

Reflective Essay

During the summer of 2010, I participated in a Government and Politics course in which we studied the concept of terror in the self, the community, and the state. I completed a twenty-page paper at the end of the course, where I came to the general conclusion that any number of factors could drive human beings to a type of psychosis typified by destructive and violent acts. I believed at the time, and articulated in my paper, that any individual could succumb to this form of insanity, and that no person was immune. Anyone could and would do evil, if put in the right circumstances. Clearly this was a very sobering conclusion.

It was out of this horrific finding that the idea for my research paper was spawned. In my essay, I had written that man is neither good nor evil, but equally both, but in my work I had only addressed the evil in man, and neglected the good. When I began to think about a topic for my College Park Scholars Capstone Project, I knew it was time to rectify this oversight. My work during the summer had focused on the reactions of individuals to extreme terror and stress, and how that manifested itself in violence. It seemed evident to me that in order to tackle the opposing side, it would be prudent to address those people who actively opposed mass violence in times of terror and stress. My research would focus on the motivations of rescuers in situations of genocide. Bastions of morality in worlds where morality had ceased to exist, their courage fascinated me. I wanted to know how and why a select few people were able to maintain their moral purpose throughout the most extreme conditions imaginable, those of genocide. It was with this purpose in mind that I set out to begin my research.

I had always dreaded the research process. I had viewed it simply as a necessary evil on the path to the actual writing. It was with my Capstone Project that my idea of research began to change. I began my search in the Library's catalog and research port. Almost immediately I discovered a number of sources that would prove immensely helpful to my research. I had always struggled with finding sources for papers, but in this case, the amount of information available was vast. The amount of information I received was so vast, in fact, that I struggled to discern which sources were worth my time to pursue further. When deciding which sources were useful, I had to ask myself a single question: Will this source help me discover the motivations of the rescuers?

Using research port, and specifically JSTOR, I was able to find a number of articles on rescuers, but it was one article in particular that completely changed my paper, and quite possibly my academic future. "How Identity and Perspective Constrain Moral Choice" was an article by Kristen Monroe that led me to finding her book *The Hand of Compassion: Portraits of Moral Choice*. This inspirational book became the major source for my paper, and from that point on, the paper grew organically. The discovery of Kristen Monroe's book was the first time I had experienced the true pleasure of the research process: finding one or more sources that truly bring your paper together.

Javiera Alarcon, the Assistant Director of the International Scholars Program and my advisor on the project, was incredibly helpful throughout the entire process. Although the research was mostly independent, my discussions with her were essential to the furthering of my research. Without her guidance, I know I would not

have been nearly as successful in completing my paper. I had to be very self-motivated throughout the entire process, but it was the motivation from working with Javiera, and the ideas I was able to receive from her that allowed me to reach my highest potential.

The lessons I learned during the research process for my Capstone Project have proved invaluable to my academic career. The ability to effectively search for and select sources is a tool that I have needed numerous times since the completion of my paper, and I will continue to use these skills well into the future. Following my graduation in May, I will begin pursuing a PhD in Political Science at a to-be-determined University, and I can say it is largely because of this research project. It was within the process of writing this paper that I stopped dreading research, and began loving it.