

Reflective Essay

My submission to the Undergraduate Library Research Award originated as a research assignment in Dr. Nicolas Rosenthal's U.S. Environmental History course. The task was to examine a contemporary environmental issue through the lens of its historical origin. Students were asked to begin their research with any recent article from the *Los Angeles Times* or *New York Times*.

Due to my longstanding fascination with the concept of sustainable development, fueled by my dream of becoming a social entrepreneur, I decided to conduct preliminary research on solar energy. I raked through the US Major Dailies online database and found an article about the new tariffs on imported solar panels, and the potentially disruptive effects it may cause in the American solar industry. These findings suggested a possible correlation between the solar sector and the federal government, which dictated historical patterns of the industry's growth and decline. To address the requirements of the assignment, I modified my thesis to focus on the link between the past federal policies and the developments within the solar energy sector.

Working on this assignment, I quickly realized that the strategic use of the Hannon Library's online databases is the key to fruitful research. Therefore, the online databases became the primary tool in my research toolbox. OneSearch+ proved to be a foolproof way of commencing my search for books, magazine articles, and academic journals. OneSearch+ engine allowed me to gear my searching criteria most efficiently and effectively, enabling me to sort results by the source type, publication, and most importantly, by the subject. It also directed me to the materials in various Hannon Library databases such as LINUS Catalog, Academic Search

Complete, EBSCO*host*, ProQuest, and Credo. By tactically using the versatile interconnectivity of the OneSearch+ platform, I was able to procure rare PDF documents contained only in the select databases, thereby simultaneously expediting and enriching my research.

At one point, I faced a seemingly unnavigable roadblock when searching for a primary legislative source. No database could provide me the access to the document upon which the coherent structure of my research paper depended. Therefore, I inquired of the library personnel about the Interlibrary Loan system. Employees at the front desk eagerly assisted me in filling out the necessary documents and informed me that the wait would take approximately two weeks. However, luckily for the rapid progression of my project, I soon unearthed this document in a book, containing a compilation of primary environmental sources from the desired period. This experience taught me an indirect strategy of searching for primary documents through books that contain selections of primary sources pertaining to a single category, topic, or era.

In the age of technology, the access to digitalized articles and books is vital to making one's research productive and cost-effective. First, the Hannon Library's abundant digital resources and search platforms allowed me to process and utilize more information per hour of research than would have been possible in the absence of the online databases. Second, the digital documents permitted me to search for key terms within the material to zoom in on the focal point of my research. Third, the Cite Sources portion of the LibGuides, and the embedded Chicago Online Writing Lab helped me appropriately format my paper in Chicago style, enjoined by the discipline of history.

As a discipline, history is one of the biggest proponents of being mindful of the author's bias when conducting research. The political nature of my thesis almost guaranteed that any source I used would be rich in political bias. This turned out to be unmistakably true in all the

secondary sources that mentioned federal energy policies. Republican-leaning sources were more prone to use the argument of national security in advocating for the use of traditional fossil fuels. Democrat-leaning sources would most often embrace renewable energy in highlighting the eco-friendly dispositions of the Democratic presidents. This persistent axiom made the use of primary sources irreplaceable in defying these inherent biases. By examining federal policies, congressional meetings, and other primary legislative sources, I made sure to foster the understanding of the connection between the federal government and the solar sector instead of putting forth a biased argument for either of the parties.