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### Amicus Historicorum (The Friend of Historians)

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Amicus Historicorum  
*(The Friend of Historians)*

Jacob Williams, Madison Isenberg, Dr. Colin Snider, Dr. Mandy Link, Dr. Matthew Stith, Librarian  
Livia Garza, Librarian Vandy Dubre

Future and present scholars,

This project is unusual in that it is not a research-based piece as are most written works in the halls of academia. Rather, my goal for this project is unorthodox, as it is written informally to assist you, the reader, to better navigate and understand the different possibilities and paths available to you in your collegiate career, all told through the personal experiences, life stories, and different paths of your professors, librarians, and fellow and former undergraduate colleagues.

I would not go as far to say that you need the advice written within these pages, but this project is important for you on those all-nighters, those last-minute assignments, and in those moments that you may feel entirely overwhelmed, as we have all been through it too. There is a comfort in reading the tribulations and successes of others, as we can gain inspiration from the fact that others have made it through and across those finish lines. Thus, this manual is for you, a friend to get you through tough times, and to help you decide what it is that you desire from college. College is an experience that is individually unique and redefines how you think, what you want from life, and who you are as a person, and thus, should be about you.

My personal hope for this guide is that it does help you decide what path to take, eases your anxieties for the future, and informs you of the possibilities and amazing experiences available to you if you have the drive to see them through. Suffice to say, you are not limited in your possibilities to be successful as an undergraduate, and in truth, you are starting your career even now. Your class research papers can be publications, your publications can be conference presentations, and you can contribute meaningfully to your discipline even as an undergraduate. You are a philosopher, historian, linguist, scientist, writer, and scholar, all through your very attendance and interest in furthering your education on the college level.

To sum, this paper is my gift to you. I may be leaving UT Tyler, but I would like to leave my words and experiences behind as a companion and friend as you navigate and create your own experiences over the course of the next few years.

I wish you all the best,

Jacob Williams

### Faculty Voices on History and How They Developed Their Path

- A. What does research look like in your field? How does it function? Where does it function, or more accurately, where does it occur? Are there tools required - i.e., language, technology, etc.? Are there tools that are not required, but ones that you have found and would recommend?**

Research as a historian is a complex process. Often non-historically trained people assume that what we do is memorization, which couldn't be farther from the truth. Research involves in-depth analysis of primary and secondary sources. One has to master the historiography of their field as well as gather a variety of primary sources (memoirs, newspapers, government documents, etc.) to assess the perceptions of the time period in question. To achieve this, one has to make use of libraries as well as archives. Archival research is key to being a professional historian.

As far as skills go, some you acquire, particularly in a masters and/or doctoral program. A language (or sometimes multiple languages) can be necessary depending on the area of research and time period. For instance, while I have researched and written about Ireland, WWI, and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I did not have to learn Irish since by that point, English was the predominant language and Irish was rarely used. As another example, if one studies Korean history, they typically have to be able to at least translate and read Korean, Japanese, and Chinese due to the nature of Korea's history.

In terms of technological skills, while many primary sources have been digitized, most have not. This requires a historian to be flexible in their acquisition of these sources. You have to learn how to use different digital archives (not all are well organized). A historian also has to familiarize themselves with the inner workings of archives when in person. Each archive can have a different way of working and sometimes it can take a day or two to fully grasp how to best utilize that archive. Rarely are all one's sources at one archive which then requires multiple trips. One also has to learn to use machines like microfilm and microfiche.

Some tools you acquire and develop as you research and gain experience. To be a historian one has to be self-motivated and be willing to dig deep, to follow the evidence wherever it leads. One has to be dedicated. I like to think about it like being something of a detective.

**- Dr. Mandy Link  
(Associate Professor of History)**

Any research project begins, of course, with a question. How one comes to that question is inevitably tied to the secondary scholarship, and it's there where research truly begins. One first becomes familiar with the books and articles on a subject; in this way, a researcher becomes well-versed in the questions and debates that have defined that scholarship, the gaps and unanswered questions in the scholarship, and avenues for further research. This process also allows one to fully engage with the broader historical contexts that will be the backdrop for their own research subject.

From there, scholars typically spend a considerable amount of time – divided or in one long stretch – in archives. These can be wide-ranging, from the more visible national or state-level archives to private archives, local archives, NGO archives, and other institutional archives. Depending on the topic, oral history may also provide an avenue for research, one that requires its own methodological and conceptual approach as the researcher considers elements like interview style, the questions to ask subjects, the nature of interviewer-interviewee relations, and transcription. Digital archives are also an invaluable resource, especially as they can often be accessed from anywhere (allowing travel time to be devoted to archives that do not have digitized materials), and have grown especially important in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when travel became more difficult.

In terms of the time required for research, for book-length projects, a researcher can expect to need at least 6-12 months of archival work, with potential follow-ups of 2-6 months that can often be spread out. Such research expeditions are often based on outside funding through grants and fellowships like the Fulbright, the Fulbright-Hays, the Social Sciences Research Committee, the Ford Foundation, or other sources, so an ability to develop skills as a grant-writer is also invaluable. For researching shorter projects – articles and chapters of 6,000-10,000 words – research can often be conducted in a couple of months. For scholars studying outside of the US, research is often dependent on knowing one or more foreign languages so that one can access and understand the primary sources in another language.

**- Dr. Colin Snider**  
**(Associate Professor of History and Graduate Advisor)**

I research and write about how the natural environment has shaped the human world throughout much of American history. This has enabled me to explore a variety of interesting contours of American history—and beyond. I get to write about how bears helped shaped Indigenous American culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, how the Ozark Plateau reframed guerrilla warfare during the Civil War, how rats impacted soldiers on the Western Front during the First World War, and how the wetlands of South Vietnam affected American soldiers in the 1960s. Such chronological and thematic breadth has enabled me to use a wide range of research angles and tools over the past two decades.

Most of my research digs into *personal* accounts of past events. This is to say I rely heavily on first-hand accounts through letters, diaries, and journals. I have also found historic newspapers to be quite useful, although it is important to be cautious with the often-unbalanced nature of such a source. I have found number-based, data-driven sources a bit more challenging. They contain stories, to be sure, but such stories are difficult to discern and even harder to convey. Government documents, census records, and other similar source material provide important data-based context, but it is hard to inject life into such sources. *Life* is in the personal and human sources. This is where stories most readily exist, and this is what draws me as a historian.

**- Dr. Matthew Stith**  
**(Associate Professor of History)**

**B. What would you like your students to know about these things? Assuming this is their first exposure to researching and writing within your field?**

The primary course for helping students understand the intricacies and complexities of how a historian researches is HIST 330 Methods. While each faculty structures this course a bit differently in terms of specifics, the overall course goals remain the same: that students conduct a semester long research project that helps them understand the differences in primary/secondary sources, how to find them, how to analyze them, etc. The goal is also that they will take these skills with them into other courses as well as into their careers after graduation.

