My Earth Focus fall semester class at Notre Dame introduced me to the roots of the dire problem of anthropogenic climate change and familiarized me with some solutions. When I was assigned a research paper in my Multimedia Writing and Rhetoric class, I knew immediately I would take the opportunity to educate myself further on thorium based nuclear energy as a solution to the multifaceted problems of climate change and the world’s growing need for energy. In my Writing and Rhetoric class, I traded my worn Earth Focus textbook for a seemingly infinite source of knowledge: the Hesburgh library.

My introduction to Club Hes’ array of online and physical resources was a presentation to my Writing and Rhetoric class by Denise Massa, the curator of the Visual Resources Center. The first thing she mentioned, and perhaps the most important thing I have learned all semester, was library.nd.edu. On this one page is a search engine more powerful – and more precise – than Google and Bing combined. The OneSearch tab was most generally helpful with my research, but the eJournals tab provided me unique access to scientific reports that are otherwise inaccessible to the general public. This was particularly useful for my topic because not many physical bound books exist about nuclear energy; rather (and much to my chagrin), there are only dense scientific and public policy reports written for and by an esoteric group of experts. Beyond gaining a deeper personal understanding of my topic, the challenge I set for myself was to distill some of this technical and jargon-laden body of knowledge into a paper comprehensible to a Notre Dame student and the educated public. Luckily, Denise (this humble and wonderful woman told us we could use her first name) showed our class the Pot O’ Gold tutorial that
introduced me to the library resources on government information and statistics. The tutorial also taught me cardinal rule of searching: the more you key in, the less you get back. Keyword and subject searching as well as information about citation were all detailed in the tutorial and also vital to my research success.

In my consultations with Denise, I learned how to define search terms even more precisely and beyond that, universally applicable research skills like concept mapping. If a complex research question is broken into smaller “concepts” it is easily searchable. Further, finding synonyms or related words for these concepts is useful in both expanding and narrowing one’s topic. Concept mapping (beyond looking like a cloud in the finished product) helped me determine my purpose, audience, and goals for research by allowing me to visualize how different concepts were connected. Denise enthusiastically introduced me to Remix. This media-creating tool will be useful for creating visual material for my audio-visual presentation for Writing and Rhetoric.

When I first met with Denise (and her loveable dog), I thought I might try to connect renewable energy sources and environmental concerns to the 2016 presidential race with my research paper. She was eager about the idea and together we ran with it until my project was slated to connect the 2016 race with energy, the environment, and Donald Trump’s portrayal in a Simpsons episode from 2000. While my research took me in a more scientific and less policy focused direction and away from The Simpsons and Trump, the strategies I learned from Denise facilitated my knowledge gathering and my conceptualization of my topic and purpose.

Professor Westrate and Denise both spoke about the usefulness of note and bibliography mining. I used this strategy to move from one book or article to others that cite the same source as well as from one publication to the resources it cited. This strategy was most effective at
placing me in the middle of the scholarly debate (albeit as a modest observer) as I read and synthesized the same sources leading nuclear physicists and policy experts use and create.

Paramount to all the other library resources is the one most difficult to qualify: the 13th floor. I have never been able to write effectively unless I am isolated from my friends, noise, and any other distractions, so on one of my first nights studying at Club Hes, I ventured up the rickety, clapboard fortified elevator to what I thought would be the most remote and tranquil place. After about one and three quarters semesters at Notre Dame, the 13th floor has witnessed some of my greatest academic inquiries and discoveries and been privy to my many night-long vigils of au bon pain fueled studying, writing, and revising. The gentle hum of the radiator, the enveloping arms of the surrounding stacks, the magnificent panorama of South Bend beyond the spaceship Gug, and the inspirational graffiti quotations create for me a grotto of research and learning as holy as the one on the other side of campus.