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Title: Development of Research Skills in UIUC History Students

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About the Author: I am an undergraduate student in anthropology and history here at the University of Illinois. For the last five years I have worked in various library settings, particularly in the university library system. Through class lectures and commonly asked questions on how to perform internet and library research I noticed that the research skills of students upon entering the university were not what the university had expected them to be. As a future library and information science graduate student, I felt a need to understand how students develop various research skills over the undergraduate years and to ask critical questions as to how we can improve the way the university, particularly the library system and individual departments, teach students these skills.

Keywords: research, university libraries, history department

Abstract: As a research institution, one of the goals of the University of Illinois is to teach its undergraduates the skills needed to succeed in their own research. Through the pilot research I conducted, I've found that this goal is not being fully met for students in the history department. I hypothesize that uneven teaching of research skills, such as library and library catalog introductions and campus and online resource awareness programs, by professors as well as fewer and more distant interactions between students, librarians, and professors have not prepared students for their upper level courses. Building on preliminary research through student interviews, I propose additional research through interviews with history professors and librarians and a semester-long ethnography of a History 498 writing course. These research methods will help to unearth ways of helping students succeed in their classes and any further research they do.

Initial Exercises:

Reading Response

Initial Exercises:

Observation

Initial Exercises: University Library System (About the University Library:
<http://www.library.uiuc.edu/new/geninfo/history.html#collections>):

Analysis of a Text

Libraries hold an important place in many communities, no less on our campus. The role libraries play differs depending on the community they serve and the specific interests of that community. Working in the residence hall library system for four years I was wondering how its recent integration into the main university library system changed its mission, if it did, so I decided to take a deeper look at the information the library system has provided on itself. This document provided details on the mission of the libraries, their collections, and the history of how these collections were obtained. It seemed to me that the residence hall libraries have a different focus than the Graduate and Undergraduate libraries but, as we will see, this document does not recognize these differences.

The first section is about the University's extensive collections and how it provides materials in "all" subjects in languages. This may seem a lofty claim, especially after one examines what they choose to highlight as their prized collections. As the reader peruses the list of notable collections it becomes obvious that there is a strong emphasis on United States and European (mainly Western European) materials. This may tell us that there is either not as strong an interest in the university community for materials from other continents or simply that the university does not see a need to expand these smaller collections. Interestingly enough, the "History" portion of this page says that the majority of the research collections were collected in the 1940s. Would growing modern interests be represented by these collections?

The other fascinating portion of this page was the section dedicated to explaining the library's accessibility. The library praises itself on focusing on "becoming" the leading institution in physical and electronic access to its collections. Their choice of the word "accessibility" is interesting since it first brings to mind disabled persons being able to access library resources on site. However, accessibility in this section means the ability, mainly, for persons to find materials online not on site. The fact that you can locate all the materials online and that simply calling for help would give you the same service as being there in person is highly emphasized. That being said, the mission of the University libraries are to support students and faculty but once, in the accessibility statement, the library states it wants to be available to all those that are not in the university community. This statement was the only one of its kind stating this larger community goal and most of the information was targeted toward undergraduates and students and faculty looking for specific collections.

Finally, the section on accessibility states that they have “sophisticated” tools and software that are “as easy as ‘point-and-click’”. This raises interesting questions about computer literacy in the community the library is trying to reach. It suggests that you will be able to use impressive software with as little effort and prior knowledge as possible. This seems to suggest at once a community that has easy access to computers and yet low to medium computer literacy. This would most likely be the university and perhaps a select number of local residents, those who would be in close proximity to the library’s resources and have easy access to computers.

Initial Exercises: A Caveat: The following interview was not part of my formal project but does discuss the importance of expectations in a student's life and how these expectations may affect their decisions and priorities.

A Practice Interview

Interested in the complex motivations behind choosing to attend college I interviewed R, a female Indian-American student and friend on campus. She is a fourth-year student from a moderately sized, non-Chicago area town in Illinois. When she entered the university she was in a biology/pre-med track but changed her major in her third-year.

I began our interview by restating the focus of the interview and explaining again how any information she provided could not and would not be traced back to her. As we will see, this ended up being very important as the interview progressed.

