

2020 Library Awards Essay

Yukun Sun

This past Fall 2019 Semester, I took the course COMM458H: Seminar in Political Communication; Rhetoric, Memory, and Culture as a part of my honors curriculum for the Department of Communication. The course largely explored the communal meaning of memory through studying how race, nation, gender, and sexuality are represented in commemorative spaces. Projects included several think pieces that reflected upon related course readings and discussions and a local memory presentation which allowed us to be physically present in a place of public memory and to think about the functions of that space and the act of remembering. For our final assignment, we were tasked to complete an intensive research project that bettered our understanding of campus rhetoric, history, and memory using the university's archives as the main resource.

Before the research process, my professor, Dr. Carly Woods, offered us several resources that focused on memory and how to conduct archival research. Namely, chapters from *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* by Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, and Gaillet's "Archival Survival: Navigating Historical Research," in *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition*. Early on, UMD archivist Lae'l Hughes-Watkins visited as a guest lecturer and discussed her work: "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices."

As we got close to the final research project, Professor Woods asked us to brainstorm on-campus topics/issues that interested us from a rhetoric and memory perspective and to also think about the exigence of that issue. Because I was interested in environmental issues and experienced a rise in student environmental activism in the past semester especially, I thought this topic was appropriate to explore.

Our class attended our first library visit at Hornbake in early October, where archivist Hughes-Watkins talked more about UMD's physical and online archival resources. Additionally, she also talked about proper citations, online citation resources, and ways to construct a working research question.

During these preliminary stages of research, I have yet to narrow down my research topic/question and was still unsure of what exactly to focus on. Some possible topics, I thought, included student environmental activism on-campus through organizations and clubs and the rise of popularity in sustainability studies at the University. It wasn't until Dr. Woods sent me an article about student efforts in 2017 to rename the Plant Sciences building after ecologist Rachel Carson that caught my interest and began to drive my research path.

At our following Hornbake visit, archivist Hughes-Watkins pulled archival material for each member of the class (six students) based on their research topic. Dr. Hughes-Watkins explained to me that she could not find physical material on Carson's relationship to the

university or the building renaming initiative and suggested that I look in the database of student newspapers (The Diamondback) or the online archives. However, she did find some materials relating to the university's Office of Sustainability like its Magazine.

Dr. Hughes-Watkins was very helpful in getting our project started and providing us with the tools and knowledge to do archival research at the university. Before working with her, I was not aware of the university's library archives and many of the online resources such as the student newspaper digitized material and the various archival collections.

In the following weeks, I worked closely with Dr. Woods while writing out my paper topic proposal, the extended outline, the rough draft, and the final. Since my research stemmed from an online Diamondback article, I was able to find several related articles on the same topic from the newspaper. Additionally, the information in the initial article led me to further important resources like the Environmental Science and Policy Facebook Page and one of the previous student board members. Though I was not expecting to find resourceful information on social media like Facebook, I was able to uncover important pieces of my research such as the actual online petition. This portion of the research process almost felt like a scavenger hunt at times. Another important piece of my research was the students behind the petition in 2017. I was able to contact and interview two student board members and gain their perspective on the building renaming initiative.

Beyond these primary resources, I also used journal articles that were part of the course material for COMM458H and online, at lib.umd.edu. I use the library's "WorldCat" frequently whenever I need to find research or journal articles because I find it to be a very reliable and easy search engine. The ability to refine searches, cite, and save articles makes the research process simple. Overall, I had a balance of both scholarly and popular sources, all of which are credible.

Finally, at the end of the semester, I finished a research project that I am proud of. As the paper was around 20 pages, I found organization and time management vital components of the research process. Moreover, I found that conversations with my professor and the library archivist were vital as well. They were able to guide and help me along when I ran into unexpected roadblocks. I can now take these skills with me for the rest of my undergraduate career such as writing my Honors Thesis next year and to Graduate School later. For the future, I think students can benefit from the integration of a librarian guest lecture in the classroom setting as I did. This way, students can become more familiar with the research process without having to figure it out on their own.

Both Dr. Woods and Dr. Hughes-Watkins encouraged my classmates and I to submit our research papers to the 10th annual James C. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond Undergraduate Scholar's Conference, which is concurrently held with the Eastern Communication Association's 111th Annual Convention. I am pleased to say that my research was recently accepted, and I will be presenting at the conference in Baltimore this April.