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2/28/2012

Library Award Reflective Essay

When I began my research for this paper, I had little idea where I wanted the paper to go and what I wanted to focus on. My research started to take on a focus when I stumbled upon an article narrating an early meeting between Spanish explorers and indigenous people in the Caribbean's. From this, I realized that I wanted to focus on European interaction with indigenous groups. However, since my class was focused on British trans-Atlantic relations, I shifted from the initial interest in Spanish interaction to British interaction. After that, it was fairly simple to find information about Protestant missionaries and how they attempted to convert Native Americans in New England.

My sources came almost exclusively from database's that the library allowed me to access. Databases I used included Early English Books Online, JSTOR, ProQuest, and Early American Imprints. One of the main strategies I used was taking names that were mentioned in passing in one article and attempted to find an explanation of who they were and what they did. Also, during my research, I quickly discovered that John Eliot was one of the most prominent figures in New England Protestantism during my time period. Because of this, I then focused on his missions because it provided a much more concise picture than attempting to look at all New England Protestant Missionaries. In the same vein, multiple primary sources mentioned the praying town of Natick and stated that it was the most prominent town. Similar to Eliot, I then focused my research on this town. By focusing my research on these two main figures and places, I was able to have a concise enough research problem to be answered in only one semester.

I did not individually seek the assistance of any of the librarians when I was doing my research. However, at the beginning of the semester a research librarian came to our classroom and showed us the different databases that were available for us to use, and showed us which ones were focused on the time period and geographical location our class was concerned with. Because of this, it allowed me to not waste time figuring out which databases would be relevant for the material I needed. Along with my own research, my professor, Ms. Brennan, inspired me to turn my research towards this area. She told me that New England during this time was well documented and that there would be more than enough sources for a paper like this.

The evaluation of primary sources is somewhat more difficult for me than secondary sources. For the primary sources, I both looked at who had published the source and who had written it. Both pieces of information allowed me to understand what potential bias the source would convey. For example, anything written by John Eliot would, of course, portray his missionary efforts as being successful. For secondary sources, the initial evaluation is the publisher of the piece. I was taught that, at least the majority of the time in scholarly work, for a

piece to be used it had to have been published by a University press. Along with this, I read any peer-reviews of the secondary source I was using. This allowed me to gain an understanding of what the writer's peers thought of his work.

Writing and researching for this paper, will without a doubt help me in my future academic and professional career. The first thing it taught me was to not lock in the focus of your research to early and to be open to suggestions. If I had of been locked on to what my initial idea was, this paper would have never been written. Also, listening suggestions is needed to make your paper better. The peer-reviews of both my classmates and Ms. Brennan were invaluable in the process of bettering my paper.