The first question I posed was when did she begin thinking of college. R asked me to clarify if I was asking when she seriously began considering it. I noted the word ‘seriously’ to bring up later and asked her to talk about when she first began to seriously think about it. She told me that she had ‘always’ wanted to go to college but didn’t begin the process till sophomore year. It struck me as fairly early considering the fact that she told me she was thinking about it before this point. R said that standardized tests and her teachers’ expectations that students need to prepare for college through AP classes were major instigators for her college investigations. R then went on to explain that if you were in honors classes, you were “more inclined” to be given these opportunities. Though she did not directly say it, there was an expectation that if you were in these classes you would go to

college. This strongly left me wondering about the portion of her school that was not in these classes and whether or not they were encouraged to prepare themselves in such ways.

Since I had noted that R mentioned thinking about college earlier than sophomore year of high school I asked her when she began to even consider the possibility of college. R mentioned that her parents and all of her cousins had gone and that she always expected to go. Though she told me she wanted to go for a wider variety of good career choices and that her hard work in schooling (well before high school) meant that she had to do this, her explanation that so many people in her family were so successful and that she had to drive to succeed to reach that level stuck me as the main motivator of her choices. The number of times that she mentioned (sometimes intense) family pressures and expectations also helps to confirm this conclusion.

When asked about where she considered going her choices were all top universities and places that her relatives had succeeded. When asked about her choices she mentioned that U of I had not been at the top since it was not as well off as the other universities she was applying to. She did not want to say which universities she had been accepted to and how she choose U of I out of those universities expressing the fear that the University would find out. She had no problem telling me but stated that the University should not be given this information even if it could not be traced back to her. I'm still rather puzzled by this situation since she gave me the information but I don't exactly understand why she fears the University finding out about it. I knew better than to push the point since, even after I assured her that her identity was safe, she very uncomfortable.

When being told she was admitted she told me she choose the location because it was in state, was nationally recognized, and was more affordable than her top choices. When we talked about her choice to come here to study biology/pre-med she mentioned that the program was not what she expected. R was distressed and angry that the program did not provide perspective into the many social issues that medical professionals face every day. A strong connection was made for me between her new, more socially conscious major and her previous pre-med interests, which she said had absolutely no interest in social issues in medicine.

One of the major drawbacks of this interview was time. R had other obligations and a prolonged interview was not possible.

Similarly, if I had not known R before I think some of the responses would not have been as detailed or informative, specifically about family pressures. I also did not foresee an ethical problem arising from one of my questions. I did not think she would tell me something and then ask that I not give the information to the class and, through it, the University. This interview was an excellent chance to look at the expectations that help to shape our decisions and helped to point out one of the major drawbacks for those interested in pre-med.

Question: How do upperclassmen history students gain the research skills they need to succeed in their courses, particularly history?

Do they develop these skills in high school, do they develop them throughout their college career, or simply not develop them at all? Do students see the ability to conduct productive research as a priority? How do grades relate to performance? Who takes responsibility for teaching research skills: the library, professors, yourself?

Working in the library system and simply being a student here for the last four years it has become apparent that students do not have the research skills needed to succeed on campus and in the professional world. I am specifically interested in how students research and how they obtained these skills, if they have. Were they taught helpful research skills in high school, did they develop them in college, or did they not develop them at all, or at least not to the point that they need to be for the professional world? If they did gain these skills in college how did they do so and what resources did they use. Do we make assumptions that people have some of these skills or are computer apt like the University library mission statement suggests? Are these skills even important to students and do certain majors encourage building these skills more than others?

Plan: The plan so far has been to interview history students to learn how they conduct research, what sources they use, where they learned how to research, and what campus sources (professor, library, friends, etc.) they have found helpful. I will be gathering a couple more interviews from history students to get a better rounded idea of the answers to these questions. An interview will also take place with a librarian in the main library system to learn how they make a connection between themselves as a research body and the general population of students. How are their tutorials set up to help students, are the tutorials helpful for the students who have taken them, and how many students have

taken advantage of this resource? Similarly how does the library system reach out and make students aware of their services?

I will also be looking at documents of student work in writer's workshop and in the archives to see what sort of sources were used and what kinds of comments/feedback the students were receiving to better hone their skills.

I would begin this project by looking into the many resources that the university provides to help students gain these skills. Our university's libraries give many group and individual tutorials covering library and internet research and I know that a few undergraduate classes take classroom time to attend one. However, what is not clear is whether these tutorials help students as much as they are meant to.

A significant portion of this project will be made up of interviews with students. It is particularly important to learn their background education, especially in high school, where they may or may not have been taught research skills. This may say very much about the school and community as well as what they deemed important for their students to learn. I will also be gathering information about how individuals study for class projects and papers and discovering how they learned the skills to do so. I will then be looking at their thoughts on the resources the university has provided for gaining these skills before, hopefully, asking staff at the library what they hope to accomplish through these same programs.

