Affirmative Action has always been somewhat of a fascinating subject for me. However, the real reason that I chose to use it as my central research topic, was that it had affected someone I’d known personally. We were told to pick our topics based on our own experiences; I’ve known two equally qualified people who both applied to the same university. One was granted admittance, while the other was denied. The two friends of mine were very similar in their grades, extracurricular activities, and so on. Yet, my one friend was Mexican and the other was white, like me.

I suppose I’ve always wondered to what length all the varying forms of affirmative action policies truly extend. How much of an advantage do these policies offer competitive minority applications at a public university? As a student here at the University of Maryland, I see the benefits of a diverse student population; I know how hard UMD strives to create this unique atmosphere. Might UMD, along with other universities, offer a bit of an advantage, then, to minorities? These questions had me curious, so I decided to use my curiosity as my drive, and chose affirmative action as my topic.

Finding not just sources, but scholarly sources, used to be tough for me. I mainly used the McKeldin library, but I also used the one in CSPAC. I would go online to the library site, and find online articles or print sources of peer-reviewed journals, recommended books, and more. This site actually became extremely helpful to me when writing research papers for my other
classes as well, including my Honors Seminar, *The Contemporary American Musical Theatre: From Hair to Hairspray.*

Once I had picked up my print source, or opened an electronic copy, I immediately began to evaluate it as a source for my research paper. I looked at the author’s name and title, asking myself: are they knowledgeable? Do they cite their sources? Has anyone cited this piece in different research papers? I examined the title. Is it biased? Is it relevant? And finally, I read the summary. Does this paper have useful data? Are most empirical facts and statistics supported? All of these things are critical to the worth and value of a document as a source for my paper. Sometimes, I had to reject using a paper, and instead search for a better-fitting source on the lib.umd.edu site; in other situations, I was able to keep the first one I’d found.

I did not seek assistance specifically from a librarian, though occasionally they did have to help me find a book or two, and I requested most of the others. Embarrassing, I know, but McKeldin library is huge! My professor, Ashlie Kauffman, however, was a large asset to the successful completion of my paper. I visited her during her office hours a few times, coming in with various bibliographies and outlines to edit. She sometimes suggested alternative approaches to my research: narrowing my scope from the whole of affirmative action policies, to the more relevant ones, and to the statistics on college admissions. This advice also limited the sources I began to search for, as I focused more directly on the effects seen in college campuses. I still have more broad sources in my research, but these are used to establish a background of information for the readers. The true depth of my research comes more with the overarching theme of college application variance based on an uncontrollable feature: race.
Professor Kauffman would also help me to evaluate how I was planning to integrate my sources into the paper; this was definitely helpful in the overall structure of my paper. It’s one thing to have all of the sources, it’s another to incorporate all of them into a final paper, and have it read smoothly. She suggested when to use quotes from my sources, and when to paraphrase. While this may not have drastically changed the way I researched my topic, it did change my outlook on how to consolidate all of the information found.

During the research process, I learned how to truly take advantage of the many libraries that we have on this campus. Before this paper, I would be content to just use Google Scholars, which isn’t a bad site and does work, but ultimately dims in comparison to the network of sources that can be found in the UMD libraries. I still use the online site for finding my sources, particularly when I am away from campus. I find many of the sources on the site to be extremely useful and credible. I am grateful that my professor insisted we have a “Library day” last semester, where we took the time to truly learn how to navigate the library website.

There is definitely a surplus of information on the site, however. Sometimes it is hard to find that one specific paper; it’s really challenging not to get side-tracked by all of the different options, as well. If I could change anything, it would be the use of parameters on the library site. I want to be able to narrow down my results more accurately. Now, I’m willing to concede that this is probably more my error than anything else, but I do remember this being a point of aggravation for me while doing my research. Ultimately, I don’t have anything else I would change, except I wouldn’t waste so much time on alternative sites trying to find anything to prove the validity of my sources. I would just stick to the online Wiley library site; for once I learned how to use it, that was the primary site I used to find any source. It’s truly a great
resource, and I cannot stress enough just how much I benefited from knowing how to use the site.