. This strict organization plan was the key to my paper and I think it is the most valuable thing that I learned from writing this kind of paper. Because I was able to clearly sort out the details before I began to write, the paper became more manageable and thus more enjoyable. I feel like I took more away from the paper than I would have if I had not prepared so well.

Finally, my favorite part about this paper was the fact that I was genuinely interested in the topic. I now believe that curiosity is the best fuel for a research paper and I hope that in the future I will search for a topic that inspires and motivates me to learn.