There was a similar study conducted recently at the University of Rochester but with a broader, slightly different topic and valid only to their university. Their techniques and results are important to look at when doing this topic, however.

Data: I meet Anna in the Courtyard Café. It's early in the evening and the room is a bit noisy but not enough so to interrupt our conversation. Anna is an Asian American junior in history and pre-law. I had met her the year before in an upper level history course and this set a foundation for our conversation on research skills and the history department.

A Project Interview

Our interview began with her describing her experience in high school. She told me how the only research projects she was required to do were in her English classes and they were almost

always group projects; she was never asked to do anything on her own. Anna also mentions a history project on US presidents, thinking I am specifically looking for information on our mutual field of history, but how she mentions this project tells me it was not really significant to her.

As I ask her to describe what skills she learned in high school I get some mixed answers. She tells me that she learned the basic structure and process of creating a paper, such as creating an outline and making a bibliography on note cards (when I asked her if this was the annotated bibliography we often have to write in history she reflects that it was though they didn't use that term till college). Then she proceeds to tell me that she hated the organization of these methods and that no one would "look at the sources on the note cards." I am made to understand that it was the work of jumping through hoops and not really about learning or even reading anything in these sources. As we talk further I can see that Anna has devised a unique research process for herself that greatly departs from what she learned in high school. Still, at the same time, she acknowledges that she learned how to use search engines from her school's librarian and she recognizes that this skill was important for her.

When we make the transition to what she does when she is assigned a research project I note how distantly she has placed herself from what she learned in high school. Anna begins to tell me that she first searches for a subject that interests her and writes down notes she gathers in class and from her reading. She then looks at any key phrases she wrote down and will begin placing them together to form a topic of interest. This is where I see her form drastically change from high school. Anna then takes the time to write down key bits of information in different places around a page and then will draw color marks for connections between the different pieces of evidence that would support various arguments. She tells me that she hates the outlines that many people use and that this enables her to have a larger topic and begin to narrow it down depending on the arguments and connections she makes. Though she doesn't mention it this would also be a great means of noting evidence that conflicts in your argument and which you need to address.

A thesis, she later explains, comes significantly after writing her conclusion. She notes that students at the university are taught to write their thesis first but she notes that students then suffer when they work hard to prove that thesis rather than looking at the new facts they are gathering. Anna then points back to the

fact that half of our history class had to re-write their papers because of new information that completely redefined their topic. She sees this as a common problem in many of the classes.

At this point I ask Anna to explain how she gets the information needed to get this far into the paper writing process. Rather unexpectedly Anna explains that she does not use any online resources. She tells me that, while she has gotten used to the online library catalog, she does everything in person. The catalog process, she explains, is time consuming and hardly ever gets you what you're looking for and online resources do not have enough information to use as a source. Rather, she says, she seeks a librarian, such as the history librarian who she used for our class, who will give useful ideas and is a great source of book resources. Anna tells me that she did not know about asking the librarians "until it was mentioned in passing in class last semester." Looking back on it, I should have asked her what she did before this. However, she tells me she spends a great deal of time in the stacks since a book on your topic will almost always be placed physically next to other books on the topic. What completely surprises me is that after this she mentions that she never uses primary resources, the historian's gold mine. She explains that she always uses them in secondary sources since they are explained and put into better context.

Throughout my interview with Anna she throws around the experiences she had in two of her history courses, History 200 and the class we took the previous year. I tried to distance myself from the feelings I had about our shared class but I felt that she was angry about the experience through what she told me. History 200, the course that is required of history majors and was created to show students how to create long and detailed papers, was an inspiration to her. The professor, she explains, cared about the students and their subjects of interest even though it was not her own specialty. This class was an example of the help Anna expected to receive from her other classes, mainly the professor recommending materials, offering feedback, step-by-step instructions on how to write a paper, and information on how to narrow down topics. In our history class, however, she points out that she received no constructive feedback, her subject was ripped apart weekly, and she could not connect with the other students because we were all studying completely different topics. As we talked about the history department I noticed that these were also critiques of the department. When I asked her, she agreed that this class was like a microcosm of the history department: Isolation from peers because of different interests

and a great sense of competitiveness. Anna felt very passionate on the subject of the department and explained to me that it was the lack of interest from professors and the bad experience in our class that made her decide to forgo graduating with distinction from the department. Sadly I had made the same decision after that class and Anna explains that this isolation and competitiveness was also the reason her helpful 200 professor left.

