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University of Notre Dame Library Research Award Essay

In Stanford Hall, our priest-in-residence, Fr. Stephen M. Koeth, C.S.C., Ph.D., reminds us of the drudgery of doing research the “old-fashioned” way: reading through hundreds of articles, looking aimlessly for information that may or may not be ultimately useful – no search bars, filters, or URL links. Researchers might spend hours at the library without acquiring any valuable information. While “old-fashioned” research may have helped scholars cultivate patience, Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Libraries exemplifies an organization on the cunning edge of research. In writing my research paper, Hesburgh Libraries’ resources were essential for composing a well-researched paper. As a first-year student, I benefited from Hesburgh’s exceptional resources that made academic research accessible and achievable.

In February of 2023, our Writing & Rhetoric professor, Dr. Elizabeth Capdevielle introduced the class’s capstone project: an academic research paper. We were faced with the task of choosing a contemporary issue that piqued our interest – something I found exciting but also intimidating. *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* subscriptions provided by Hesburgh Libraries were crucial in brainstorming possible topics for this paper. In October 2023, I had begun reading *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* on a daily basis, finding news articles that stimulated my intellectual curiosity. When it came time to brainstorm research topics, I sorted through articles that had most intrigued me over the past four months. I kept being drawn to the topic of birth rates in China; in the last decade, China has become increasingly concerned with their falling birth rates, with the government reversing its one-child

policy in 2015. Ultimately, this led me to research the effects of Chinese fertility rates on their agricultural economy to explore possible impacts in China.

While much of my initial research began with Google, Global Affairs and Sociology Librarian Jessica Kayongo introduced me to a plethora of resources offered by Hesburgh Libraries that facilitated my research. In a second floor Hesburgh classroom, she used the projector to explain how to use OneSearch in an academically rigorous manner. She later sat with me, showing me new features on Hesburgh Libraries' platform. Soon, I was utilizing FindText, refining searches with Advanced Search, and using the "Chat with a librarian" tool. These tools were essential when I would later approach challenges in my research. Ms. Kayongo also helped me set up my first Interlibrary Loan for a 2023 article from the *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*. This article proved pivotal to linking family size and education in China that served as a linchpin in my research.

As I continued my research throughout the spring semester, Hesburgh's access to JSTOR, ProQuest & ProQuest E-book, Gale Academic OneFile, and SpringerLink were indispensable. My research focused on uniting disparate areas of research, including population demographics, education, economics, policy, and agriculture; synthesizing these research areas required access to a variety of journals through Hesburgh Libraries. Access to these databases were crucial in finding articles that produced the paper's nearly thirty references and many more uncited articles used in my research. Moreover, the Interlibrary Loan Program continued to be critical in my academic research. As I sorted through articles' references, many works were not directly available. Many pertinent articles were published in China-focused journals that I could not directly access through Hesburgh. However, Hesburgh's expansive Interlibrary Loan network

allowed me to access several articles from Chinese journals with a loan from National Taiwan University.

One last Interlibrary Loan demonstrated Hesburgh Libraries' truly exceptional breadth of available research. After being unable to find a statistic in any article, I submitted an Interlibrary Loan for the *Tabulation on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China*. I expected this request to be denied because of the language of the book (Chinese) and the length of the book I was requesting (over 800 pages). However, Hesburgh Library Assistant Whitney Young was able to find the book and put on hold at Hesburgh. Using this book, I was able to sort the data tables to calculate the statistic that I wanted to include in the research paper. The resilience of the librarians and assistants to get students access to their desired texts displays the excellence of Hesburgh Libraries.

Through access to academic databases, news subscriptions, outstanding librarians and assistants, research spaces, and Interlibrary Loans, Hesburgh Libraries provides comprehensive resources to undergraduate researchers. The accessibility of OneSearch and the availability of supportive librarians like Ms. Jessica Kayongo allows first-years like me to practice thorough academic research at Notre Dame. While Fr. Stephen Koeth's recollections of "old-fashioned" research methods sound interesting, it has made me grow in appreciation for Hesburgh's modern, accessible research tools. Over the next three years, I look forward to continuing to utilize Hesburgh Libraries' outstanding resources and pursue inquiry-driven research.