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Library Research Award Application
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Library Research Award: Critical Essay

When I began the 2018-2019 Political Science Honors Program, I had already worked for Professor Christopher Parker as a research assistant. Nonetheless, the idea of conducting my own research project was daunting. The consensus among my cohort was that we had no idea what to expect or how we would turn our vague ideas into completed papers. However, with help from faculty members, my advisors, and University resources, I not only successfully completed my project, but I developed a sense of academic efficacy I had not expected.

To begin my research, I returned to what ultimately became one of the most helpful sources I would use: a syllabus from my favorite class, Feminist Theories of Justice, taught by Professor Christine Di Stefano. The assigned readings sparked my imagination, transformed my approach to academia, and provided a variety of potential research questions for me to pursue. Based on Professor Di Stefano's recommendation that I pursue a topic related to leftist economic policies and women's liberation, I returned to works of Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young. These readings determined the theoretical framework on which I would base my project.

After re-reading Fraser and Young, I turned to two other political theorists Professor Di Stefano had recommended to me—Carole Pateman and Kathi Weeks. Their work on Universal Basic Income and women's labor inspired my eventual research question on how basic income and federal job guarantees would impact women. Their writings inspired the next phase of my

research, during which I read all relevant works that Pateman, Fraser, Weeks, and Young cited in their writing to contextualize and support their arguments. Throughout my research project, I returned to this strategy whenever I felt unsure of my next step or lost in my research.

When I exhausted these resources and needed new information, I relied primarily on UW's library resources. I used UW Libraries Search, interlibrary loan, and a range of social sciences databases such as JSTOR. When I had the time, I wandered the stacks of Suzzallo, Allen, and Odegaard to see if any titles jumped out at me. I also chose a collection of keywords to search online, including welfare, basic income, job guarantees, dependency, women's rights, and caregiving. A combination of these and other phrases generated a wide array of information that I ended up citing in my thesis. Before this project, I had not realized how many academic articles were at my fingertips at a moment's notice.

The hardest part about researching was deciding when to stop. Others' whose advice I sought confided that they never felt their own research was complete. However, they generally agreed that once I was repeatedly reading the same arguments or ideas—called “oversaturation”—I could consider my work as close to done as it could be within my time allotment. I also felt I had reached this point when the sources I found seemed increasingly obscure, such as several from decades-old political magazines, and when no arguments I read seemed controversial or novel.

I asked for help whenever I felt stuck. My advisor and second reader, Scott Lemieux and Chelsea Moore, respectively, either provided me with suggestions or affirmed I was already on the right track. Other faculty members, too, recommended books related to courses I took with

them previously. Professor Nathan Roberts, for instance, recommended a helpful book on the history of the Reconstruction Amendments. Over the course of my project, I felt increasingly comfortable reaching out to others who consistently seemed happy to help with my project and provide their insights.

As I learned more about my topic, I gained confidence in my own approach to finding relevant sources and narrowing those down. My newfound confidence in these skills continues to assist my research in classes. I am certain I will carry these tools with me into whatever postgraduate education I pursue. I now feel confident in my abilities to identify sources effectively, read and summarize them efficiently, and still allow myself time to learn about less relevant topics that may not make it into my final product, but which expand my knowledge and may inform future academic endeavors. This was the true joy of researching—not only becoming highly educated on a specific topic, but also familiarizing myself with new concepts, histories, and arguments that I might not have encountered otherwise. It was through this process that I fell in love with the process of researching and gained the skills I will need to continue this work going forward.