Somehow the topic eventually got back to library resources and we talk about tours of the library and tutorials on researching. Anna tells me that she had been signed up to visit the library for a tour twice but something prevented her professor from being able to sign up a time. At first she mentions the history department and then the library as not wanting large groups of visitors but when I ask her to clarify why she thought this was she did not put the point of blame on anyone but said it was a problem with scheduling times. Anna explains she learned the ins and outs of the library and of research through trial and error. The modifications she made to the research methods she was taught in her upper class suburban-Chicago school suggests to me that she greatly adapted the skills she learned or simply did not use them at all (ex. internet resources). Her choice of resources surprised me and is very important when looking at the effectiveness and attention that the library is putting toward things like the online catalog.

Data: I found several boxes of interest in the archives. I began my search by looking up “Writers workshop” and “writing” since in class last week it was mentioned that there were some documents from Writer’s Workshop. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to find exactly what we talked about so I’m going to contact Ellen Swain for specific help finding it. Anyway, I did find an interesting document called the “Workbook for Writers” which should contain information on how to improve writing skills. I’ll be taking a look at this to gain a better understanding on what the university believed students should generally know. I similarly did searches under the subject search (specially under the History and English departments) and found a very promising set of papers by Ameda R. King that contain notes she made on students’ work and the grades they received. This is potentially important since Dr. King was a professor in the history department and we can gain insight into what professors were looking for in how papers were constructed and researched. Though these were my big finds I did find several other boxes that may not be as helpful but deal with writing procedures on campus. I kept all my searches

The Archive

concentrated on documents from the past 30 years but I do understand things constantly change. I will contact the Achieves to find out where some of these boxes are located since they are not listed on the site and after that make an appointment since I was unable to do so this week and it is possible these documents are in different locations.

Edit: This after noon I spent some time looking at a few of the potentially helpful documents I cited last week. I had originally made an appointment to visit both Achieves buildings but my labyrinthitis is making it difficult to get much done quickly and coherently. Since I needed to make a choice I decided to go to the main Achieves library located in the graduate/undergraduate tunnel. I looked at the Arthur Bester Papers but found them to be unhelpful in my research.

The real goldmine, however, was Ameda King's papers. Since the papers ranged in time from 1930 and 1950 the use of certain research materials, like the internet, were obviously out and I was afraid that the time difference from this period to today would be too much to create any kind of major similarity in research writing. What I ended up finding proved me wrong in several points. Ameda King was a history student and then professor here at U of I and we have quite a few samples of her notes, her thesis, grade books, and notes she made on students' assignments. Her personal notes and especially her thesis told me that she was looking at mainly secondary books and historical interest magazines but also at primary documents (the historian's goldmine), much like current students use. What really surprised me about her thesis though was that the comments left by her instructor mostly had to do with stylistic phrases (the thesis was written in narrative form and with a significant amount of flowery writing) and how to fix her citations rather than a critique of her argument or suggestions on material to add. There were several drafts and notes from her thesis but I did not see any major contributions from the professor, though it is possible they talked with King and even wrote things down but it was not archived. The syllabi for her classes stated that professors and the library are sources for specific information and that they want to help if you want to learn more but the lack of any content feedback was surprising.

Finally, I took some time to look through her old grade books.

The number of Ds and Cs students received astonished me. King listed the college of the people in her classes but I found no rhyme or reason to grades (if someone, for instance, had a focus on history they might have been more inclined to enjoy the subject and work hard and even have taken previous classes on the subject). I sometimes saw Agriculture students getting a rare A whereas English and LAS students were getting Ds. There seemed to be no change in her upper level course grades either. I was having a conversation about grades the other day with some classmates from a previous history course. There seemed to be a consensus that people generally did well in classes without putting a great deal of work in it, as cited by a project we had each completed and all received As on, despite the fact that 1 of the girls had obviously made a significant portion of the information up. This got me wondering about our history department being devoted to research, as Anna had suggested when I interviewed her. In the 1930s-1950s King was asking her students to do many of the same research projects we are doing in class today but most of her students received what we might consider today poor grades. Has the average changed from a C to B today and are we more willing to simply give someone high marks and a degree when the effort hasn't been put into it? What's changed so much since then?

The questions raised in my archives search are incredibly relevant to my topic. One of the motivators to gain study skills is to do well /pass in a class but if someone knows they will get a good grade without the effort what is to encourage them to research and research well, it is not a priority for them. How many people check the sources provided in bibliographies? Have increased class sizes made for less time to thoroughly look through work (King's courses were surprisingly small in comparison with today's history courses) and is there a push to pass students rather than giving critical grades?

