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Reflective Essay on Library Research

During the 2016 Spring semester at Kansas State University, I wrote a persuasive research essay for my Expos 2 class entitled, “Taking Action: Diversity in American Institutions.” The intent of this essay was to write a rhetorical piece on a topic that is currently controversial in the world. The essay was meant to be written for a resistant audience, one that does not agree with your view on the topic. My topic was affirmative action in American institutions, and the stance I took was pro-affirmative action because it decreases racial discrimination. My resistant audience was against affirmative action because they believe it creates more discrimination. Since this was not just a rhetorical paper but also research, many sources were required to boost the ethos of our paper and make our argument more concrete. This is why I decided to utilize K-State Libraries’ many resources to find the research that best fit my project.

After I was finished, my persuasive research paper included eight resources, five of which were found using K-state Libraries. I had a very specific research process that helped me find and narrow my choices down to these sources. I started my research process by using “Search It” through the K-State Libraries’ homepage. Starting out with “Search It” was beneficial for my process because this catalog searches not just the physical resources located in libraries like Hale, but all of the databases and journals that K-State has access to. I was not quite sure what direction I wanted my project to go in when I first started my research, so I stuck with

very broad terms like “affirmative action” because I knew that was going to be my main focus of the paper. After reading through some of the articles that came up, I decided to make my side of the controversial topic pro-affirmative action.

After establishing what my position was, I realized I needed to narrow down my topic. Affirmative action is not a new topic, and “Search It” pulls up over 300,000 sources associated with it. Since I was taking a pro-affirmative action stance, I needed to locate sources that also took that stance in order to persuade my resistant audience. It was still early in the research process, so I stayed on search it and started looking through some other topics. “Search It” is a useful source for this type of research because on the left-hand side of it’s page, it gives suggestions for common topics based on the current search. Since I was specifically looking at race-based action in institutions, I narrowed my search down to topics like “social policy,” “economic discrimination,” and “racial discrimination.” Through this search is where I located one of my main sources, “Affirmative Action: Extend It” by Robert Chrisman. This source provided a perfect base for the rest of my research because it included everything I needed for paper; a focus on institutions, discrimination, and why affirmative action is beneficial.

Something I realized after I found the Chrisman piece was that I could find similar articles by looking at the “recommendations” tab underneath the source. Here I was able to find sources that were very similar to the article that I was currently interested in. After reading through Chrisman’s article and a few under the recommendations tab, I saved my favorite articles to RefWorks. I had learned about RefWorks right before this project. It allows students to export sources to their RefWorks account where they can organize them into folders and also create citations. This was a great way to keep track of the research I was interested in. RefWorks is also available to students courtesy of K-State Libraries.

After using “Search It” for awhile, I decided to try using the ProQuest database. ProQuest also comes up with a lot of results for topics on affirmative action. After being on ProQuest for awhile, I realized that ProQuest searches a multitude of different databases, similar to “Search It.” By going to the “Databases” tab on the ProQuest homepage, I could limit my search to specific databases. Since my paper deals with racial discrimination, I chose databases like “Ethnic NewsWatch” and “Alt PressWatch.” “Ethnic NewsWatch” was helpful because it focused on racial issues, and “Alt PressWatch” searched for articles on policy issues. Through these databases I was able to find articles about the history and current issues for affirmative action.

After all this searching, I ended up with dozens of articles that fit my topic very well. However not all of them would fit into my paper, so I had to choose which ones were the most effective. First I limited all of the sources to those I knew for a fact were scholarly or peer-reviewed because the information in those sources were most trustworthy. Next, I looked at who the author was. Since this was a rhetorical paper, I needed to use authors with good credentials to appeal to my audience. I picked authors like politician Jesse L. Jackson and conservative writer James A. Buford because I believed they had the ethos and knowledge to appeal to my audience. Lastly, I made sure the articles I was choosing supported my thesis the best. I believe my research was effective because every source supported my main idea in different ways.

Overall, I was very pleased with the way my research process went and how my paper turned out. The resources K-State libraries provides are incredibly helpful not just to me, but all students who need great research for their projects.