I think one of the things we try to communicate to students is how hard and rigorous historical research is. It's not a simple Google search; it takes a lot of time, effort, and relentless dedication. Another thing I try to establish is that a good historian doesn't just narrate the past, they **MUST** have an argument, a "so what" factor. They have to be able to communicate to the reader not just what happened but why it's important.

**- Dr. Mandy Link  
(Associate Professor of History)**

The first thing I would remind students is that research is a process, and one that requires persistence and creativity. There is no “magic document” that will make your argument for you; the good news is, there is also almost never a “poison document” that single-handedly undoes a well-constructed research project.

There are many paths to research; it is important to keep an open mind to potentially-useful things that may not be immediately evidently useful, especially in the earliest stages of research. Thus, it is important to be mindful of the materials you are examining and, if possible, to note down everything you encounter and where you encountered it, in case you need to return to it.

Additionally, since research is a process that unfolds over days, weeks, months, and (in the largest projects) years, it is important to keep perspective. Some days are better than others; going through materials for hours (or days) without anything that does not appear immediately useful can sometimes feel like you’re not finding anything; avoid this mindset for two reasons. First, you’re encountering all kinds of materials, some of which may be useful later in ways you can’t envision at that stage of the project, and some of which may open the door to new avenues of research or inquiry. Thus, even while you might be working on a particular research project, always be asking questions about the materials you’re looking at that maybe *do not* immediately seem relevant: what do they reveal? Whose voices/perspectives do they include/exclude? What possible stories might we be able to tell with them?

Second, writing your analysis and your research project is very much like the research process itself, in that some days are better than others. Sometimes, you will find the words and ideas pouring out; other days, it is a struggle. On those days, though, avoid despair; even if you get very little written, it is important to keep in mind you are working your way through it. Imagine it like driving in snow – you may not be going quickly, and it may be a slog, but you’re still working your way to clearer roads.

Additionally, you are your own worst critic, so never delete what you have written; instead, save it as a side note, a different draft, or just a compilation of materials you deleted that you may be able to use later. You never know when or where it might become useful to help you develop an idea and to better express what you’re trying to say later.

**- Dr. Colin Snider**  
**(Associate Professor of History, and Graduate Advisor)**



There are many avenues to access such material. For much of my research across time and place, I have found an abundance of letters, journals, and diaries in published form—often usefully transcribed and edited by modern historians. For example, historian Mark K. Christ transcribed and edited a diary kept by United States soldier Jacob Haas who fought in the Trans-Mississippi Theater during the Civil War, titled *“This Day We Marched Again:” A Union Soldier’s Account of War in Arkansas and the Trans-Mississippi* (2014). Christ’s work as editor brings to light in published form the personal diary of a Union soldier who both witnessed and participated in the chaotic and bloody guerrilla war that raged in and near the Ozarks. Books published during or near the time I am researching also often prove valuable. Theodore Roosevelt’s *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), to name but one title, yields original insight into the famous hunter and naturalist’s bear hunting trips in his own words.<sup>1</sup>

Many excellent personal sources have yet to be published. In these cases, it is often necessary to visit archives and special collections to access the unpublished primary sources—or, increasingly, to access them on the archival websites as growing numbers of documents are digitized and posted online. It is imperative to do “pre-research” before visiting an archive in person. First, it helps to ensure that you will not waste time and money on documents that are available online. (I’ve wasted just such time and money more than once.) Second, it is not generally acceptable to drop in unannounced without a research plan communicated with the archivists. (I’ve also erred in this way.) For these reasons, at minimum, much of the work related to research goes into *planning* the research.

All professional historians have researched archival sources on-site, but it is now increasingly common to find important materials digitized on government or archival websites. The library at UT-Tyler, though short on books, provides access to a host of valuable databases and websites that might otherwise require expensive subscriptions. Public (and free) archives across the country also provide a vast array of digitized primary source materials. The National Archives and Records Administration, Library of Congress, and a host of state and local archival collections maintain thriving and ever-growing digital collections.<sup>2</sup>

**- Dr. Matthew Stith**  
**(Associate Professor of History)**

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman: Sketches of Sport on the Northern Cattle Plains* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1885); Mark K. Christ, ed., *“This Day We Marched Again:” A Union Soldier’s Account of War in Arkansas and the Trans-Mississippi* (Little Rock: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> The following examples house vast amounts of records in both hard copy and digitized. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov) (accessed on October 30, 2022); Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov) (accessed on October 30, 2022). For a good example of a state-level archive, see Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, TX, [www.briscoecenter.org](http://www.briscoecenter.org) (accessed on October 30, 2022).

**C. How do you, personally, research and write? How could your personal methods, habits, or quirks better improve the more general methodologies taught to undergraduate students in your field?**

This is a big question! But I will try to be as succinct as possible. Over the course of my masters, doctoral program and then professional career I have developed a method of research habits that work quite well for me. Some are commonly used; some are particular to what works for me.

As with most historians, I start with a question. For my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation, the initial question was quite simple: what would make Irishmen voluntarily serve in the British Army during World War I when the Irish had attempted to free themselves from British control for centuries? I began by reading many academic books on the Irish experience of World War I through my university library (I was at an R1 institution that had an extensive library network which meant a wealth of books for my research). As I read through such secondary sources, I take thorough notes by hand as I've found that taking notes on the computer does not ingrain the information in my brain (a quirk to be sure). I then devised a color-coded highlighting system (yellow = a potential source I needed to look for, pink = ideas for my thesis/dissertation/book, green = direct quotes I wanted to use). After I've worked through a good number of secondary sources, I then move onto the primary sources, having acquired sufficient context to do so. Once at the primary source stage, that often requires archival research which was true in my case. I did two research trips to Ireland for my dissertation and subsequent book.

One thing that is integral to researching is that the researcher must be flexible. Sometimes you're chasing down a source or an idea and it doesn't end up working. At that point you have to be able to pivot rather than become discouraged. It is also important to follow the evidence rather than cherry picking sources to meet a predetermined conclusion.

When I teach HIST 3300, I take the time to explain my process to the students. Often students are intimidated by the workload of this class, as it is much higher than other history courses. This is necessary for them to understand what professional historians do, but I like to break down my journey as a historian as well as my process so that they can see that it is, indeed, doable. Part of what I teach students is that, while some of these are my process in particular (the highlighting and method of notetaking), they must find what works for them. But that combing through secondary sources *first* and then primary sources is the best way to move forward. Secondary sources provide context and narrative without which primary sources do not make sense.

**- Dr. Mandy Link  
(Associate Professor of History)**

For research, this is highly contingent upon a number of factors beyond your control – what archives are available, when archives are open, if workers are on strike and the archives close (something that has happened more than once), etc. While you are conducting research in the secondary scholarship even before going to archives, the archival research still begins before ever traveling. This happens by examining archival websites to become familiar with their collections and to find out what is available digitally, so that research (domestically or abroad) can be more efficient by looking only at the collections needed that are not digitally available.