Data: I met Hilda, a history and pre-law student from a middle to upper class area near St. Louis, in the lobby of the Main Library on a chilly Thursday morning. Unfortunately I was still ill and I did not feel quite as clear minded as I normally do but Hilda was clearly focused on our interview and had an interest in the topic we were to discuss. Our interview began with a conversation about her high school experiences with research. Though Hilda admitted she did not write many research papers, after a few clarifying questions Hilda recalled a research paper where she had to prove that the "East Coast was a better place" and write a national paper on democracy both for her English class. From

Data Continued

Hilda's tone I could tell that she did not consider her high school papers true research papers even though she had to do research for them. When we further explored any research skills she learned in high school she did not believe she had gained much that translated into college. Further along in our conversation, however, she pointed out that writing sources on note cards and color coding them as she had been taught in high school has directly translated into her research process for history. That said, she told me that her high school English teacher was the one to show her how to research online and the librarian may have had a little, though mainly insignificant part in the process.

As we began to talk about her current process of conducting research she began much the same way as Anna. First, she would look at the library online catalog, find books of interest, and retrieves them. Then, much like Anna, they would lay in wait in her room until about three weeks before the paper was due, depending on the size of the paper. Hilda firmly believes that she procrastinates since she has so many books on hand but from what I've gathered through casual conversations in my history courses this is far from true in comparison to her classmates, many of whom start the night before. This is when Hilda's research process begins to differ from Anna's. Hilda begins her paper writing process by writing an outline and looking over the books she got from the library. The writing occurs the week before the assignment is due writing. If there was one thing Hilda was confident in it the knowledge of how long it would take her to complete an assignment. She prided herself on the fact and I can't help but wonder if other students are as aware of their working speed as she is.

As we discussed the sources Hilda uses in her paper we kept returning to the library. She tells me that all the sources she needs she can find on the online catalog or through online library resources, such as JSTOR. If she discovers a book covering the topic, she explores the bibliography to discover other primary sources. What surprised me, however, is that Hilda tells me this is only the case if she enjoyed the topic she was studying. If not she simply uses secondary sources, since they offer commentary over these sources. When I ask her what library she gets her information from she tells me flat out the main library and the foreign language library (since she has a great passion for Sweden). She simply refuses to use the Undergraduate Library because it doesn't make her feel "smart" and is much too quiet for a girl raised with 5 siblings.

Interested in how she came to have such a reliance on these libraries I ask her about library tours and other research options offered by the library. Hilda proceeds to tell me that she has had tours in several classes that took her to the foreign language (where she found the librarian a fantastic resource), architecture, main, and undergraduate libraries (the last in which she was taught how to use the online library catalog). She credits these tours as the reason she felt comfortable going there as a freshmen. If you don't have a class there or a tour, she tells me, you don't feel like you belong.

Finally I ask her to tell me about any help the history department has provided her in gaining research skills. Though not as unhappy with the department as Anna, Hilda told me she believed the department hadn't taught her anything she didn't know. Professors, she explained, were too busy with their own business to focus on classes and the classes they did teach they taught simply by providing a book on research with no discussion or practical application; it was assumed that students had the skills they needed before they entered. It's "like you're the wife but he has a mistress at home", Hilda explained. Hilda then told me about her father, a community college history professor, who was more focused on his students because he does not have to focus on research and pressure to perform for the college. After discussing her personal experiences one on one with professors, as was required for certain writing based classes Hilda concluded that in order for one to really learn about anything in detail one had to have a double major. In Hilda's opinion, History was too large and didn't truly cover the information you wanted to learn about anything in particular.

From the interviews with Anna and Hilda I've noticed a trend to stay away from online resources and to focus on the library system. Though both learned the system in different ways they recognize the importance of the sources within and the help that the staff can provide. However, both seem to agree that the history department is not the source of research knowledge but somehow expect you to perform it. This late in the process I'm beginning to realize my information is skewed toward honors and pre-law students, who would have an obvious desire to learn proper research skills. For an extended project I would need to interview those who have different career goals, one where research is not necessarily important.

Data: Opening scene: Classroom footage followed by footage of the history and undergraduate libraries. Purpose of the video is to

Video/Plan ask how history students do research for class and how they get from the classroom to the library.

Scene 2: The Idea-talk with students about how they get ideas for research paper topics and how they begin their preliminary research (going over notes, talking with a professor, directly contacting a librarian, exploring the internet).

