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UMD Library Award for Undergraduate Research

I joined the Department of Government and Politics' honors program late in my undergraduate career. I started it at the beginning of my junior year, and only had one semester to consider my topic before I began the research phase of my thesis. Choosing the European Union as my topic was something that happened gradually. I was in a class on the EU, with the professor who would become my thesis advisor. During that semester, I made a list of possible topics that I hung on my wall; they ranged from foreign policy with China to health care policy in the U.S. I carefully evaluated each option by reading news articles on each topic to see which one I was most interested in. From this process, I knew that I was most interested in international relations, and the EU. I had also taken a class in Germany on Germany in the New Europe, so I had some background in European politics. I asked Professor Kaminski to be my thesis advisor, and enrolled in his class on globalization for the next semester. I knew that I wanted my thesis to be on the future of the European Union, but I was unsure how to approach such a broad subject.

In order to narrow down my topic, Professor Kaminski suggested that I read several books on Europe. I found these books at McKeldin Library by looking them up on WorldCat. I checked the status of these books, and their location within the library. With this easy access, I was able to go into McKeldin, get what I needed, and get to class on time. I found one of the most important books for my thesis, Walter Mattli's *The Logic of Regional Integration*, in McKeldin. I used it in a paper in class, and ended up

using the ideas as the basis for half of the theory in my thesis. The other half of the conceptual framework came much later during the process of writing. The idea of using empire theory to explain the EU came from my thesis advisor. McKeldin and its online resources came to my aid again when I was able to find the section in the stacks on Europe as an empire and on empires in general. I spent a lot of time going through the books in those sections to find what I needed.

Most of my research was done through the UMD library website. I would use keywords to find books that I might want to use as sources, and then browse the related books in that section. I also read articles that I found on WorldCat. I also found one book that was a course reserve, which was a new experience. I was used to being able to check a book out and take it home, but with the course reserve, I had to make time to stay at the library to take notes. I discovered that when I used Google Scholar while logged on to the UMD library website, Google would tell me which articles were available through WorldCat. I also read articles from *The Economist* to keep up with current events in Europe, several of which I used in my thesis by utilizing *The Economist* app on my iPhone. I selected sources by using several criteria: publication date, reputation, and bias. I knew I could trust the materials that I found through WorldCat, so I evaluated those based on the date they were published. I evaluated materials that I found through general Internet searches by looking at who published them, to check for biases, and where they had been published, to check for reputation.

When I needed help with research and writing, I went to my thesis advisor for advice. He helped keep me focused, when I felt like I had too much information and I did not know what to do with it. He steered me towards the concepts that I would eventually

base my thesis on, and told me how such a large project should be structured. I was struggling with organizing the information that I was collecting, so he gave me some tips for more effective researching methods. I became better at taking notes on the main points, and at skimming books to get to the information that I needed. This experience will benefit me in my future career. I want to do more research, so this is an excellent training for that career path. I learned how to organize and execute a large project with a lot of information, as well as which research method is most efficient for me. I gained confidence in my ability to complete a large research project, and realized that determination, perseverance, and time management are important traits to have when you are looking for the right book or paper to use for your project.

There are two things that I would change if I could go back and redo my thesis experience. I would manage my time much better by sticking to a timeline for each chapter. I would also have asked my thesis advisor for advice on how to organize my materials for my thesis much earlier than halfway through the process. I wasted a lot of time by spending too much time on the wrong books, and not taking effective notes. The library assisted me a lot throughout the whole process. It was a quiet place where I could go to read and write without distractions. The only thing I would change would be to have more large tables like the ones that are tucked behind the elevators on the sixth floor. The study carrels were private and a good environment for getting work done, but I prefer to be able to spread my things out while I am working. Groups often occupied the second and third floors, which have large tables, so I would get distracted. Overall, McKeldin Library and its resources were essential to the completion of my undergraduate thesis.