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Library Award Essay

One of the most rewarding experiences of my first semester at the University of Maryland, College Park was researching and writing my submission for the Library Award for Undergraduate Research, entitled "Game Changers: Baseball Fans, Strikes, and Free Agency, 1966-1981." I authored it for my Historical Research and Methods Seminar course, HIST208B, instructed by Robert Bland in the Fall 2015 semester. The theme of the class, which served as the parameter for the students' paper topics, was the United States after the Civil Rights movement.

As a lifelong baseball fan, I knew immediately that I wanted to write about some aspect of the game and incorporate it into the larger social and political climate of the U.S. in the latter part of the twentieth century. As I was researching possible topics, I became increasingly interested by the labor conflicts of the 1970s and how they manifested themselves in the business of baseball. As a result of my research, I learned that the founding of the baseball players' union, the Major League Baseball Players Association, and the subsequent achievement of many new workplace rights for players, coincided with this broader American labor movement. I was thus eager to further investigate the impact that certain player gains - particularly free agency, implemented in 1976 - had on both the makeup of the game and on the baseball fans who were accustomed to the baseball status quo.

I transferred to UMD before the Fall 2015 semester from a public university in Brazil that, although also a quality institution, had more limited resources, so I was astounded at the wealth of primary and secondary source material that was available to me at UMD's libraries. I was impressed at how easy it was to search for secondary literature using the Worldcat database, as well as amazed at how simple McKeldin Library made the process of checking out the books that I needed - I merely requested holds online and they were ready for pickup the next day! I was able to find five books - two works of secondary literature pertaining to my topic, two autobiographies of key figures, and a collection of essays - that helped me immensely in writing my research paper, and my experience in obtaining them could not have been more stress-free!

Over the course of the semester I also learned about resources that will be invaluable to me over the course of my undergraduate and graduate careers. My class met with Mr. Eric Lindquist, History, American Studies, & Classic Librarian, on two occasions, and he was very

helpful in showing us how to navigate the wide array of databases to which UMD students have access. I was excited to explore the primary sources available in these databases, and I found America: History and Life, Historical Newspapers, and iPoll to be the most helpful for my research topic. I was able to discover many news articles and polling data that became important primary source evidence in my paper. My class also met with Ms. Laura Cleary, Coordinator of Special Collections and University Archives at Hornbake Library. From her I learned not only about UMD's extensive special collections that are open for research use, but was also able to skim through various boxes of UMD's impressive AFL-CIO collections.

While the prospect of writing a fifteen-page research paper, my first of that length, seemed daunting, the kind assistance of Mr. Bland, Mr. Lindquist, and Ms. Cleary made my experience very pleasurable. I take pride not only in the finished product that I was able to craft, but also in the process itself: I familiarized myself on how to seek appropriate primary and secondary source material and how to properly use them to support my central arguments. Looking back, there are a few things that I would have done differently. For instance, I would have used more varied sources, and incorporated at least one electronic media source as evidence - perhaps a documentary film. I think such a source would have further enhanced the credibility of my argument. I would also utilize the archives at Hornbake Library in much greater depth. Although I was able to find columns written by Shirley Povich on the electronic databases, one of which I cited in my paper, I would have loved to have spent more time going through the Shirley Povich Papers collection at Hornbake. I look forward to exploring them further this semester, as an avid fan if not as a researcher!

All in all, I immensely enjoyed the process of writing this research paper and I can't wait for further opportunities to use the tremendous resources available to me at UMD Libraries!