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2024 Hesburgh Library Research Award Essay

In Fall 2023, I heavily employed Hesburgh Library resources for my 10-page research paper in my Writing and Rhetoric course with Dr. Darlene Hampton. My paper, entitled “Fragile Harmony: The Perils of Power-Sharing Agreements in Post-Conflict Societies,” examined whether the practice of consociationalism is effective at healing sectarian divisions in post-conflict societies or whether they simply inflame existing tensions and impede stable governance. As we were given the liberty to explore our own intellectual interests within the theme of “Writing in Service to Justice,” the library was invaluable in helping me discern and refine my research topic. It also provided me with access to a diverse set of sources to draw from, ensuring that my argument was balanced and well-supported.

Our class first attended a library workshop in the 2nd floor classrooms on how to effectively navigate the plethora of resources available to students and how we can best extract the information pertinent to our papers. Engineering Librarian Willie Baer provided a demonstration of One Search and how the use of boolean operators in Advanced Search can generate results that are closest to what we are looking for. Initially, I was oscillating between different areas of interest, from qualified immunity for police to the impact of geography on political conflicts. Through One Search, I was able to see the existing literature and the varying academic viewpoints on these research topics. Mr. Baer showed us how we could quickly glean what each book or academic article was about by looking at the “Description,” as well as the major themes through the “Subjects” attribute. This significantly expedited the process of narrowing down my research question and ensured that I was picking a topic with sufficient

intellectual depth. I was particularly drawn to power-sharing agreements given the tensions present in the literature—some suggested that they were valuable in heterogeneous states with prolonged histories of ethnic conflict due to the enshrined principles of peaceful coexistence, while others argued they entrenched political corruption, patronage networks, and arbitrary racialized partitions. My argument centered on the latter perspective but exposure to these differing opinions ensured that I was engaging with counterarguments.

In investigating the wide variety of sources available on the library database, I was also grateful for the digital access the library provided to many of these materials. Having subscription access to sources like *The New York Times* and journal articles through JSTOR were invaluable in my research. These sources were instrumental in helping me identify which case studies I wanted to focus on in my paper. I ended up choosing Lebanon, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland because they all exemplified the different failures of power sharing in post-conflict societies, while also illuminating some of its possible successes. Through *The New York Times*, I was further able to consult primary sources, including news articles that were written at the time of these ethnic conflicts. For instance, one piece written in 1984 on the attempted assassination of the leader of the Maronite Christians in Lebanon demonstrated the precarious political environment of the time and its role in sparking a civil war. At the same time, I was also able to engage with articles that came from educational institutions from these countries, underscoring the importance of including voices that extend beyond what we usually derive from Western-based outlets. When doing a regular Google search, it is likely that the results will come from just media outlets or universities in the Western world, given that the algorithm prioritizes local relevance. This can inhibit our exposure to a diversity of perspectives that is crucial in academic research.

Moreover, all of the sources on One Search could be directly imported into RefWorks, another platform that the University of Notre Dame provides access to. This allowed me to easily compile all of the sources I was consulting and manage my citations with much more efficiency.

I have also partaken in multiple workshops through Hesburgh Library that have allowed me to develop my research skills. Through the weekly “Events Digest” newsletter, I learned about opportunities like “Bringing Order to Qualitative Madness with ATLAS.ti” with Mark Robison and “Introduction to Text Mining” with Eric Lease Morgan in the Navari Family Center for Digital Scholarship. Participating in these workshops were incredibly valuable in exposing me to different research methods for my course of study in global affairs. From being able to visualize common themes between different articles in ATLAS.ti to conducting text analysis through AntConc, Hesburgh Library has equipped me with the knowledge and skills to continue to tackle my academic pursuits.

Ultimately, in completing this research assignment, the library was an essential part of my research process from start to finish. From offering spaces to work and learn to guidance from librarians to easy access to databases and other external resources, Hesburgh Library has bolstered my intellectual curiosity and academic endeavours. My engagement with the library speaks to its mission to serve as a “a hub for intellectual life” and to foster Notre Dame’s larger engagement with the community of scholars around the world.