Early in the project, research also often includes a “preliminary research” trip of a month or so, where one visits the archives one expects to use to see which collections are available, to look at their catalogues to get a sense of the documents available within them, and to get a sense of the size of the archive so as to be better prepared for the time needed for each. In my field (and in most fields outside of US history), this is followed by a “major” research trip – 6-12 months – in which one lives overseas, going through archives in their location and traveling within the country if need be for additional archives that are relevant to the project.

As for writing, this will vary from person to person. Some recommend writing a certain amount (one page; 500 words; etc.) each day, no matter how good or how bad it is. I tried this approach but found it did not work for me. Instead, after acquiring as many archival materials and taking notes on them as possible across several months, I then print out those notes and begin to go through them over and over again, mapping ideas, commonalities or differences, themes, and connections, placing my own notes in dialogue with one another. This leads to a “notes on notes of notes” approach that helps me organize the ideas in my mind and begin to flesh out these ideas and connections. I do this all manually – pens and paper – so as to slow down and gather my thoughts. After a few weeks of this, I reach the point where I can have a detailed outline that identifies not only each major idea/argument and organizes it structurally, but also highlights which particular documents and archival materials to refer to for each idea. With this system in place, I can then sit down and write 30-50 pages in a week, as my ideas are organized and I know exactly what structure the project I’m working on will take. I also write sections when I know what they’ll say even if I don’t know exactly where they will fit yet. Finally, if you suddenly feel the urge to write – WRITE! That energy does not always last forever, so it’s best to take advantage of it when it hits.

**- Dr. Colin Snider**  
**(Associate Professor of History, and Graduate Advisor)**

I have experimented with many ways to research and write over the years, and I have yet to find an absolute “go-to” method. For recent projects, I have found it quite helpful to create and use a detailed outline that constantly grows and evolves. The outline consists of a Word document with bullet-points that I use to frame my project. I then flesh out each topic, section, or chapter with relevant historical and historiographical research. All outlines for all projects typically follow the same basic format:

- 1) Introduction and working thesis—based on research.
- 2) Historiography—what have other historians said about my topic and how might I *add* to that ongoing conversation?
- 3) What “true” stories, based on primary-source evidence, can I tell to support my argument(s)?
- 4) How can I close the project with a brief, clear, and persuasive conclusion?

I write detailed notes within each of these categories. These notes include direct quotes from primary sources, interpretations from other historians, and a variety of other thoughts, comments, source citations, and so on. The product resembles a semi-organized compilation of ideas, questions, evidence, and citations from which I slowly mold something clearer. Even when I begin to string together words and stack paragraphs (aka, the writing process), I continue to research and add to the outline-turned-paper until the project is finished.

Accumulation can be a wonderful thing, especially when it comes to productive writing. I often encourage students (and myself) to work at least a little bit every day on large projects. Even brief daily stints add up. I have found that I can write approximately one manuscript book/article page per hour on average when accounting for citations, proof-reading, and all other factors that go into the process. Some pages go faster, some much slower. If my one-page-per-hour rate is maintained, and if I simply spend one hour per day writing, it is possible to do remarkable amounts of quality work without having to resort to the shoddy last-minute binge writing that so many of us fall into as a deadline approaches. Of course, one must also factor in a great deal of preparation time to get on the one-page-per-hour train. My hourly writing rate does not count the hours of research, note-taking, and all other work that is needed to *start* writing.

In the end, the research and writing process takes a great deal of grit and patience. It takes grit to be productive when there are many other things that we might rather be doing. It takes patience to ensure that what we *do* produce is carefully and thoroughly situated in both the relevant historiographical conversation and strong primary source evidence. All scholars develop their own techniques to be productive—whether those entails self-styled mind games or carefully choreographed schedules. Sometimes we must employ *all* available tactics to finish a job. If anything is certain from my experience, the final product’s quality is proportional to the amount of work that went into it over time rather than immediately before the deadline.

**- Dr. Matthew Stith**  
**(Associate Professor of History)**

**D. Personally, where has research taken you? How have you academically evolved, or how did student you become post-doctoral or professional you? If possible, this would be a good place for the earlier mentioned snippet of an early and personally foundational research project. In this process, what challenges, rewards, and opportunities appeared to you that you would like to share with your students?**

I have been thinking about this quite a bit lately as I am working on a new research project. My master's thesis (about 100 pages) led to my dissertation (about 250 pages) which I revised and published in 2019 as my book. All in all, this process took eleven years and a great deal of hard work and dedication. It could have been easy to become disheartened as one always runs into obstacles, but persistence and deep love of the subject matter kept me going (at one point I was having dreams that I was speaking to the people I was writing about).

When I started this long process, I wasn't so much daunted by the duration; in fact, that's one thing I relished about this career choice: one can never be bored! But I was terribly intimidated when I started my master's degree. I was intimidated by the amazing students in my cohort and wondered if I could really cut it. But I had supportive professors who encouraged me to follow my interest in Irish history. When I finished my master's thesis, I felt a bit more confident that I belonged in academia. The five years I took for my PhD helped me gain more confidence as I gained more knowledge and experience (attending academic conferences and publishing an article in a peer reviewed journal helped a great deal).

During the PhD it is imperative, in order to be competitive on the job market, to publish and deliver presentations on one's research. My research not only took me on two amazing research trips to Ireland, but also to conferences at Cambridge University, The University of Edinburgh, and in Helsinki, Finland. Meeting with other historians and sharing my work not only provided useful feedback, but also expanded my knowledge of other aspects of history. Nothing is as inspiring to me as meeting with other historians who are as passionate about their work as I am about mine.

It is no easy thing to publish any kind of book, let alone an academic book. The process of applying to a publisher can take months and during this time another historian is appointed to read the proposal and manuscript to determine its worth. This was an agonizing wait for me! I had applied my first semester teaching here at UT Tyler, so it was lot of newness at once. Once my book was accepted, I definitely felt like I had "made it," as they say. I have to admit, when I opened the box of my book copies I teared up. That book represents over eleven years of my life; so much hard work. The quality of my research was certainly one of the reasons I was able to secure employment as a professor.

And now I am working on a new research project, and it's been interested to start at the beginning again. Having been through this process before I know how I work best and that has made this research project progress faster.

There are many challenges, rewards, and opportunities I would like my students to know (and I certainly try to impart them in class).

- **Challenges:** What historians do is HARD. There's no beating around the bush. There are many moving parts, sometimes you spend days/weeks, even months, researching something only to have it come to nothing. Sometimes you have to delete paragraphs or pages because they don't work (I had to delete 20 pages from my dissertation-it was very painful!).
  - Sometimes you have spend hours/days researching what may seem like the minutest of details.
  - Sometimes you'll have writer's block or find it nearly impossible to sit down to write.
  - Our work must always be reviewed by others in our field (or for students, by other students or the professor), and receiving constructive criticism can be hard. You've worked so hard on your project, and it can feel disheartening to get so much feedback.
  - My recommendation on these challenges is to keep at it. It is hard sometimes to keep going, but it's important to remember *why* you started it in the first place. Sometimes you just need a break to refresh yourself. As for taking constructive criticism, it's important to remember that the comments are there to help you be a better writer and historian. What I do is read through the comments, allow myself to feel sad/upset, and then wait a day before starting the revisions. I NEVER emailed my advisers or editors immediately after reading the comments as I never wanted to come off as upset or rude or panicked. Waiting at least a day always helps me think over their comments and process the changes I need to make before asking for any clarifications.
- **Rewards:** There are so many rewards to historical research! Firstly, there are the intrinsic, personal rewards. It's a particular kind of person that wants to be a historian and I think it's generally a person with a great deal of curiosity AND an open mind. Pursuing research questions as far as it can go feels like detective work or like a huge treasure hunt, all in the quest for knowledge. That acquisition of knowledge is very personally rewarding (and I've helped win quite a few pub quizzes from my research, if you can believe it).
  - There are external rewards as well. For students that can be achieving an "A" in their course or on the research project itself. For graduate work, that can be the reward of presenting your research at conferences or publishing in a journal. Sometimes just having another historian validate your work is reward enough.

