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My Research on Research

Research has been taking place for thousands of years. Since coming into existence, humankind has been grappling to understand more about the world around us and our own purpose. While most are familiar with the concept of research, many picture it as something that is only done by scientists and college professors. This tends to cause people to feel overwhelmed at the prospect of undertaking a research project of their own. I myself have always felt daunted at the idea of doing my own research someday, but the things I have learned over the past several weeks have lessened my fear of research and even made me excited for my future project. You might say that my horizons have been broadened, as I now know that research isn’t just sitting in a stuffy lab all day studying charts. Research can be art, cooking, gardening, astronomy, or anything the researcher chooses to do that involves using ethically gathered information to answer a question.

So to start, how do we gather the information needed to conduct our research? Futurist John Naisbitt once wrote “We are drowning in information but starved for knowledge” (p. 24). College students have a world of information literally right at their fingertips. A quick Google search can bring up millions of results and endless pages of information. We are bombarded by websites, commercials, emails, advertisements, and news articles every waking second. Unfortunately, this information overload has bred laziness in today’s college students rather than improving their research abilities. It’s so easy to find easy answers online that many students will go no further than the top five results of a Google search. This is problematic, because oftentimes these websites aren’t credible and may even have false information. In order to fix this problem, it is important to be someone who is information literate when conducting research.

The American Library Assiciation (ALA) defines someone who is information literate as someone who “know[s] when they have a need for information, identif[ies] information needed to address a given problem or issue, find[s] needed information, evaluat[es] the information, organiz[es] the information, [and] us[es] the information effectively to address the problem or issue at hand” (p. 7). Information literacy helps to ensure that quality information is being used in research and that the research is ethical.

The Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research by the National Academy of Sciences states that researchers have three obligations when conducting research. These are: “an obligation to honor the trust that their colleagues place in them […], an obligation to themselves […], and an obligation to act in ways that serve the public” (pg. 2). In order to fulfill these obligations, information must be gathered responsibly and research must be done without cheating. Using inaccurate information and falsifying results are unethical and are strictly prohibited. It may be tempting to falsify information to produce more attractive results, but in fact it makes the research inaccurate.

During my years at Minnesota State Mankato I hope to improve my information literacy and research capabilities. I will begin to do this by familiarizing myself with on campus resources such as the library, online journal databases, and research events in Mankato and the surrounding areas. In my later years at school I hope to grow as a researcher by applying the knowledge I have acquired through research papers, presentations, and working on an undergraduate research project.

We all have questions about our world and ourselves, and research is the key to unlocking the answers to these questions. By becoming information literate and conducting ethical research, a researcher can expand their knowledge of the world and grow themselves in the process.

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