

Rosemary Klapac – Library Award Essay

During my freshmen year chemistry class I learned of France's standing as a world leader in nuclear power and I wondered why there weren't more countries like it. This question stuck with me through the years, but bogged down by other more specific school assignments, I was unable to effectively research it. As soon as my Hist208 instructor told us we would spend the semester researching a topic of our choice, my mind immediately revisited this nuclear question. It was this pure interest that motivated me to exhaust all research avenues at my disposal.

In my research I utilized the library catalogue for the UMD-CP campus as well as the UMD university system, Inter-Library Loan, and ResearchPort. I began my research with an initial catalog search of the campus libraries. I used this search to find books as well as to establish relevant subject headings to further my search beyond initial keywords. Once I found the books on the shelf, I made sure to scan the titles and indexes of neighboring books. By doing this I easily doubled the number of books I was able to find on my research topic. I then used the catalog to search all the libraries in the UMD as well as WorldCat to locate books outside of the UMD system. I requested any title that seemed relevant. Needless to say, I started out with a large number of books. However, because books are such a large source of information, I quickly narrowed it down to just a few which I would use extensively. I used ResearchPort to access shorter and more specific pieces of information. I read a great number of articles, used some, and discarded many. By reading these articles, I was inspired to explore more specific avenues and look for them to be discussed in the books. I also used ResearchPort to look through historical archives of *Washington Post* and *New York Times* which I used to locate newspaper coverage of events, such as protests, mentioned in the books.

Through frequent meetings with my instructor, I gained confidence about the potential of my research. She emphasized the importance of original research. Previous papers I had done during my undergraduate career focused on information provided in class and were greatly limited to the sources discussed as assignments. I was worried about my ability to make a unique contribution to the subject without being an expert on it. However, my instructor repeatedly advised us to let our research guide the direction of our paper. Although I had doubts about this at first, I blindly followed her instructions and continued to read until I came across an article that inspired me to focus my paper on the relation between government structure and nuclear usage.

My instructor also helped me a great deal in determining the legitimacy of my sources. While I was knowledgeable of basic indications of reliability, such as website endings and the viability of peer-reviewed articles, I encountered difficulty in determining primary sources. While I initially intended to use one book by Alain Touraine as a secondary source, my

instructor suggested its potential as a primary source. She showed me that the date of publication, the tense he wrote in, and the absence of an index were all indications that the book was a testament to his experience as well as his ideas. This changed the source base of my paper. While I initially intended my primary sources to be newspaper articles, I instead used the writings of contemporary intellectuals and experts. Furthermore, after collaborating with my instructor on this source, I was able to independently determine Ralph Nadar to be another good primary source. Touraine and Nadar were a complicated mixture of researcher, expert, and first hand witness. Encountering these sources extended my knowledge on primary sources.

The research I conducted for this paper was significant beyond the practice it gave me in navigating indexes and databases. It demonstrated to me, for the first time, the potential significance of historical studies. A question that had plagued my mind for years was now answered, and the answer was a product of my own intense investigation. The experience also gave me a quick glimpse into my future as a historian. It took me to a place beyond the traditional classroom experience of lectures and assigned readings. I was challenged to interpret the same sources and utilize the same resources accessed by more experienced researchers. Through long hours, hard work, and under the guidance of my instructor, I grew confident about my potential as a researcher.

Thank you for your consideration.