- **Opportunities:** There are so many opportunities, many of which depend on one's direction. The opportunity to travel for research and conference presentations is one that I very much enjoy. Not only does this allow one to network, but it also allows one to experience another city and/or country. My time researching in Ireland helped me understand more about the country. This is true for my time in Finland, England, and Scotland as well. As a European historian I found these experiences to be invaluable not only to my own knowledge, but also in teaching. I find that students find it interesting when I can share personal stories from traveling as well as pictures.
  - For students I emphasize that undertaking historical research helps them develop invaluable skills that are useful in any kind of employment. It develops analytical skills as well as written communication. I had several jobs after my bachelor's degree that were not history related (a litigation firm, insurance company, Eddie Bauer, AmeriCorps) but each of these jobs valued my ability to be detail oriented, to work independently, to communicate well both verbally and in written form, and to appreciate the complexities of a task.

**- Dr. Mandy Link**  
**(Associate Professor of History)**

Simply at a geographical level, research has taken me to Brazil (primarily Rio de Janeiro and Brasília) and Chile. At a more philosophical level, it really allowed me to finally understand and embrace what it is historians actually “do” as historians, poring over documents and interviews, uncovering materials, hearing different voices of the past, weaving them into a story, and analyzing what primary documents reveal not just about the past, but its relation to the present.

How I got here is a long and winding tale, but the short version is that I initially set out to teach history – at the high school level, I thought. After discovering in my sophomore year of college that I hated education classes and getting what is arguably the best advice of my career (that if I loved history for its content, I should go to graduate school and become a professor), I quickly threw myself into history fully without having to worry about the distractions that education certification requirements would have demanded. Having realized through a combination of history and Spanish courses that Latin American history most interested me, I went to a program where I could have the full scope of learning about Latin America, from Mexico to Chile, from Ecuador to Brazil. It was a graduate seminar on Modern Brazil in my second semester of my M.A. where I realized Brazilian history just “felt right,” even as I was developing a personal and professional interest in human rights and military dictatorship in Latin America. Unfortunately at the time, I only spoke Spanish, but through a grant, I was able to spend two years learning Portuguese while taking graduate history courses in my PhD program. The hardest parts were likely the applying for grants for research, as they were very limited, and, once research was completed, disciplining myself to write the dissertation.

The hardest part of a major writing project – whether it is a M.A thesis or a Ph.D dissertation – is that you really are in many ways “on your own.” While you can have conversations with your advisor and your colleagues about your subject, only you know the materials you have; disciplining yourself to set deadlines and make progress is something completely unlike the undergraduate learning experience (or even the experience of coursework at the M.A. or Ph.D. level). That said, thinking about having to write is far worse than actually writing, so if you maintain a good regimen of research and writing at the times available to you, you find you gradually make progress, and – like a long hike – what at first seemed almost impossible is actually fully do-able if one just persists and concentrates on the tasks immediately in front of them, rather than thinking about the end product immediately. And upon completion, there is some small sense of satisfaction in knowing that, while far from the sole expert, your knowledge on a topic does make you one of a handful of experts on your topic, and that in your post-graduate career, you have the opportunity to continue developing your knowledge in that field and in new fields and applying it in new ways.

**- Dr. Colin Snider**  
**(Associate Professor of History, and Graduate Advisor)**



In my view and in my experience, all good scholars must evolve as academics because all serious scholarly fields of inquiry evolve. It is imperative that teachers and scholars keep up to date with the latest interpretations in their respective fields and then convey that in their writing. To do otherwise is to peddle bad scholarship—or no scholarship. This is not to suggest that we must all agree with every new interpretation, but we must recognize and engage the ongoing scholarly conversation lest our work become stale and our historical thinking enter a kind of stasis. Serious journal and book editors demand their publications *add* something to the historical conversation, and we cannot possibly add anything if we do not know what has already been said. This, in effect, is a part of field-specific historiography. Keeping up with the flood of scholarship on a yearly basis for any field—much less multiple fields—is hard work, but it is necessary work if we are to stay relevant as scholars and teachers.

To risk using a corporate cliché, my work has evolved both vertically and horizontally over time. I have a much deeper understanding and appreciation for the depth of Civil War scholarship and know now far more than I did in graduate school. I see more clearly now how my work might contribute to the field of Civil War era guerrilla warfare, environmental history, and community studies. But this vertically aligned confidence took more than a decade to achieve. I have also moved horizontally across into other fields of American history (as mentioned above). Doing so has offered unique challenges as I wade into new and vast fields of history for the first time. This is both daunting and exhilarating. Indeed, it takes a great deal of work to gain confidence and understanding in areas outside of my previous research areas, but it is worth it.

Some scholars remain in their vertical research “silos” for most of their careers, chipping away at some narrow topic with little horizontal variation. This is great. We need these kinds of scholars. But I find too many other topics to be too interesting to chip away at only one. This, of course, leads to more and often slower work, but it also leads to a lot of new intellectual adventures that would be much harder to find if I dug in the same scholarly hole for my entire career.

I have also evolved as a researcher and writer, and this is a very good thing. My early writing and research abilities were stunted by limited grammatical ability, unclear thinking, and only a very cursory understanding of the writing process. Each time I began to feel confident in my abilities as a historian, I encountered a reality check that yielded a strong dose of humility. I felt like a real professional when I graduated with a B.A. in History. Then I started an M.A. program in which I soon realized just how much I did not know. Once I completed my M.A. in History, I deemed myself a proper historian. Then I began a PhD program. Everything I thought I knew about research, writing, and history soon seemed cursory as I learned even more about just how much I *still* did not know—and, more precisely, how much I could never know. Once I finished the PhD, I finally felt I had reached a peak, but it turned out that it, too, was akin to what climbers call a “false peak.” And so the process continued (and continues now) through to tenure and beyond. Perhaps the best lesson of all, when it finally sank in, was knowing and appreciating that the *search* for historical understanding is the thing. The end products—degrees, jobs, tenure, promotion, articles,

or books—are indicators that one is on the right path as a scholar, but, as cliché as it might sound, it is the beauty and excitement of the path itself that makes the adventure.

