Part 3-Reading, Understanding and Writing Abstracts

In the last library session you examined the differences between secondary and primary sources. Scientific papers that have undergone peer review and which are published in field specific journals are one type of primary source (Such sources include Science, Nature, and The New England Journal of Medicine). These articles include abstracts which are essentially brief summaries of the larger paper. Because online search engines typically only display abstracts the abstract has become even more important to ‘sell’ the research contained in the paper.

Dissection of an abstract

Review the articles and papers that you and your partner have gathered in your preliminary research. Select one scientific journal article to study and read in greater detail. Critically read the abstract and search for the following information points:

1. Who did the research?
2. Where was the research done?
3. When was the research conducted?
4. What is motivation for this research?
5. What is the hypothesis or research question?
6. How was this problem examined?
7. What data is described and in what format?
8. What are the results?
9. What conclusions have been reached through the research?
10. What are the implications of these conclusions?

Once you have critically read and analyzed the abstract write a response to each question using information drawn from the abstract. The questions can be addressed in a short paragraph format with a clear and well thought out answers to each question. In addition, consider why this information is included in an abstract? How difficult is it to locate the information in the text? Do the authors do a good job of convincing the audience that the research is new, exciting, important or interesting? Do you want to read the paper after reading the abstract? Now read the paper. How well does the abstract inform you about the content of the paper? What information was presented in the paper but not in the abstract? Was the abstract a good preview of the paper? Write a response to these questions in paragraph form bringing together your observations and demonstrating that you carefully read of the text. This component will be due__________________

Creating your abstract

One of the final components of the Ethics Project will be the writing of an abstract. After you have completed writing the text of your poster you will need to write an abstract that summarizes your work. This abstract will be included in your final poster design and will be turned in separately for grading. Because you have analyzed a professional abstract you should
be familiar with both the format and content of abstracts. Read your text carefully and examine the content. To develop your abstract look for the following points in your text:

1. What is the ethical problem examined?
2. Did your partner and you conduct a case study? Or a board examination?
3. What sources did you examine for your research?
4. What is the motivation for this research?
5. Why is this ethical question important?
6. How has this problem been examined in previous research?
7. Where and on what issues do your sources agree or disagree?
8. What are the results?
9. What conclusions have been reached through the research?
10. What are the implications of these conclusions?

After considering the above questions construct your abstract with the restriction that it must be 200-250 words in length. Remember that an abstract must be concisely composed. You will have to be precise with the information you include. Consider how you can make your research interesting and relevant to your audience. Why should your audience be concerned with your research? Will the audience want to read your poster after examining your abstract? What key search terms appear in your text? If a future students wanted to locate your research in a search engine consider what terms would be used to locate your abstract. Write a list of 4-6 key search terms on the top of the abstract that you turn in for grading. Do not include key terms on your poster.