Scene 3: The Search-Student leads through finding materials in the online catalog and then how they go and retrieve them. Ask what other resources (internet, librarian, professor, etc.) they use as walk to wherever books are to retrieve them.

Scene 4: The Department-Interview head of History department and learn what the department's main goals are for students. Then specific interviews with history faculty are shown with a discussion on how they integrate the learning of research methods in their classes and whether or not it meets the department's goals for it's students.

Scene 5: The Library-Interview librarians about how they aid students in research and how affective they have been. How does the library work with faculty and students specifically to facilitate an open relationship with them.

Scene 6: What Can We Do- Comments from students concerning how they could better be served by faculty and the libraries in their research (ex. more faculty time, feeling more comfortable with going to the library). Text changes across screen: First Year Introduction to College courses that have a focus on student/faculty/library relations and how to conduct research lessen the numbers of university drop outs. Importance of personal and group interaction between faculty and librarians rather than brief glimpses into the services they can be to students.

Discuss: When I look over the results of my research I see a great disconnect between the university and its role in teaching students how to do the research they need to perform well in class work. As a university that prides itself on research one would expect to see greater outreach to incoming students yet, as Role of the Library in the First College Year points out, first year library tours do not connect students to libraries in any meaningful and long lasting terms. Even incoming students who opt to take the introduction to the university courses, where they are to be taught the skills needed to succeed, are at a very

arbitrary level. Papers or books may be forwarded on to students instructing them on how to take notes or do simple research in the library but not discussing them or applying them makes them only helpful if a person takes the personal initiative to apply them themselves. In many ways the university as a whole does not expect students to have these skills when they come in but somehow they are expected to pick them up with resources that have been proven to be ineffective.

Coming from different schools, where various levels of research knowledge are taught, makes assuming that every student comes in with the same knowledge of how to conduct library and online research would be faulty. As Hilda and Anna both told me, the skills they learned in high school were not of any particular help to them in college even though their classes were meant to prepare them for college. When they entered the History Department they were expected to develop these skills fairly rapidly but, as Anna pointed out, many of the students didn't have these skills or understand what resources were open to them even as juniors or seniors. Hilda, for her part, was given a library tour and an introduction to library catalog research in the university library and therefore felt comfortable enough to enter the library and use its resources because she had done so in class. Anna, though never introduced to these resources first hand did have a professor who acted as a gateway to library resources. That leaves us with a very important question: What happens when a professor does not introduce students to the library and other research methods? Anna suggests that many of her fellow students are in this situation. Introduction to the university classes could serve as a bridge between the student and professor in large classes and, in smaller history classes, interaction with the professor is more available. Yet, there are still problems with conflicting time and interests between professors and students. This may be one of the problems in general with a large university but studies have shown that student/professor/librarian interaction is crucial for students to stay and succeed in college.

In my interviews as well as in personal observation it became apparent that professors were not always accessible as resources or as guides to resources. All the persons I interviewed had sited one or more occasions where their professor had known little to nothing about their topic of research and had not taken the initiative to learn about it or ask someone else who did so they could help the student. Hilda told me she was forced to go to an outside department to do her senior

honors thesis for precisely this reason. I'm not sure how one would remedy this since it would be impossible to force someone to go above and beyond their own topic to help someone. However, as a gateway to the library system, faculty could be of particular use since the library is sure to have helpful information on a topic or know how to get it. Unfortunately, it's not always pointed to.

What was of particular concern to me was that Hilda gained her research skills mainly through other departments and Anna only through one professor (she had a completely different experience with all of her other professors). Knowing that they were both pre-law I now know it would have been wise to ask how they did research for their pre-law/political science work. Were other departments teaching the skills they needed to succeed in their other areas of study? This would have explained Anna's comfortableness in the library even without instruction and would surely explain Hilda's confidence in going back to the libraries she had visited with non-history classes.

There is still much that needs to be done in order to get a better grasp of what exactly the university is doing teach these skills to students. Specifically, I need to understand what standards or plans the History Department has set up for its professors to teach students how to research. Furthermore, I need to interview a librarian on campus to discover what the library's goals for students are and how they view the success of their tutorials in library research and library tours and whether or not it has increased material checks outs and library attendance. Finally, I need to ask in what ways librarians are getting involved in the studies of students. Are they coming to classrooms or are they seen as a distant resource that is aloof (as *The Role of the Library in the First College Year* suggests).

A Caveat: The administrators and professors of the history department have not, at this point, been interviewed. It is important to understand in what sense these individuals believe they are preparing students and their interviews are essential for further work on my project.