- **Dr. Matthew Stith**  
**(Associate Professor of History)**

### The Experiences and Advice of Your Fellow Students

**A. Explain your journey! The processes, challenges, and unforeseen rewards of your research project. The changes in your personal perspective on academic writing and research, reflecting upon the version of you before and after your project.**

As a newly arrived freshmen, or currently acclimating sophomore, the idea of, and adjustment to collegiate research and writing seems like a daunting process, a hesitation that I am familiar with. However, I would like to be one of the first to tell you that your fears are temporary, and that a transformative redefinition of your perspective towards scholarly research awaits. To better help you acclimate to scholarly research and writing, I will explain, and bring you along my own journey of academic self-discovery. My transformative experience occurred in the “gauntlet” of undergraduate history majors, Historical Methods, a class that I took with Dr. Colin Snider at the University of Texas at Tyler (UT Tyler). From my experience in Historical Methods, I researched and wrote a seemingly unimportant research paper that, unbeknownst to me, took me on an academic journey where I found my passion and niche in history, committed to learning two languages, Latin and Greek, won the prestigious Boe Award, presented at the Boe Award Panel with the Great Plains Honors Council (GPHC) at Wichita State University, and gained a publication through *the Windmill Scholarly Journal*, published by GPHC and Emporia State University.

As most history students will tell you, Historical Methods, or simply Methods, is a culture shock, and some students delay it to their junior and senior years out of fear. Mostly, Methods consists of a large research paper, around 6,000-7,000 words, in which, the students are given a thematic topic to research; in my case, the topic was human rights. In my own journey through Methods, my foremost challenge was accepting that fact that I was lost, and that being lost was okay. In fact, losing oneself in research, and not knowing where to go next is a natural part of the research process. For my research topic, I knew that I wanted to research something related to the Roman Empire, as this era of human history most piqued my interest. However, for the sake of time within the short span of a college semester, I found that focusing on one climactic event was the wisest decision, so I chose the end of the Eastern Roman/Byzantine Empire at the Siege of Constantinople in 1453.

Your first moments of feeling lost in research comes when you have an idea or a question, but none of the sources to inform and support the formulation of an argument. The best and quickest way to find your sources, both primary and secondary, is to use a simple google search. In my case, I googled and read a few tertiary articles on the Siege of Constantinople, and then I found a few relevant secondary works such as Steven Runciman’s *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453*. Through these tertiary and secondary sources, I was able to discover the names of some of the key chroniclers and historians of this topic such as Nicolo Barbaro, Kritovoulos, and George Sphrantzes. After I

delved into the world of Byzantine historiography and first-hand accounts, I was ready to analyze and write my research paper over the course of the following months.

In the analysis and writing process, I encountered several challenges, but also some unforeseen rewards in my own personal development as a historian-in-training. In using multiple primary sources, you will find that it is difficult, at first, to derive the truth of an event, or more accurately, what historically happened, without the author's biases, fabrications, and embellishments. However, by using a wide roster of primary sources, you will find that by cross-referencing the minute details within their narratives, you can derive a relatively concrete truth, and further, even unveil an author's hidden message or agenda. Another challenge you will face in the course of your research is the fact that, as an undergraduate, not all sources are available to you, and this is okay! In fact, this unfortunate annoyance will become a point of enjoyment to you, in that one closed door will lead and drive you to uncover entirely new resources. In a way, academic research is a constant cycle of dead ends and retracing one's steps, but these initially daunting realities always lead to more questions, more sources, and eventually, a more developed argument.

Personally, delving into the end of the Byzantine Empire arguably granted me the greatest reward academically possible as an undergraduate: I found a methodology and era that interested me in history above all others. In the course of the siege of Constantinople, there is a particular event in which Sultan Mehmet II of the Ottoman Empire manipulated the environment by building land tracks to drag his ships to assault the seaward walls of the city.<sup>3</sup> I had already taken a course on the methodology of environmental history, and this piqued my interest; in fact, after reflecting on this episode in the Siege of Constantinople, I committed to becoming an environmental historian focused on the Roman Empire. I found my niche. After completing my Methods paper, the course, and the semester, I found myself no longer timid to the type of student, scholar, and historian I wanted to be. The scope of larger research papers no longer made me uneasy, my indecisiveness towards courses was gone, and the utter chaos of researching and writing in academia no longer made me hesitate, because no one really knows what they are doing, looking for, or writing until they are finished.

**- Jacob Williams  
(A Fellow Student)**

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<sup>3</sup> Kritovoulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, trans. Charles T. Riggs (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 55-56.

My project was one of literal blood, sweat, and tears, and I am very grateful to Dr. Mandy Link for her mentorship. I began my project, as most history majors here at UT Tyler do, in HIST 3300 – Historical Methods and Research. This class taught me what the standards and expectations are for research within our field and what the different processes are like.

The process with Dr. Link was guided by very clear expectations but was focused on independence. At the beginning of the semester, we were given a very broad topic from which to develop a research question that interested us. Not long after, I was listening to a podcast where one of the hosts jokingly mentioned that he read about the Nazis taking amphetamines in Germany during World War II. The host was talking about the (at the time) newly-published book, *Blitzed*, by Norman Ohler, which I immediately started looking into.

Before I decided I wanted to use this as my topic, I did some preliminary research. Looking back, I believe that this was my first mistake, as I did not do enough digging before I firmly decided on my topic. The reason I say this is because as the project progressed, I found it incredibly difficult to find reliable information, and there was even less information available in English. Since I was in Texas during the time of my research, I did not have access to German archives or research materials due to the distance and language barrier.

After some brief research, I decided to order *Blitzed* and I read it cover-to-cover once to take in all of the information. I knew that I would be using this book a lot and wanted to become very acquainted with it, so I read it again and annotated it very diligently. From this I was able to narrow down what I wanted to discuss in my paper, which was the history of drug culture and methamphetamine in Germany. From this point I began to gather my resources by starting with Ohler's sources. I looked at other books that he cited that were on the topic. I tried to gain access to online archives and looked at what other scholars had written, articles, journals, etc. I printed off so many sheets of paper that were related to my research that I found it very helpful to have a three-ringed binder dedicated only to information related to this project.

There were a lot of challenges as my list of sources seemed to be almost always changing. What I have found helpful is to accumulate more sources than you know you will need, as I always have at least one source that I struggle to find a use for. Also, if you're going to conduct research in a country or region that has a different native language than the one's own, it's going to make everything more difficult. For example, Ohler wrote a precursor to his book *Blitzed* that detailed his archival research more fully, but it is only available in German. This happened with a lot of the resources that would have been beneficial to my paper, which makes sense given the topic at hand, but it was not a thought that I had when I chose my topic.

One of the things that was important for me to keep in mind, especially with the topic I was researching, was that I had to be incredibly aware of who the author was. Before Norman Ohler wrote *Blitzed*, he was a fiction writer, which I believe is important to note because it is prevalent in his writing style, but this is beneficial to him because it elevates the research that he has done. Another author that I used was David Irving. I distinctly remember sending Dr. Link an email

lamenting over how important his source was to my paper, but I was unsure if I could use his work due to his personal beliefs. Despite being one of the most published authors on World War II, Irving is a self-declared Holocaust denier, and was arrested multiple times as a result. I determined that, since what I was using his research for was not in relation to his bias, it would be acceptable. However, I did put a word of warning into my final paper so that my audience was at least aware.

