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Reflective Essay

Writing a paper is not always an easy feat, let alone writing a thesis. A year ago, after having changed my undergraduate honors thesis topic for the third time, I had no idea where to start. The only thing I knew was that I wanted to conduct a study that would include both of my majors, Political Science and Journalism and Media Studies, and my minor, Latin American Studies.

Thankfully, during the first week of that semester, one of my professors made me attend a workshop conducted by Rachell Weigel. I was so glad I attended the workshop because I learned a variety of ways to search for data through the library resources and online. I learned how to do research through Google Scholar and use different websites for fact checking. Given that I was still lost about the topic, Mrs. Weigel suggested I consult with my department's librarian, so I met with Susie Skarl. She not only helped me narrow my topic, but she also helped me learn how to use the library's Quick Search tool and how to use and download books and articles from different databases.

After having met with her and learning how to do research effectively, I started to research my new topic: permanent campaigning and its effects on press freedom in my home country of Ecuador. The Quick Search tool was easy to use and led me to valuable articles from peer-reviewed journals regarding media and politics. I mostly obtained articles from JSTOR and EBSCO.

In addition to searching and reading articles for my literature review, I obtained help from Dr. John Tuman and Dr. Paul Traudt, who are in my committee. I made considerable advances in my literature review the first semester, but I was having trouble

keeping track of all of the articles and sources I accumulated. Thankfully, I had enrolled in the Graduate Research Certificate Program and was able to take a workshop on RefWorks through the library, again taught by Mrs. Weigel.

During the workshop, I signed up for an account and learned how to keep track of sources, make folders and create bibliographies in a simple manner. I also learned how to install RefWorks on my home computer so I could keep track of my folders and have bibliographies ready at the request of my committee. As my research pertained to political occurrences in South America, it was important for me to keep track of the articles I had attained, especially because they were in different languages.

Because of the diverse origins of my research articles, however, I started to have trouble when the articles and books I needed were not in any of the library's databases or bookshelves. Thankfully, I remembered from Mrs. Weigel's workshop that the library had a loan program to borrow books and articles from other universities. Thus, I signed up with Illiad and used it to get articles and books that were impossible for me to get otherwise. In fact, I liked Illiad so much that I have used the Inter Library Loan and Link+ programs for research in my other classes as well.

After much research and analysis, I ended up writing my thesis on the chilling effects that a permanent campaign by a populist president could have on the Ecuadorian print media. Through the research methods courses I have taken, I have learned how to perform content analysis, which I applied to my research. Given that I had to evaluate the levels of negativity in opinion columns printed in privately owned newspapers, content analysis was key. Thus, through the library's workshops and resources, I was not only able to conduct an extensive literature review but also a clear and thorough analysis of

opinion column content.

Now that I am getting ready to defend my undergraduate honors thesis, I am confident that the work I have done on it adds value to my discipline. Thanks to my research, I was actually able to come to a conclusion that contradicts major indices of press freedom such as those of Freedom House and Polity. In fact, I was not only able to develop a new way of quantifying aspects of press freedom, but I also learned valuable skills I can apply further down the road in my academic and professional careers.

**Note: I will not defend my thesis until two weeks from now and until I have further reviews from my committee. But, the thesis attached to this application is fairly completed.*