

UW Library Research Award Reflection

Prior to completing this project, my research process consisted mainly of simple Google searches. However, as I began to delve into Brazil's HIV epidemic, I began to investigate more resources that could assist me in my pursuit of primary sources. I began by searching Google Scholar and limiting my publication dates to find more recent information about the epidemic. Using the articles that I found, I then turned to the UW Libraries website to get some more in-depth searches. I specifically investigated PubMed and the Incidence and Prevalence Database (IPD) because these are the most relevant databases for the healthcare and epidemiology fields. However, I also used websites such as UNAIDS and AVERT because they spoke most directly to my research topic. These sites also compiled international data which made direct comparisons between Brazil and other countries significantly easier. After speaking to one of UW's research librarians, I discovered the use of Boolean operators which were able to drastically narrow my search criteria and condense my searches to a more manageable number of articles. While reading through the articles that I found, I began to notice that they may not focus exactly on my area of interest, but many articles at least made brief references to topics that pertained to my paper. Based on this principle, I began to look through the references of the primary articles I had found in order to better support my own research points.

In my project, I used a wide variety of sources including journal articles, books, government documents, and international organization websites and databases. Although I had begun to develop my research process, I ran into several unforeseen difficulties in navigating the content of the paper. The first major issue that I encountered was that the majority of my sources from Brazil's government and research teams were written in Portuguese. This led to a lengthy process of using Google Translate for each source in order to determine whether or not the information was relevant to my topic. I was also evaluating the quality of the sources, paying particular attention to the research methods, sample sizes, and whether the study objectives matched the results and conclusions presented in the paper.

The second major challenge I encountered was locating accurate, primary sources that explained when AIDS was first discovered in Brazil. While this seemed straightforward at the outset of the quarter, it proved to be very difficult because the term AIDS was not coined until 1982. This was several years after physicians in the US began to notice significantly elevated rates of Kaposi's Sarcoma and Pneumocystis Pneumonia among men who have sex with men (MSM). Thus, in the literature, "AIDS" was not used in any of the publications that reported on its first cases. In order to address this issue, I turned to the primary US sources that my professors had presented in class. Using the titles of these papers as my model, I changed my search terms to match what would have been reported in literature back in the early 1980's. Using terms such as "high incidence," "Kaposi's Sarcoma," and "Brazil," I was able to find sources that revealed the first AIDS cases despite not using that particular nomenclature.

Through this iterative process of reading new sources and refining my search criteria, I learned that creativity is vital to a successful research project. Simply inputting the first search terms that come to mind will often lead to the most common sources, but real ingenuity is needed to uncover the hidden gems tucked deep within the recesses of a library database. I have also come to realize the value of speaking with tutors, librarians, peers, and UW faculty in my

research process because they often have new research strategies, tips, and tricks that helped me uncover new information when I thought I had exhausted all of my resources. As stated above, the use of Boolean operators in my searches was such a simple addition to my research strategy, but it made a world of difference and helped me find a variety of sources that would have remained undiscovered otherwise. The skills I have learned from engaging in this process will be vital to both my graduate school and professional experiences.