To me, the most rewarding thing about this research experience is walking out of it as an “expert” in something. The reason I chose this topic is because as a historian entering the field, it is frustrating to see the perpetuation of misinformation regarding the Nazi’s and their “natural” strength. Whenever people ask me about my research, it is so fulfilling to be able to watch someone’s insight change before your eyes, as most people are unfamiliar with the actualities of drug use during war. Before this project I felt almost like I did not belong in the field because I could not fathom completing my own research project. However, I think that this was a very important step in helping me realize how much I enjoy researching and look forward to bigger and better research projects as I move forward in my career.

**- Madison Isenberg  
(A Fellow Student)**

**B. What do you believe you are capable of now, in terms of undergraduate research, compared what you thought you were capable of before your project? What have you further accomplished? What are you thinking about undertaking now that you are finished?**

Looking back at my freshman and sophomore self, my perspective of my own capabilities as an academic are utterly changed. In fact, Mehmet II's aforementioned manipulation of the environment turned into a project of its own, a research endeavor that led me through the history of ancient diseases, the environmental roles of insects and mammals, and the climate, all to uncover the environmental factors that led to the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. This project began as an independent study under the mentorship of Dr. Edward Tabri, which in turn led to the paper's nomination and winning of the GPHC's Boe Award and publication in the journal, *The Windmill*. Also, through my work with ancient primary sources and secondary scholarship, I became aware that when studying ancient history, there are often holes in written accounts. Either due to the fragmentation or loss of records, these holes are usually remedied by a cross disciplinary approach. Thus, I began another research endeavor, to examine the relationship between History and Archeology, an analysis situated within a pinnacle moment in the development of the Roman Empire, the Third Punic War, and the destruction of Carthage. Beyond research pursuits, as a B.A requirement, I am required take a minimum of 12 hours of a foreign language, and due to my newly found passion for Roman history, I put myself on a path to learn the Latin language. Next, despite it not being required, I am also embarking on a path to learn the Greek language to further broaden my access to antiquity.

**- Jacob Williams  
(A Fellow Student)**

This has been my biggest research project, and after it was initially completed, I could not believe that I had written the final product that sat in front of me. To be fair, it was about four o'clock in the morning and I had been working on it for almost ten hours straight, but when I pushed back from my desk, I celebrated what I have deemed to be my greatest academic achievement to date. In first few weeks of Methods, I was unsure how I would even be able to produce a paper longer than 10 pages, but at the end I was trying to figure out how to cut down my paper to less than 30 pages.

Before this project, I did not have the same confidence in my writing abilities as I do now. This project truly helped my confidence, and my abilities have grown exponentially because of the experience it gave me. Since completing this project, I have done a few side research projects, but nothing as close to the sheer size or dedication that this one took. Currently, I am editing my paper for the second time because I am attempting to apply for the John Hopkins Humanities Symposium, and possibly have my paper published through Cambridge open source. After I graduate, I will probably start another research project just for fun, as it will allow me to practice the skills that I have learned and continue to do what I love.

**- Madison Isenberg  
(A Fellow Student)**



**C. What advice do you have for the soon-to-be, or younger undergraduate students, not yet exposed to the experiences, challenges, and rewards of undergraduate research and writing?**

Now that you have learned about me, my struggles, discoveries, newfound passions, and adventures in academia, I want to leave some advice for you to succeed in whichever path you decide to take. First, simply get lost in your passions. If you have an idea or a concept that you wish to expand upon, go for it, because in most cases your professors will support and even help you accomplish it. Second, as an undergraduate, you are not as limited in your academic pursuits as you might think, as you can perform independent research, you can publish, you can apply for funding through a countless number of undergraduate scholarships, and you can present your research in front of professionals in your field, all either tied or separate from your normal course duties. Another key piece of advice, for history majors, is to not push Methods to the back of your degree plan and taking the course as a sophomore. Taking Methods early on will spare you of stress and acclimate you to the scope of larger research projects, improving the quality of your papers moving forward into your junior and senior years. Lasty, the most important thing I would say is to find a discipline, field, and career that you love. It is normal at all levels of education to worry about academic progress and grades, but when you truly find something that you are passionate about, you perform highly through this passion. There are mundane, repetitive, and frankly uninteresting things in college, but the problem is if this becomes your whole experience and outlook, and if this is the case for you, life is too short and I recommend that you search, change majors, and find what will make you happy and proud for the rest of your professional career.

**- Jacob Williams  
(A Fellow Student)**

In lower-level classes, I found it somewhat hard to sit through the generalized world history classes that are prerequisites for upper-level classes because there was so much information packed into such a short period of time. My first piece of advice is to pay attention in these classes because they will be the basis for your understanding of the basic outline of history. No matter how confident you are in your assumption that you “know” how history has unfolded, pay attention in these classes because they are bound to teach you something you did not know, or they will correct a previous misconception. Also, these classes are a good opportunity for you to figure out what you want your area of focus to be for your eventual research. Try narrowing your interests down to a region of the world or a certain period because you can then customize your degree plan to your interests by taking classes with professors who specialize in your area of interest.

My next piece of advice is to talk to your professors about what you are interested in studying. If that is their area of expertise, they can provide you with some incredibly useful information regarding your subject and point you in the direction of some great sources to use in your research. If it is not their area of expertise, they will most likely be willing to help direct you by providing you with potential resources, or to another professor or librarian who could better assist you. Please do not forget that this is their job, and they want to help you succeed! There are also a lot of resources on-campus within the library where librarians are experts on all the databases that the University has access to. Some of your professors may require you to speak with them when completing a research project, but I implore you to reach out on your own if you are struggling with your research because they will truly be excited to help!

When you do start your upper-level classes, you will be very intimidated, I can guarantee it. But don't worry – almost everyone in your class is feeling some sense of imposter syndrome. Unfortunately, this feeling does not seem to go away (as confirmed by some professors), but the best advice that I can offer is to embrace this feeling. What I mean by this is to use your imposter syndrome to drive you to become a better student, writer, and researcher. Your competition is not with the other students in your class, but yourself as you should be striving towards submitting papers and assignments that are better than your last. It is also important to take into consideration any feedback your professors may provide, and if possible, try and find a peer to read over your work as well!

**- Madison Isenberg  
(A Fellow Student)**

**D. Likely, you are going to graduate soon, so what do you want to be? And, how has your academic journey through undergraduate research and writing influenced this decision?**

From the moment I decided my research topic during my semester of Methods, I truly embarked on a path of unaware self-discovery. Through research, analysis, and writing, I grew an insatiable passion for the processes of historical research, a passion that still has me consistently thinking of new ideas and new hypothetical projects. After taking the time to learn Latin, and beginning Greek, I have opened new and exciting doors to further develop more complex research endeavors. In an at-first unintentional and winding path, I naturally made the decision to take my education in history to the graduate level with the hope of becoming a college professor. As a college professor in history, I want to professionally research the environmental factors that influenced, shaped, and changed the Roman Empire, and I want to teach the next generation of college students about the joy and importance of historical research in the vast, complex, and competitive world of academia.