Research Proposal: Statement of Research Problem:

Walking into a class of 300 people and being told you are to write a research paper can be daunting to freshmen and seniors alike. Even as class sizes slowly shrink in many upper level classes, you depend on the research skills you learned throughout your

college experience to succeed in your assignments. To incoming freshmen, this can be especially overwhelming. According to Gardner and Koch (2007), students who “were better informed about the University, [and] made more frequent use of the University’s resources and services” though first year university introduction classes were more likely to return the next year rather than drop out (pg. xvii) so it makes sense that students would be learning about research resources beginning their freshmen year.

As I began interviewing junior and senior students in the history department, however, I received similar stories of how knowledge of resources and library searching online and physically, was either not learned at all, learned in another department, or learned on one’s own. Professors did not always want or have the time to help students individually and general skills were usually not taught in class but it was assumed that students possess these skills already. There is a disconnect between students, professors, and libraries that is preventing students from understanding and using the resources that are available to them. It is this disconnect and ways to create a stronger connection between students, faculty, and libraries that is the study of my research this semester.

Statement of Proposed Research:

At this point in my preliminary research, my findings have suggested that students learn the skills needed to succeed in their history classes in other departments, on their own, or through one or two instructors in the department. In my continued research I will be examining more closely interaction between professors, students, and libraries through following a History 498 class. Since this is a research-writing course required for history majors it would be a prime location to watch these relationships at work. Professors often spend time in class and individually discussing projects and, theoretically, should be offering suggestions for further resources. Thus, a student may be directed to a certain library or even librarian that will help them with their projects and, in turn, their personal research skills. I also plan on examining more thoroughly the role of libraries in student research. In my preliminary work I was surprised to learn that these students hardly ever used the internet in their research unless it was to look at the online library catalog. Similar research conducted at other universities states that internet research is especially high for middle to upper class students but

my research suggests that is not true for our university so this topic needs to be more closely examined. Finally, I will be further looking into the importance that students place on research skills. Though they may be important for completing a class project, if a student does not place much significance on research skills they are less likely to be inclined to learn them and more likely to simply work to the grade.

Methodologies:

The most effective method of gathering information I found was through personal interviews. These interviews allowed me to use Stauss' (2005) method of "keyword analysis", where the persons I interviewed put more of an emphasis on certain words and even topics. Understanding the processes that students go through while conducting research is difficult to get through surveys since research is a highly individual process and it is difficult to get the details needed for fully understanding the reasoning and complex processes that go into it. Though Bernard (2004) says, "if a respondent doesn't understand a question...you can fill in...and probe for more complete data" it is difficult to get the information you would need in the first place with a survey, it is a deeper, more complex process. A survey may be beneficial to get a broader view of where students learned to research and how effective they have found library and professor introduced resources, however. *The Role of the Library in the First College Year*, a monograph series on first-year experiences compiled by the Association of College and Research Libraries, was used for gaining perspective on similar problems faced by other universities and what solutions have been effective so far. I believe the most beneficial form of further research would be to conduct a semester long ethnography of one History 498, the mandatory research writing course, in order to understand the beginning point of student research skills and how they develop them throughout the course. As a student who has taken a 498 course, I know that my fellow students often struggled to find the right resources they needed for their term paper. Speaking with the professor of a 498 class before and during the semester would help to establish their goals for the course, help to evaluate where they see students' research skills, and learn what they are doing to aid the students in their class. Though the course is specifically set up as a Composition II and research writing course, certain things may be assumed by the professor, such as a prior knowledge of how to find appropriate resources for their topics. It would be important to monitor how expectations and

teaching changes to better fit the various levels students are at and also how students are developing their skills in class.

Ethics:

Several ethical issues were faced in the process of interviews, mainly that of confidentiality. As Stacy (1991) states, "ethnographers are far freer than the researched to leave" (p. 113). The relationship is always an unequal one, the researcher chooses what is included into the end text and must do their best to protect those they are interviewing. Though I already had an established relationship with the students I interviewed, it may have been difficult for them to feel comfortable expressing criticisms of the department they were currently enrolled in and confidentiality was that much more important. Balshem faced a similar problem when her participants were wary of authority figures and strangers (p. 64). The assurance of confidentiality and my purposeful exclusion of specific information that could directly connect those I interviewed to their statements was a way of offering anonymity and created a way to get at deeper thoughts and feelings that may not have been expressed in another place or way.

