Reflective Essay

My submission for the Hannon Library Undergraduate Research award is the paper and supporting research I wrote as a part of the 2014 Summer Undergraduate Research Program and continued and turned into my HIST 498 class taught by Professor Buckley. For the project, Dr. Andrew Devereux of the history department served as my faculty advisor. My research explores the role that incipient German nationalism played in the early Protestant Reformation, using the Duchy of Prussia, the first protestant state, as a case study.

The Protestant Reformation and its interconnected conflicts and developments have always been my favorite area of historical study, and originally I planned to explore the political aspects of the Reformation. However, when reading primary sources written by Martin Luther, such as his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, I discovered loads of nationalistic rhetoric that Luther employed to attack the Papacy. This intrigued me and I decided to explore instead the nationalistic elements of the Protestant Reformation. This shift in the direction of my project illustrates how preliminary primary source research can greatly shape the form of a research topic.

For my research I relied heavily on the online databases that LMU provides for undergraduates. The most beneficial online database was JSTOR. JSTOR allowed me to read a plethora of scholarly articles on my topic that served many purposes. JSTOR’s easy access to PDF articles made doing research immensely more efficient and in depth. From this experience with JSTOR, I learned the importance of abstracts, which allowed me to narrow down my sources without reading them in full first. The key terms, which usually constitute part of an abstract were also very helpful, providing me with new or more precise search terms I could use while scouring databases.

These secondary sources found through JSTOR provided important information on how modern academics address and approach the Reformation as well the study of nationalism.
Scholarly articles helped develop my historiographical understanding of my topic, acquainted me with the appropriate academic terminology and vocabulary, and kept me abreast of new or interesting arguments related to the Reformation.

I accessed other secondary sources through the library catalog and Link+. Link+ was an incredibly useful research tool, as I was able to have a book about Ulrich von Hutten, an important early protestant and German nationalist shipped to LMU for my research. What was also interesting and useful for my research was the intersectionality of my research topic. While looking for secondary sources, I was able to find articles and books that discussed my topic from a variety of different disciplines, including history, theology, political science, literary studies, and cultural studies. This provided me with a larger and more diverse pool of sources to draw from, which would hopefully translate into a more coherent and in-depth research paper.

One of the problems I encountered while doing my research was the language barrier. As most of my research related to Germany, many of the sources I stumbled upon were in German. While I could not read these articles fluently, I could still look at the articles’ bibliographies in order to find other sources. This language barrier showed me the importance of knowing foreign languages, particularly in an academic environment. As an aspiring graduate student, this hurdle perfectly demonstrated to me why history graduate program require two, or even three foreign languages. In light of this, I have begun taking German classes here at LMU to both prepare for graduate school and to expand my cultural knowledge about my favorite historical area of study.

This was my first large and independent research project and it was an invaluable experience. Through this experience, I gained a stronger grasp of how to conduct research both in a library as well as online. This experience exposed me to professional academic writing and research methods, and the challenges they come with. This project left me feeling encouraged about continuing to pursue history as my career and passion and the lessons I learned from this
experience will stay with me throughout my undergraduate experience here at LMU and hopefully into graduate school and beyond.