**- Jacob Williams  
(A Fellow Student)**

After I graduate, I had originally planned to take a short break and then move to Germany so that I could pursue a master's in library sciences, with a focus in Archival Studies. Moving to Germany is my eventual goal because they believe that higher education should be accessible to all, so they provide all levels of education (even doctorate degrees!) at an extremely low cost. However, I have recently decided that I am not overly eager to jump right back into an educational setting after spending almost 16 consecutive years in school. So, I have decided to investigate different options that will allow me to continue to work on things that I am interested in while making money and possibly even traveling! One of these options is a scholarship known as Fulbright, which provides applicants the opportunity to be paid to travel the world while teaching English or working on research projects. I am also considering becoming a freelance writer because, as strange as it sounds, I have developed a love for writing and editing academic papers. Working as a freelance writer would allow me to bring other researcher's projects to fruition and provide inspiration and experience towards my own research projects as well.

Eventually, I would like to go back to school. While I have been studying history as an undergraduate, I have developed a very deep appreciation for primary sources and their importance to the work that we do as historians. This has been through various research projects that I have done where professors have either required a certain number of primary sources to be used or instructed us to only use primary sources. While scouring for relevant information for many research projects, I often found myself sidetracked reading unrelated surrounding ads, headlines, and other interesting accounts, especially in newspapers. Currently, I am working as a student worker within the archives here on campus and I love what I do. I have been able to cultivate and revise my own collection, as well as understand, on a basic level, how an archive is run. I would love to work as an archivist, especially somewhere steeped rich in history.

**- Madison Isenberg  
(A Fellow Student)**

**E. What do you think is the value of research overall, for yourself and for history more generally? What do you wish you'd known before you began researching?**

The value of research in academia is a unique and personal thing, as it is the individual scholar who determines through research, writing, publications, and presentations what questions, ideas, themes, and arguments are important, and for historians, what is important in the narratives of events in the course of human history. For me, the environmental impacts on the society, economy, culture, politics, military, and daily life of the Roman Empire constitutes the value of history. That is the beauty of history: it is a liberating discipline in which you can study anything, and this is, to me, the most valuable aspect of historical research. There are so many things I wish I knew before embarking on my collegiate experience: how to create a study schedule, how to balance school, life, and work, how to know when I have found my niche and what I am meant to do. But I think that if I had the answers to all my questions, I would have never made it to where I am today. I hope my story, experiences, struggles, and advice have inspired you in some way, and I truly wish you the best of luck here at UT Tyler, or any other academic institution in which you decide to improve yourself.

It is okay to not know, that is the best thing about college. Discovery in discipline, and discovery in oneself.

**- Jacob Williams  
(A Fellow Student)**

There is not any one thing that I can pinpoint to say I wished I had known before I began researching, because any of those questions were answered through experience. Honestly, I believe sometimes it could be beneficial to enter a research project blind so that you do not have any preconceived biases surrounding your topic. The one thing I can say that I wish I knew about researching was that I wish I learned how to do it sooner. It is so useful being able to do your own research not only in your field of study, but in your everyday life as well. The strategies that you learn for researching history are applicable for researching almost anything else, it is incredible how much you can learn.

I think it is extremely important for one to be informed, and that is the value that I find in research. Overall, I think that it is incredibly special to have the ability to be well informed, and since we can do so, I wish that more people took the steps to gather their own information to form their own opinions based on credible research. For history, research is very important because it creates discourse and draws our attention to things that we can learn from that occurred in the past. Most people, when looking at history, focus on the successes or failures of a person/place/thing, but I think that research is about encapsulating and analyzing all points of view to get the full story. I study history and do research not only because I am interested in preserving the knowledge of the past, but because it provides great insight into what to expect from the future.

**- Madison Isenberg  
(A Fellow Student)**

## Librarians and the Importance of a College Library

### **Why Library Resources are Important**

Libraries purchase and subscribe to a variety of books, scholarly journals, databases, and research tools. As a student, you have access to these library resources for free. It behooves you to take advantage of the different services and resources on campus, particularly those that can elevate your academic success like the library.

Aside from accessing materials, another concern you may have when searching for information is if it is credible and scholarly. Using library resources ensures you are finding acceptable sources, whether that be for a class paper or larger research project. Libraries typically subscribe to scholarly content, and databases can further filter results to peer-reviewed sources.

However, no library has access to all information. Even the most well-endowed libraries must sometimes borrow from others to fill in the gaps for what their students, faculty, and researchers need. Your academic library is no different. Your library tries its best to subscribe to and purchase whatever resources the campus community needs, but unfortunately there are limits. Whether it be budget constraints, space availability, or resource scarcity, sometimes your library might not have *all* the resources you need for a project. Interlibrary loan is a service most academic libraries use in order to compensate for those “gaps” in their resources. Essentially, libraries will borrow from and lend to each other to ensure their respective patrons get access to what they need.

Usually, your library will have an interlibrary loan request form or portal for you to submit requests. After you supply all the details on what resource you are needing, library staff will request to borrow it from another library. If you request something short-form, like a journal article or book chapter, usually you will receive a scanned PDF copy via email in a few days. If you need something long-form, like an entire book, those materials are usually sent via the postal service and might vary on delivery time. For PDF scans, the copy you receive is yours to keep. For physical materials such as books, you will “check out” the resource much like a normal library book, however loan periods and renewals might differ from your institution’s typical privileges.

### **Get to Know Your Librarians**

The University of Texas at Tyler follows a liaison model, with designated librarians for specific subject areas. Other libraries might have general reference librarians covering a wide range of topics. Regardless, your library will have staff you can consult with regarding your research. Consultations can vary in scope, from finding specific resources to refining database searching methods to reviewing your citation formatting. Reference librarians possess a wealth of knowledge regarding where to look for things and how to look for things. They can show you what your library has access to and how to access resources external to the library.

Of course, asking for assistance is not always easy. “Library anxiety” is a very real phenomenon. Particularly with academic libraries, our popular culture paints these institutions as

austere temples to knowledge operating on archaic rules and filled with sanctimonious scholars. This image can overwhelm patrons, making them too nervous to ask for help or even enter the building. While most libraries are welcoming and accommodating (for example the UT Tyler library has social zones for group work and allows food in the building), anxiety can still be difficult to overcome. Your library should have alternative ways to communicate with staff or access materials. Video conferencing software like Zoom and online live chat services allow you to still get one-on-one reference services without physically entering the library. Additionally, with the increasing presence of ebooks and electronic journals, most items you need for your research might only be a click away on the library's website.

