Welcome to Research 101: Scholarship is a conversation

Published articles and dissertations form a discussion that involves critiques, arguments, and additions to our understanding of the world. But wait...What does that mean? Well, you know when you’re at a party and there are a lot of different conversations going on at once...

In one corner, people might be discussing climate change and pollution. On the other side of the room, some people are talking about the new electric car technology. You have heard both of these conversations and begin a new conversation that discusses the impact of technology in reducing pollution.

This is what the scholarly conversation is, it’s multiple people writing and publishing their ideas and hoping that others will pick up and use this information to form new conversations. Now this party is really huge. There are a lot of conversations happening at once and not everyone agrees.

In all of these situations, you’re just hearing a part of the story from just a few voices. Any given piece of scholarly work does not represent the only, or even the majority, perspective on the issue at hand. A single source represents just the view and research of that author. Additionally, you’re entering the middle of the conversation -- certainly not the end. When you’re conducting research as a student, it isn’t possible to read every article on a certain topic. However, you should read some articles to get a sense of the context for the research related to your topic.

As you research, it’s necessary to evaluate the work of others -- but also try to see yourself as a producer and as a consumer of information. As a student you can contribute to the scholarly conversation.