

Allison Giza
Library Award for Undergraduate Research: Application
Reflective Essay
February 2015

Research for this paper began with an annotated bibliography assignment, for which my professor required us to choose a topic relating to the life and work of J. R. R. Tolkien and find ten sources that would assist in writing a research paper about our chosen topic. I chose Aragorn, one of the main characters in Tolkien's epic *The Lord of the Rings*. In class, we had been discussing Aragorn's role as a classic hero in *The Lord of the Rings*. With this in mind, I decided to focus my research around Aragorn's role as an epic hero.

In my four years at the University of Maryland, I have grown increasingly comfortable with library resource services, and have come to rely heavily on both print and non-print sources from the library system. For this paper, as I have with almost every writing assignment throughout my college career, I began with a basic online catalog search for "Aragorn as hero." As I discovered sources, I modified my search terms to include Boolean search operators, a technique I learned from a workshop with librarian Alex Carroll during my junior year professional writing class. I started using phrases like "Aragorn AND king" to ensure relevance in my sources and to narrow down my search results. This strategy yielded many high-quality results. I also found sources using books we had read for class, by drawing upon other essays and authors that the books referenced. Finally, I made use of the InterLibrary Loan system's electronic delivery feature to access sources that the University of Maryland library system did not carry.

As I perused my sources, I began to feel as though my paper was going down a path that had already been well-paved by other scholars in the field. Many of the essays and articles I was reading contained fabulous analyses of Aragorn as a classic hero in *The Lord of the Rings*. Realizing this, I turned to my professor, Dr. Michelle Butler, to help me refine my topic so that it would address an area of study that had not yet been exhaustively covered. Through discussions with Dr. Butler, I realized that I could draw upon scholarly analyses of Aragorn's heroism, and use these to compare this type of hero to another type within the story, such as that of Frodo, Boromir, or another heroic character. Once I decided to compare Aragorn to another character in the book, I began to refine the sources I was reading and search for specific details that could help me with this task. I began reading essays that analyzed not only Aragorn as he appears in the book, but also Aragorn's character as he is portrayed in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy. I realized that a contrast existed between these two iterations of Aragorn, and decided to focus upon that in my research paper. My thesis was that the medium of film necessitated a change in Aragorn's character from the medieval hero archetype exemplified in the book to a modern hero archetype. Once I decided upon this thesis, I selected sources that would help me strengthen this argument, including analyses of Peter Jackson's films, the films themselves, and work by prominent Tolkien scholars Verlyn Flieger and Tom Shippey on heroism in *The Lord of the Rings* and the effectiveness of the films.

Over four years, I have been assigned many research projects and completed them with varying degrees of success. I think the key element in the success of this paper was a familiarity with the library system, and an ability to use this system in a way that most facilitated my research. I have come a long way in four years in my writing and research methods, and this year especially have made use of library services to my benefit. During this particular project, I

struggled with focusing my topic, and learned that discussion with professors is often the best way to work out the kinks of a research project. I also practiced the importance of spreading out research over the course of many weeks, allowing for the topic to develop into a strong presentation. I think that this will greatly assist me in my last semester of school this spring, as I prepare final papers for my capstone classes.

I think that if I were to change anything about this research process, it would have been to make even more use of InterLibrary Loan services, allowing more time for relevant sources to be delivered to me. I remember not receiving a few books I wanted to use in time to write my paper. I also do not have a background in English or literature, having taken the seminar that assigned this paper as an Honors elective, and so I think that I could have consulted a specialist librarian for extra help on this type of research. The library is a fantastic place for online research and services, but the personal interaction between librarians and users is an important resource that students like myself often forget to utilize in this information age. Perhaps the library could better advertise the availability of subject specialists, so that students are well-aware that they have access to this resource.

Overall, though, I have very much enjoyed becoming familiar with the library system over four years, and I was particularly happy to use it in assisting me with writing a paper about one of my favorite books and movies.