My research began last fall in Dr. Katarina Keane's history course, "America in the 1960s," when we were assigned to write an essay about how weekly newsmagazines covered the Vietnam War. I have always been interested in vintage magazines, so I was excited to conduct hands-on research with materials housed in McKeldin Library's stacks. Although the assignment focused on publications such as *Life* and *Time*, I was curious about how entertainment magazines might have engaged with the war, and *Playboy* was one of the first that came to mind. Despite its sexualized reputation, I knew the magazine contained far more than erotic imagery, which made it an intriguing subject of study.

I wasn't initially sure whether *Playboy* would be a viable direction for the project, but after discussing the idea with Dr. Keane, she directed me to Special Collections at Hornbake Library, which holds an archive of *Playboy* issues. That marked the beginning of my engagement with the University Libraries' archival resources, and the paper I ultimately produced wouldn't have been possible without the materials I accessed through Special Collections and University Archives.

Because I had never conducted archival research before, my first visit to Hornbake was a learning experience. I quickly realized that archival research involved procedures and systems I didn't yet understand. When I began trying to locate and request specific issues, I ran into difficulty understanding how the collections were organized. To resolve this, I emailed Laura Schnitker, the Mass Media & Culture curator for Special Collections and University Archives. Laura responded with helpful guidance and connected me with Amber Kohl, curator for the Literature & Rare Book Collections, who provided further assistance in locating and requesting materials. Their support made the archive much more navigable, and without their help I likely wouldn't have been able to access the issues I needed.

As I reviewed *Playboy* issues from 1965 to 1975 in the reading room, I was struck by the amount of Vietnam-related material embedded in the magazine's editorial sections. In particular, I became interested in "The Playboy Forum," a section in which readers – including soldiers stationed in Vietnam – wrote in to share their experiences, opinions, and concerns while responding to one another across issues. The Forum functioned as an interactive space where people from very different locations could engage in discourse about the war. These firsthand accounts revealed a dimension of the Vietnam War that I had never seen before in more traditional news sources.

Expecting there to be substantial scholarship on the relationship between *Playboy* and Vietnam, I began searching library databases for academic literature. To my surprise, I found very little. The near absence of study on the topic became a key motivation for my research, because it suggested that this archive had significant historical value that hadn't been fully explored..

After I submitted my initial essay, Dr. Keane encouraged me to expand the project into a publishable paper. This spring, we refined my research question to focus specifically on "The Playboy Forum" as a site of dialogue and community during the Vietnam War. My research strategy became more targeted once I had a narrower scope and a specific site of analysis. I initially requested issues spanning 1965 to 1975, corresponding to the period of direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but after my first review I noticed that references to Vietnam were especially frequent between 1968 and 1973. That observation narrowed my focus further, and once I decided to concentrate on the Forum, I worked through each relevant issue chronologically, identifying recurring themes and tracking exchanges across issues.

In addition to the *Playboy* issues housed in Special Collections, I used other University Libraries resources to locate primary and secondary sources that would have been difficult to access otherwise. I used ProQuest to find newspaper coverage that supplemented my archival evidence, and JSTOR to research scholarship on the underground GI press and Vietnam-era media culture. These databases allowed me to place *Playboy* in conversation with other forms of wartime discourse and helped me understand both what had been studied and what remained underexamined. Through the library, I was also able to borrow books that helped me establish historical context for the war, Vietnam-era media coverage, and the broader role of editorial content.

The research process also taught me the importance of organization in doing research. At first, I relied mostly on taking photographs of pages that seemed useful, but once I left the reading room and began evaluating my evidence, I realized I hadn't consistently recorded issue dates or page numbers. In some cases, I couldn't tell which pages belonged to which issue. I therefore changed my approach by scanning pages more systematically and immediately documenting key details and notes, both digitally and on paper. This taught me that finding strong sources is only part of the work; making those sources traceable, usable, and interpretable is equally important. As a history and journalism student, accuracy and attribution are essential, and this experience showed me the importance of organization in archival research.

Reflecting on this experience, one thing I would change is the initial accessibility of archival research for first-time users. Special Collections staff were very helpful once I reached out, but the process felt intimidating at first, and the twelve-item request limit could be restrictive when reviewing a long run of periodicals. The library could better support projects like mine through a more user-friendly introduction to Special Collections research, perhaps in the form of a short guide for how to find and request material, and more flexible options for those conducting longer chronological surveys of materials. It would also help if, when making a reading room appointment, researchers could request assistance during the research process. In my project, I examined over 60 issues of *Playboy* and scanned numerous pages from each one, and it would

have been much easier if I could have indicated on the appointment form that someone would be accompanying me, rather than requiring that person to make a separate appointment.