

Library Award Essay

The inspiration for my research paper “Shanghai Noon?: An Analysis of China’s Role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” came from a section of readings in my course for the Fall 2010 semester, GVPT454: Seminar in the International Relations of China. In the course, one of the main trends we studied was that China tends to avoid taking a leadership role in the international arena. Therefore, when I read the articles and books related to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), I was impressed with the large role that China played in both founding and then leading the group of Central Asian states. I was intrigued and determined to learn more about it; therefore, I made the subject the focus of my term paper for the class.

After deciding on the general topic of my paper, I was able to begin some preliminary research. I used McKeldin as my source, as I was already familiar with its organizational system from previous papers and projects. By simply searching for “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” on Research Port, I was able to come up with several articles of relevance. A search on Catalog was not quite as successful, as it only returned only a handful of hits; however, by noting the call numbers for Chinese history and for Chinese foreign relations, I was able to discover several books that referenced the SCO (references that I was able to easily locate by using the indices of the books). From these initial books and articles, I was able to both take very useful notes, and to find even more articles and books from the bibliographies. After several hours over multiple weekends, I had compiled twenty-three pages of notes. These notes mostly consisted of quotations and paraphrases I felt would be pertinent to my research.

During this process, I worked independently, since I felt that my library skills had already been developed over three years of use. However, the library training that I had been provided in my earlier years at the University has often proven invaluable: I am very thankful for the

librarians who taught me how to use the different library sources, especially Svetla Baykoucheva and Tom Harrod (who no longer works at the University of Maryland).

After compiling my research notes, I went through them and determined what I felt were the most applicable to my research topic. I did this by creating general categories, leaving comments for myself in the margins of my notes in the process. Based on these groupings (security cooperation, economic interaction, cultural exchange, and counter-US policies), I was able to determine links between different readings and to create the logical sections of my paper. Simultaneously, I compiled all of my sources on EndNote Web, which the University makes available to all students. By using this helpful citation manager, I could easily pinpoint exactly which references pertained to which group. Additionally, by downloading the Microsoft Word plug-in from EndNote Web (Cite While You Write), I was able to easily insert my references in the appropriate format.

By using the library's resources to research and write my paper on China's role in the SCO, I was able to fine tune my research methods even further. In previous papers, I had relied mostly on journal articles which were easily accessed online through Research Port. However, for this paper, I made more use of books, which I was able to locate with the call numbering system: by knowing the call number for one of my textbooks, I was able to find several similarly-related books. Therefore, though I still used plenty of online articles, I was able to supplement these articles with essays and books. In doing so, I not only helped improve the quality of my paper, but I also helped improve my research methods, which will certainly help me tremendously in the future.