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Winning Reflective Essay: 2020 LHULRA Winner Rachel Moravek

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Reflective Essay

For many undergraduate students, performing research is a daunting task, to say the least. If there is anything I have learned while leading my first research project, it is that it doesn't have to be. In the later months of 2019, I began researching undergraduate students' experiences with and understanding of accessibility and accommodations in the classroom. I started with little to no knowledge of the topic and even less confidence in my ability to execute research at all. All of that has been exchanged for confidence and competence thanks to the resources and services available to me through Forsyth Library. With my project nearing completion, I can say that I have gained talent as a researcher, a deeper understanding of finding and evaluating resources, and a positive impact on my research through interaction with library faculty.

Although I have always been aware of its presence, I feel that Forsyth Library and I have only just become acquainted. My eyes and mind are permanently open to the vast amount of resources and services offered there, and I have become a better researcher because of them. What makes a successful researcher, to me, is the willingness to familiarize oneself with the tools available. A researcher is only as strong as her access to information and admittedly, I didn't take advantage of the resources and services Forsyth Library offers until recently. If there is one sign that Forsyth has made me a better researcher, it is that I have a newfound hunger for knowledge. I'm always striving to expand my bibliography and strengthen my research with sources because I now have a wealth of information at my fingertips.

For years I used the same research database, Academic Search Premiere. While the database has served me well, my search results were limited. Library staff recently showed me how to search all databases for information at once, as well as how to find databases that are related to my major for more specific results. Additionally, the option to filter results by resource type, author, journal title, etc. has proven to be a critical tool for me as a researcher. I often come across an article from a journal that seems relevant to my topic and I can use the filter option to find other articles from the same publication. What has perhaps been the most helpful in my gaining a deeper understanding of finding and evaluating resources is the Interlibrary loan option. This option has taught me that I can seek much older sources to gain context for newer studies. Though Forsyth has an expansive collection of sources, some of the sources I search for, especially the older ones, must be requested from other libraries. The request form is intuitive and easy to fill out and I have the information I need with a few short days.

All these useful resources pale in comparison to the helpfulness of the Forsyth Library staff. If a student is in a rut with their research like I was, there is always someone eager and available to help. At one point in my project, I had hit a wall. I couldn't seem to make the connections I needed, and I longed for my "Eureka!" moment. The Instruction and Research Librarian at Forsyth reviewed the work I had so far, eased my mind by assuring me I was on the right track, and taught me how to conceptualize the more complex questions by searching for sources with similar sociological theories. She also taught me how to seek out articles from a bibliography and followed up with any other ideas she had. Shortly after, I finally had a breakthrough.

After this project, I feel empowered. So much of my area of study revolves around sociological research. The idea that I would potentially be doing research for a living used to make me feel small and unsure. I knew I loved my major but I wondered if I had the skills to succeed at it. The resources and services at Forsyth Library have helped me gain, sharpen, and use those skills and as a result, I feel more confident than ever to take on my future. I look forward to a life full of “Eureka!” moments.