Significance of Research:

As a research institution it is essential that we examine how effective the university when it teaches its undergraduates essential research skills that help to keep up with the university's aims. My project is significant because it examines how students feel they are being prepared both for their college years and the future. This is not something that can easily be gaged from university run surveys, for the complexities of how individuals conduct research are many and sensitivity toward criticizing the university structure, particularly one's own department, is something difficult to discuss.

References:

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Stacey, Judith. (1991). “Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?” In Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (Eds.), *Women’s Worlds: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (pp. 111-119). New York: Routledge.

Strauss, Claudia. “Analyzing Discourse for Cultural Complexity.” In Naomi Quinn ed., *Finding Culture in Talk: A Collection of Methods*. NY: MacMillan. 203-242.

EUI Links: Unfortunately, I was unable to find anything that directly related to my project in EUI. There were a couple of projects done at ISU that were more closely related to my subject but I was unfortunately unable to access them. The system has also decided to not display half of the projects I’m interested in so instead I am looking Melissa Penovich’s examination of seniors, their college experience, and what they are taking away from it (<http://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1335>).

What I found particularly relevant to my project were the responses she received as to expectations of college and resources. The author points out that teachers in high school tried to prep “college-bound brains” for college by instilling fear of college workloads on them. For me this showed a specific expectation that certain people were expected to go to college and those persons would constantly be reminded of, possibly discouraged by, the challenge that this would bring. This idea of preparing certain people for college has come up in both of the interviews I have conducted so far.

The other point that was of great interest to me were several stories she told of people being told that they would not be ‘babied’ in college. Many times she states that the people she was interviewing believed that they had to take on academics and the college experience by themselves. Penovich points out that many of her interviewees were discouraged by the size of the classes to ask a professor for help, though they eventually learned that the professors would give them help if they took the

initiative to ask out of class. I have to wonder if this is a common feeling among students. Those who I have interviewed and many of my friends have all expressed feelings of going it alone many times as well. If instructors don't take the time to instruct their students in class on proper research will the students pick it up on their own, like Anna and I, ask for help, or become like the large group Anna pointed out that don't know how to use library resources or conduct online research? I'm inclined to think that if you aren't particularly motivated to do research (both Anna and I were in honors history courses that required extensive research in order to do well) or aren't given basic techniques in conducting research, you are more likely not to learn indepth research skills (it may not be important or even relavent to you). This brings up a lot of questions about being a research instution and how the library is trying to help students gain research skills.

Reflect: In reference to Moodle, I found the tool helpful to my research since my fellow classmates were able to comment and offer advice on my research throughout the process. However, it would be helpful to have links at the top of the page that lead to different entries. It would often become a long process of scrolling and exploring before I could find what I was looking for. Similarly, it would be helpful if comments could be placed below each entry instead of at the bottom. Sometimes it would be difficult to understand what entry someone was commenting on.

As for my research experience, I thought it was incredibly helpful and offered a great spectrum of tools to aid in further ethnographic work. Even though I will not be pursuing anthropology as a field, I believe this course has helped me understand how I can use the ethnographic skills we learned in class in my chosen field. In reference to IRB, I personally did not have any problems with compliance since my subjects were simply interviewed at this point. It may have been more difficult if I used other methods to conduct research, however.

As for the class, I found that I felt like I didn't have enough research at the end of the project to say anything for certain. I know that the class is only for a semester but it was difficult to make any solid conclusions this early on. I'm not sure how this could be improved. Adding additional research assignments may have been helpful but I understand we didn't have much time between readings and the assignments we already had. In the end, it was more important that we had the tools for further work rather than all the material we needed for our projects.

Finally, I had some misgivings about archiving my project. I did not feel I had enough information to make any solid conclusions or any detailed recommendations. However, at the same time, I recognize this is a preliminary project, one which I hope to further research in the future, and others will hopefully recognize it as such when they look at this archive. Since I did have several requests to see my completed work, I decided to post the information here to the public in the belief that it may help others who are interested in this topic.

Recommendations: The best recommendation I can make from the research that I have conducted is that there needs to be a stronger bond between librarians, faculty, and students. Faculty needs to serve as a gateway to research learning and to the many resources that librarians can offer to students and faculty themselves need to become more involved in the research of their students. Though the library offers tutorials and tours, personal or small group interaction, particularly in the classroom, is needed to also strengthen this connection. First year introduction to the university classes are a good way to start making this connection between all three but only if all three are involved in a significant and bigger way, not just a hand out or 15 minute tutorial, but through personal interactions between students, library staff, and professors.