

Reflective essay (750–1,000 words) describing applicant’s research strategies and use of library tools and information resources.

My paper, “Getting from *Sesame Street* to *Sesamstrasse*: The Development of *Sesame Street*’s International Adaptations, 1970-1978” would not have been possible without the use of the University of Maryland’s archival holdings. Even the topic was one I came to through consultation with items from the University’s special collections. Tasked with the development of an original research project for HIST408, I began my research through a class visit to Hornbake Library to view some samples of collections. Coincidentally sitting down at the table of *Sesame Street* papers, I was immediately drawn towards the subject of the program’s development, aided by the knowledge that the University had extensive holdings on the subject. Thus began a project that would take unexpected routes and through extensive consultation with University archival holdings, allow my work to complicate existing scholarly narratives.

Delving into the somewhat scarce literature about *Sesame Street* and children’s television more broadly, I found mention of an unusual event – the BBC’s banning of *Sesame Street*. Finding this history mentioned only in anecdotal form, I was intrigued by the prospect of exploring it further; through consultation with the online records of special collections, I was able to find that the University’s Children’s Television Workshop holdings had boxes of material about the international versions of *Sesame Street*. It was at this point that I got in touch with archivist Michael Henry to discuss the international aspect of the CTW collections. Michael said that, to his knowledge, much of the international holdings had not been looked at by prior researchers and expressed interest in my pursuit of information through them. Granting the limitations to time and depth of research given that the project was on a tight timeline, I went into the archive to begin research into the subject.

Almost immediately, it became clear that the existing limited anecdotal narrative of *Sesame Street*’s international development was nowhere near the full story. The documents held by the CTW collections described an engaged and iterative process of development, one which learned from earlier challenges and worked to create versions of the programs that would more effectively respond to foreign contexts than the original American version of the show. While the co-production model, as this adaptive model of program development came to be known, had limited mention in the literature, existing work on the program completely left out a middle stage of development. Through the archival documents I found a significant number discussing the “Open Sesame” model, which was a unique stage of development in which versions of the show for international broadcasting were stripped of American elements and intended to be culturally neutral. Moreover, the reason for this model’s implementation came out of the aforementioned BBC ban; even this aspect of the story had not been fully addressed, as the ban came about as part of a much longer interaction between the CTW and BBC executives.

*Sesame Street* was hailed in American television for being the first attempt at a rigorously planned educational program, one which brought in educators and entertainers in the aim of creating a product that was able to both engage and teach through an iterative educational model. It begs the question then, how would that model extend into international contexts? In the existing literature this was a question that had yet to fully be answered, in large part because prior research had not consulted international section of the CTW’s collection in the University’s holdings. Out of the CTW collections came the work of creating a narrative tying these stages of

development. This process was made simpler through the fact that an iterative learning model was again developed for international programming, as it had for the program originally. *Sesame Street*'s international development thus takes on a larger role in the way that one may view the spread of cultural products. Seeing the limitations of an American or neutral version of programming for world audiences, *Sesame Street*'s producers, both at CTW and in other countries around the world, sought a model that would bring about cultural fusion. Within the CTW collection was this engaging narrative that was waiting for someone to stumble upon it. They were the core of the paper and were vital to its development.

In addition to engaging with new histories and discovering unencountered narratives using the CTW collection, this project as my first engagement with archival sources taught a much broader point about the importance of archival sources to historical research. Being able to physically interact with the holdings and see handwritten notes, grammatical errata, and a much more personal view of history was an invaluable experience informing my future study and research. I was, and still am, very thankful for the assistance of my professor in the course, Dr. Katerina Keane and for Michael Henry as CTW archivist for guiding me towards this underserved yet engaging subject that I would not have been likely to otherwise encounter.