

2019 Winning Essay by Ty Snarr and Brandon LaChappelle
Library Award for Research in STEM/Health Sciences: Essay

The purpose of this ongoing project is to improve health equity in rural Costa Rica through social transformation. In the partnership phase, the goal was to strengthen and establish partnership between academic researchers and community members through community-based participatory action research. Community-based participatory research is a relatively new research process which involves actively engaging the community throughout all steps of program planning and evaluation. Over the course of spring break, we were able to facilitate a community health assessment using a survey that we developed with the help of library resources. The survey was conducted in 63 homes within the chosen community. We conducted interviews with individuals or families. In these we asked about health history, current health, and concerns they had for their community. Being that community-based participatory research is an ongoing process, results from the assessment will be used by the academic partners to guide planning for a participatory educational intervention aimed at health promotion and disease prevention in the community. Once the data has been analyzed, the information will be shared with the community and the researchers will work together with members of the community to identify a desired health outcome. Partnership in community health assessment provides a mechanism to engage community members in working toward a common goal—health for all.

As academic researchers, it is vital to understand the community which you are encountering and be knowledgeable about the plight many of the community members faced as refugees who left their homeland. Turning to the library for assistance served as an integral part to succeeding in our research project. As students in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Kim Whalen has presented many research tools to use for furthering our understanding of various populations. Nevertheless, the library offers many more resources than can be covered in a single class period. This research quest proved to be more difficult than expected. A simple “Summon” search proved not enough for our project as our research became exceedingly pointed. We used maps from the library to gain perspective on the location and topography of rural Costa Rica, textbooks to understand local economies, and World Health Organization reports to learn about demographics. Use of boolean operators, which once seemed like esoteric knowledge, became fundamental to our library searches. Improved skilled searches of Medline and other databases helped us weed through irrelevant articles. Access to Interlibrary Loan allowed for wholistic research not limited to the Christopher Center’s walls.

In order to identify the most beneficial sources, we needed to ensure that the sources used were reliable and credible. To evaluate the sources, we used concepts and ideas from the Currency Relevance Authority Accuracy Purpose (CRAAP) test. By evaluating these different standards, we were able to determine which sources would be most relevant to our research. By limiting ourselves to higher academic standards, research became increasingly difficult but of

superior quality. Because our research became very specific, assessing levels of evidence from the top of the pyramid became next to impossible. As a result, we worked diligently to assure that the data we collected was of the best status available.

We used a number of sources that focused on information regarding the general demographics or the geography of Costa Rica. In addition, we used sources that focused on healthcare in Costa Rica. In order to better understand how these two components were connected, critical thinking about connections between the two was necessary. For example, we discovered that the region in which we focused our research was mountainous—leading to poorer health access and equity for the community. Likewise, we connected ideas of rural health and a different epidemiologic landscape than urban areas of the country. Combining information from books, government resources, peer-reviewed articles, and NGO publications, the library helped paint a picture of our purpose.

As students who have spent extensive time on different research topics for various classes, finding research specific to our topic proved challenging. As we originally researched, it soon became obvious that strategies used in our first couple years of schooling would not suffice for the new project. One researching student, who works at the circulation desk at the library, used knowledge from assisting library patrons with research that he acquired over years of working at the Christopher Center to expand investigative resources. The other student researcher took advantage of tips and hints on the library website to broaden searches and find untapped literature.