Regardless of how you choose to interact with the library, it is still critical to reach out and consult with your librarian if possible. Perhaps the most important advice I can bestow is that you are allowed to ask for help. Do not confuse academic isolation for independence. While individualism and self-sufficiency are invaluable traits, scholarship thrives on collaboration and connection. Even outside of academia, being a part of a community and having people to rely on in times of need are vital.

Often, we fall into the trap of thinking requests for help signal a failure on our part. We become convinced we were not smart enough, not strong enough, or not resourceful enough to solve a problem by ourselves. Nobody can solve everything on their own, nor should they be expected to. Even the most well put-together person you can think of has struggled and needed help at some point. Society relies on collective knowledge and experience to progress, and your research endeavors are no different. Reach out to your librarians, seek mentorship from your professors, and collaborate with your fellow students. You never know what insights others may offer that could change the trajectory of your research for the better.

**- Livia Garza  
(University Librarian)**



## Student Research

When it comes to the issue of how undergraduate research is treated or viewed in collegiate academia, there seems to be a wide gap between the preconceived notions of the computer generations. Unfortunately, I believe these notions started in the 1990s and have led us to a place with a tremendous lack of information literacy while virtually drowning in information.

When I was a child in third grade, we were all taken to the library and taught how to use the card catalogue to find books on our topics. Since we had a 4 inch by 3 inch card of typed information, we were taught to think about our topics in different aspects in order to find books or articles that were relevant. The limitations of this discovery mode caused us to break our topic into keywords. For example, if I was looking for the education of governesses during the time of Jane Eyre, I would have to think what the time period actually was, the country, females or governesses, education, etc., then look each of these up to determine if there were possibly any books on my topic. Once you were taught to use a card catalogue, it stayed the same from library to library. So, where research was more physically demanding, it was however easier to go about finding. Librarians typically had print handouts of key research starter resources by subject and sometimes by course conveniently at the desk.

However, since the advent of the online library catalogue or OPAC and the mainstream access to the internet, researching has changed. K-12 schools no longer teach even the most abstract of researching skills. Since the online catalogue systems are very expensive, most do not have one, nor do they have the expensive databases. So, students are not taught to think about their topics, break them down into keywords, or even the basic search strings to find the information. This is still a crucial step in researching. The ability to break down research questions into keywords and create a searchable vocabulary is still needed to do research today.

Teachers and professors tend to believe that since their students were born after 1990, they have grown up with computers and internet technology, so they know how to do research on the web. However, if they have been taught at all, it is to type a full sentence into a search engine and then take the first page of results. There is typically very little vetting of the information on those pages, as it is easier now to create webpages and make them look legitimate. The result is faculty expecting collegiate level research and information from students who are at an extreme disadvantage and do not realize it. How are we to know what we do not know?

Nor are they taught to discern the information for reliability or credibility. Indeed, most students do not know what the search engine algorithm is using to identify pages for their results. The assumption is that the search engine is looking for the best information specifically on their topic. So, the student who does not know how to do collegiate research does an internet search and retrieves information from a legitimate looking website but does not know what to look for to determine its credibility.

Most universities, other than private institutions, do not have required information literacy courses, typically due to funds, preconceived notions about information literacy, and degree credit

restrictions. University or Subject Librarians must be invited into the course to work with students teaching them how to go about researching and vetting information. This can vary from a traditional passive learning one-shot to a fully embedded librarian actively teaching some researching skills tied to an assignment. In the one-shot, the librarian has one class period to show the students how to research using library databases. From the one-shot, it is up to the faculty how much the librarian is allowed to work with the students.

Faculty can emphasize the helpfulness of the librarian, but the truth is most students suffer from library anxiety. Many struggle with the fear of being wrong or with imposter syndrome so the idea of approaching a librarian for help, is unsurmountable to them. They revert to the common search engine and the first page of results. It usually takes a required meeting with a librarian, grade attached, to get students to approach them. Once the ice is broken, students are more likely to utilize the librarian again if it is a positive interaction. In addition to working with students and supporting their faculty's research, librarians have also taken the task of outreach on their college campuses to help students from finding buildings on the first day of classes to helping students move into dorm rooms, all to break down the wall between undergraduate students and their library anxiety. They have also been partnering with other campus groups such as Student Success for events like NAP (Night Against Procrastination) or the student favorite Annual Quiz Night, so students see them as friendly, helpful, and approachable.

Another issue with research is the idea that information will be or is currently freely available online. Students struggle to understand the costs associated with accessing reliable scholarly information. Scholarly journals and academic databases require subscriptions or purchases of individual articles. While one can very well come across academic resources using Google, most of them will be behind paywalls or subscription only access. An individual scholarly article can run from \$30-\$80 on average, with medical articles considerably more. Google Scholar, a Google product that searches a broad scope of scholarly literature, can be a useful tool to find resources; however paywalls can still prevent you from accessing what you find. I once had an older student ask me why there isn't just one library that she could pay a small yearly fee to access all the databases. When I informed her that that yearly fee would be more than her family's entire yearly budget, she was astounded. Even hearing about one database annual fee of twenty thousand dollars for just the 5,000 UT Tyler students (at the time of the conversation) boggled her.

On one hand, I believe that libraries have been existed seamlessly in society for so long that they are overlooked for the integral part they play and for the need role(s) they serve. Many public and university libraries are severely underfunded and librarian positions are seen as expendable. This at a time when information is so easily available through venues that do not vet the information for authority or credibility and the populous from children to adults are not aware of the need to evaluate the constant streams of information nor do they know how. The librarians are struggling to teach them, however with fewer librarian positions and less funding for the credible, though expensive, sources, how is the populous to learn the needed information literacy skills?

**Why I became a librarian**

I decided to become a librarian after working in the library as a student page. I got the job while completing undergraduate studies in English Literature. I loved everything about it. I loved the engaging conversations I heard the librarians discussing. I loved the organization, helping other students find what they needed, and the atmosphere. I honestly felt like I had found my people. I learned through conversations with different librarians, that all information and experiences you have, you can use in your library career. I could get my master's in library science and use my literature background, even my years of theatre studies. Nothing would be lost, and no time would be wasted. I have always had a great deal of interest in many subjects from physics to computers to animation to acting. As a librarian, I get to research and learn about all these topics as well as use them in my daily job duties. I also love helping people, especially college students. I remember what it was like for me as a first-generation college student being lost and struggling. So being in the library, I could help other students with their class assignments and research but also help them through the college experience as well.

**- Vandy Dubre  
(University Librarian)**

To make a long conclusion short and more effective, I believe that if you have reached this point at the end, our advice and experiences speak louder than any written words or thoughtful closing statements. Thus, I leave you with this:

College is what you make of it, and the key word is “you.” You have an amazing opportunity to create the life you want, fulfill the dream you have, make the friends you desire, and no one can do that for you nor take it away. All you must do is try to the best of your ability, and everything will truly work out in ways that may not even be conceivable yet. Stress is temporary, life changes, nothing is ever set in stone, and there is always a silver lining if you are willing to look for it.

- **“I wish it need not have happened in my time.” – Frodo Baggins.**
  
- **“And so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” - Gandalf**

Best of luck,

Your mentors and colleagues