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2026 Hesburgh Library Research Award Essay

When I started working on my paper for Professor Dan Lindley's class this semester, I knew the topic I chose, the causes of the Soviet Union's 1939 invasion of Finland, would require me to research complex international relations theories and historical details I don't currently know much about. The Winter War is a fascinating case and one dear to me culturally: the Soviets had every structural reason to feel insecure about Leningrad's border, yet the campaign turned into a costly mess because of overconfidence and poor planning. Turning that idea into a coherent five-page paper meant I needed good primary sources, books, and a way to keep everything organized and well-formatted. Hesburgh Library ended up playing a much larger role than I would have thought, having always worked without reliance on library services during my secondary education.

Early on, I reached out to Political Science Librarian Mark Robison again. I had worked with him before on other projects, and those earlier consultations had already introduced me to much of what Hesburgh has to offer. Through those past interactions, I had learned my way around the library's website and the LibGuide, which made me more confident. I had also come to rely on JSTOR, where key theoretical journals like *International Security* and *World Politics* are, and on the ProQuest Political Science database, which covers a plethora of work on international relations and Soviet foreign policy with a depth that general web searches cannot match. Knowing these tools existed before I started the project meant I could move quickly once I started the research process for my paper. For this paper I also drew on the Russian and East European Studies LibGuide, through which I found ABSEES, the American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies, which covers scholarly work on the former Soviet Union from 1939 to the present. It was a specialized resource I would never have known to look for on my own, and it pointed me toward secondary literature I would otherwise have missed entirely.

This time, I was specifically looking for an archive of old newspapers from the beginning of the war to see how the media reflected the invasion. Mr. Robison pointed me to ProQuest Historical Newspapers, which gave me access to full articles from the *Chicago Tribune* to *Le Monde*. Being able to read contemporary reporting, like 1939 coverage of international reactions and Roosevelt's condemnation, made it much easier to show how Soviet justifications were viewed as pretexts at the time. The university's newspaper subscriptions also helped me see the contrasts between the then-reporting of conflicts and now.

Similarly, from prior experience with the Virtual Computer Lab, I knew I could log in remotely and operate another computer with licences I don't have access to from my own laptop, as though I were sitting in the library itself. One evening I was working from my dorm room and needed to access statistical software to try if I could use the Correlates of War dataset on my paper, and being able to remotely access Stata helped me save the costs associated with purchasing a license and the time I would spend going to the library in-person, making research highly accessible whether you're in your dorm or at an academic conference trying to finish your assignment in time, thanks to the Hesburgh Library.

For the books, I relied heavily on the general collection. William R. Trotter's *A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish Winter War of 1939–1940* (General Collection DL 1097 .T76 1991) was especially useful for the operational side of the war and the terrain challenges the Soviets faced. Robert Edwards' *Winter War: Russia's Invasion of Finland, 1939–1940* (General Collection DL 1099 .E39 2008) was another I checked out and made use of. Both were easy to find on the shelves and helped me pull together the casualty numbers and day-to-day events that supported my argument. If anyone else is working on this topic, they are still available in the general collection and worth picking up in person!

For formatting the paper, including my two appendices, I used Overleaf. Notre Dame has a site license, so signing in with my ND credentials allowed me to code as much as I wanted without hitting a paywall. The library's research guides helped me get started with L^AT_EX, and it ended up saving me a lot of time while making the final paper look clean and professional.

Beyond the specific tools, I spent a lot of time working in the library itself. The quiet study spaces and upper-floor carrels gave me the focus I needed when I was trying to weigh offense-defense theory against misperception and the damage of military purges. These are genuinely difficult theories to hold in mind simultaneously especially as a lesser trained underclassman, and the library environment gave me the required sustained concentration. When things got overwhelming, I would take a short break and browse the non-English leisure reading collection on the first floor. Grabbing something to read for a few minutes helped clear my head before getting back to work. As an international student working with highly technical literature in English, that small amenity means much more than it's made up to be.

In the end, the paper argues that the Soviet decision to invade was largely driven by rational security concerns created by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and a window of opportunity, but that the terrible execution came down to leader-level miscalculations and the damage done by the military purges. I do not think I could have pulled together the primary sources, the theoretical framework, and the supporting details as effectively without Hesburgh's resources. From ProQuest and the physical stacks to JSTOR, the subject LibGuides, the Virtual Computer Lab, Overleaf, and the study spaces, everything came together in a way that made the project feel manageable. I am grateful for the way the library supports student research, and this project made me appreciate how much is here, and how much I would have missed without it.