

Jason Moeder

Research Essay

I began my research as a part of my final College Park Scholars class in the spring semester of 2015. The class was a semester-long independent research project that would end up being our final project and an entrant into the College Park Scholars Colloquium at the end of the semester. From there I was referred to the library award and decided I would expand the project in order to apply for it. I originally had the idea to research formerly proposed states when I found a book on the subject at a bookstore. The prospect of creating a project that reflected both my geographic skills and my interest in voting patterns that could be used as a tool for applying for internships or graduate school was enticing but I was unable to create the time for it prior to my research class.

While working on the project originally, I was guided by my professor, Felipe Westhelle, an assistant director for the College Park Scholars Program and current doctoral candidate. Through the semester he helped me manage the project both through time management and setting of goals to reach while also reviewing my progress as I passed each goal. He is also the person that referred me to the library award and pushed me to expand the research I had already done in order to create a more accurate and better project than what I had originally created.

Through the library system I actually did not find many of my resources, however, I used McKeldin's study rooms and quiet floors extensively in order to stay focused while working on the project. In searching for my sources I attempted to find the most accurate and reputable sources so that the statistics and summaries I created would be the most precise possible estimates. For the most part I tried to keep my statistics accurate by taking them directly from the Census Bureau or published books that had been peer reviewed. It is through these resources that I discovered how apportionment of representatives is conducted and some of the proposed states I selected were actually quite close to coming into fruition.

Throughout this research process I came across numerous statistics, ideas and methods that were new to me, reinforced various information I had been taught before, and opened me up to better ways of handling how to go about research. The extensive research abilities I gained from this experience far outpace some of the work I have had to in classes I have taken prior and will help me as my undergraduate career comes to a close. Beyond this, the massive amount of geographic and statistical information I discovered during my research will be invaluable both academically and professionally through the techniques and knowledge I gained from it. As I said before, I had undertaken this research project in particular partly because it could help get into graduate school or in application for an internship and I believe that variety of resources and information I used throughout the research process will help me achieve these goals.

Looking back over my research experience, I would have liked to expand what I actually researched. While I was able to create estimations of population and congressional representations, redistricting within states and how the new states would behave socially and economically were beyond my resources and time. However, given the chance, I would like to pursue this albeit with other researchers. Considering that this was quite an unorthodox research project, it came as no large surprise to me when the library was lacking in information on formerly proposed states and their population counts. Following this I believe that the library should possibly look into acquiring some resources on these states or similar historical scenarios if not for immediate research purposes then for a curiosity like mine that eventually may push someone else to further the topic. In terms of resources used for research, the vastly available other books and study and workstations already available are great for research needs and beyond possibly expanding the library in order to accommodate the sheer number of people who use it daily, I see no issue with its current capabilities.

In finishing, while the library did not give me the resources to help expand my curiosity into a research project, it did give me the space and time to do so. The support I received from my advisor pushed me forward throughout the process and to this award. From this rich experience I hope to continue forward both academically and professionally with the knowledge and techniques I gained through this research.