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Library Research Award Essay

As Secondary English Education and English Language and Literature dual-degree candidate, it is quite obvious that my two majors provide the opportunity for interdisciplinary crossover. With a closer look, however, one will find that this overlap only occurs in my education courses. The theories we learn and strategies we study provide education majors with the opportunity to carefully consider the specific affect they have on particular subject areas. In my education courses I am often asked “how will you apply this to your content area?” Nonetheless, I am rarely exposed to interdisciplinary opportunities in English courses.

This past fall, Dr. Jason Rudy asked his students to develop a thesis-driven term paper involving Victorian Literature. Our final term paper would require us to develop an inquiry, conduct research using primary Victorian sources and secondary contemporary sources, and then craft a lengthy essay that synthesized everything. Jason provided his students with a list of possible topics, but ultimately, each individual student had to invent a query.

Meanwhile, I was also enrolled in a human development course taught by Dr. Anne Battle. Throughout this 400-level course, Dr. Battle presented theories of adolescent development, provided relevant recent studies to compliment the theories, and asked students to reflect on the information in the context of individual content areas. I was highly intrigued by this and it was not long before I found myself subconsciously applying them to adolescents I knew.

Resultantly, I found a way to bring education into an English course: write my term paper on it. If I could apply the theories and research to adolescents I met in the real-world, what was stopping me from evaluating adolescents in Victorian novels? Therefore, I examined *The Story of an African Farm*, whose plot focused on the development of three children, and I became their own personal developmental psychologist.

As Dr. Battle had demonstrated, I used Research Port to locate articles in adolescent development journals. Jason led the rest of my research. After explaining the difference between primary and secondary sources, Jason presented a how-to lesson on using the library databases, specifically the collections for the Victorian period. He demonstrated locating 19th century newspapers and magazine articles. We also learned to use the search options to narrow and refine our searches.

Of the ten sources I cited throughout my paper, seven came from the library. A mixture of both web and print texts, my paper would not have been successful without them. In the print catalogue, I was able to search for books entirely dedicated to my topic. Normally, one would not expect a book on Victorian childhood to be commonplace; however, the extensive collection UMD Libraries offers made obscure books easily accessible. Though I only used two print sources in my final paper, I perused other available print sources, which helped refine my research and inspire further inquiry.

The most fascinating feature of the databases is that thousands of century-old texts have been scanned and uploaded online; such texts really molded the foundation of my term paper. An articles written during the period evokes stronger ethos than a contemporary source that examines Victorian childhood based on artifacts. Therefore, I searched 19th century newspapers and journals for articles that would support my thesis. I was able to find trends in my searches and learned which search terms were most successful in maximizing returns.

Selecting credible sources has been a lesson I have been repeatedly taught since high school—one's ethos, in a paper, is greatly affected by the ethos of one's sources. Therefore, because I want to establish ethos, I carefully evaluate sources. When an author is provided, I conduct a quick Google search to establish his credentials. Beyond the author, I also consider the

type of medium the text was originally published in. I also consider its publishing date.

Typically, one wants to use the most up-to-date sources to ensure that newer data has not been released that could counter or rebut one's argument. Nonetheless, for my assignment, older sources, specifically ones dating in the late 19th century, were the most reliable. Finally, through the UMD Libraries' database, one can actually see if an article has been used as a reference in other texts. This feature is another way one can see if the source is credible.

The research I garnered from this project, admittedly, likely will not be of use to me beyond this paper. Nonetheless, I learned a valuable lesson in the process: interdisciplinary coursework is inspiring and exciting. As an aspiring teacher, completing an interdisciplinary project has provided me with the foundational experience to incorporate such projects in my own curriculum. I could use my project as a means to inspire my students to pursue research in their favorite subjects. Such research could help engage students who otherwise find the normal material and assignments monotonous.

Luckily, most of my research was easy to access, and Jason was constantly available for assistance. Therefore, I would not change my experience researching through UMD Libraries. The suggestions I do have, however, are simple: UMD Libraries has to be more transparent—most students are oblivious to all it has to offer. For one, students could benefit from knowing about the types of sources in the databases.

The most important suggestion I could offer UMD Libraries is to make the librarians more accessible. Unfortunately the stigma exists about librarians being old ladies with tight buns, thick glasses, and strict, no-nonsense attitudes that make them seem unapproachable. Moreover, few college students have had librarian interactions to revise this. Rather than having a centralized information desk on the first floor, accessible librarians on each floor could benefit

students. Furthermore, in order to introduce the librarians to students, UMD Libraries should schedule a presentation for all UNIV100/HONR100 courses. At this presentation, the librarians can shatter this elementary misconception while also presenting all their various resources. Since this course is taken freshman year, students will have a better understanding and familiarity with the system before their first research assignment.