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Reflective Essay on the Research Process for

"Dal *Principe* di Machiavelli a Trump"

In the Winter of 2018, I took Italian 499, an independent study based on the materials of Italian 305, Texts and Traditions I, a course that provides broad historical introduction to texts and traditions from the Middle Ages to 1700. I focused my efforts on the theories of Niccolò Machiavelli, an Italian political philosopher whose treatise *The Prince* is full of observations that seem to pertain to contemporary political values, although his work was published in 1513. After having been secretary to the Second Chancery of the Republic of Florence from 1498 to 1512, Machiavelli was exiled from city affairs when the Medici returned to power. He dedicated *The Prince* to the Medici family, hoping they might accept him back as their political counselor; a failed ambition. My first inclination was to discover how Machiavelli's recommendations on maintaining power could possibly still apply in a society so vastly different from the author's. Upon rereading the work, I found many of his suggestions to be based on human nature. The assertions in each chapter were often structured by cause and effect, with the cause being a recommended action, and the effect a natural consequence. The dependability of his counsel comes from the fact that human nature is a constant, and in Machiavelli's eyes, people's inherent depravity makes them easily governed and controlled. Those who agree with this basic statement, on which his whole argumentation is built, could potentially employ the means that Machiavelli suggests with great success in any society. The next step in my research was to find scholarly articles that discussed the role of human nature in *The Prince*.

After completing searches through the *International Medieval Bibliography* and *Iter: Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, which I found through the University of Washington Library Guides website in the A-Z Databases tool, I failed to find anything fruitful and turned to *JSTOR*. After a few keyword searches, I decided to move on to the UW Libraries Search. There, I found a short and general article on the topic, but ultimately felt as though I was nearing a block with my preliminary searches. I decided it was time to ask for help, and emailed the Romance Languages & Literature subject librarian, Deb Raftus, whom my professor had mentioned as a resource.

I sent Ms. Raftus the article I had already found and a short description of my intended research topic, mentioning that I was particularly interested in using Donald Trump's rise to power as a contemporary example of Machiavelli's advice in motion. She explained that she had used Google Scholar, UW Libraries Search, and social sciences databases called *PsycInfo* and *Sociological Abstracts* to find a few papers that might be helpful. The two texts I was interested in were not owned by UW libraries, so I requested scans of them via Interlibrary loan. One was an article on Donald Trump and appealing to Christian morality as discussed in *The Prince*, which helped me understand how someone else approached comparing Machiavellian philosophy with Donald Trump's campaign technique, although it was not about human nature. The second source was a chapter titled "Machiavelli" out of the book *An Invitation to Political Thought*. This ended up being one of my most useful sources, because it led me to the specific observations which I would focus my remaining research on: recognizing when you must mediate the arguments between plebs and the elite, using extreme opportunism, and knowing when it is better to be feared than loved. I found a few more sources with the advice of the subject librarian, and moved on to making connections between the sixteenth century and today.

Since it would be radical to compare our electoral and representative democracy with the sixteenth century dichotomy between the plebs and elite, I was glad to find that the categories of conservative and liberal were divisive enough in the 2016 presidential election to create a similar sort of polarization to that which Machiavelli analyzed in his treaty. He said that leaders should pay attention to the most controversial topics, as these would alert them towards the topics that would make or break their career. After researching the topics that voters polled as "most important" in deciding which candidate they would choose between Trump and Clinton, stratified by political party affiliation, I found that both parties cared most about immigration reform and changing the tax code, but had opposing preferences on outcomes. Next came the stage of discovering whether there was substantial proof to support my claims.

It required substantial searching and discernment to find political sources that seemed unbiased, and had information on the topics I was interested in. One particularly good source came from the Pew Research Center, a group that polls on public issues. I used it to argue that the most important topics for voters were those that Trump's campaign sought to satisfy more widely. It also gave me data on other topics that were considered important enough by the survey but not particularly supported by Trump, such as the rights of gays and minorities. I analyzed several articles comparing the Trump and Clinton policies, cross-referencing them with the polling demographics in the Pew article, which were periodically stratified by political party affiliation. By keeping all of my data organized and my inquiry systematic, I was able to make statements that were supported by abundant factual information. Using a variety of sources, and avoiding obstacles by requesting assistance, I convincingly argued that Trump used techniques endorsed by Machiavelli, over 500 hundred years ago, to win the presidential election. Not only

did this ascribe to Machiavelli correctly determining the nature of humans and how they ought to

be ruled, but it also insinuated that we may see more politicians like Donald Trump in the future.