
The Biopolitics and Structural Violence of Housing: Tenants' Rights in New York City/Library Research Award

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Jackson Oxler

Library Research Award- Senior Thesis

There's no shortage of opportunities for students at the University of Notre Dame to engage in research opportunities. In thinking about what university I wanted to attend when I was a high school student, I was immediately drawn to Notre Dame for the support and resources available to students interested in pursuing independent research. The Hesburgh Library, with its wide-ranging materials, services, and support staff, is critical to making research possible for our student body. When it came time to begin thinking about my senior thesis project, I knew the library would provide me with a critically important support system throughout my entire research process. My thesis, titled "The Biopolitics and Structural violence of Housing: Tenants' Rights in New York City," explores governmental policy and power dynamics in New York's housing industry. The theoretical background I utilized brings together three topics: structural violence, biopower, and social suffering. Having now completed my senior thesis with the Department of Anthropology, I can confidently state that the library resources provided me with crucial assistance from finding my first background readings to finishing the final publication.

When it came time to select the research topic for my thesis, I was confronted with the same challenges academic scholars around the world faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Having had plans to do research on education in Chile, the pandemic challenged me to rethink my research capabilities in an ever-changing world. Needing to dramatically shift the framing of my project, the library's online catalogs and search databases allowed me to explore the vast amounts of existing scholarship in areas of interest. However, I was unsure which specific resources and databases might provide the best results for my topics of interest. To identify promising resources that the library has access to, I spoke with Mark Robinson, the Political

Science Librarian. Having presented in my Capstone writing course, he highlighted important resources that the Hesburgh Library subscribes to for our students.

The OneSearch tool, as well as access to scholarly databases like JSTOR and AnthroSource, provided the bulk of scholarship that built up my literature review sections. The library's physical book collections on campus allowed me to explore important titles like *Social Suffering* by Kleinman et. al. Further, given the fact that my thesis had three separate theoretical applications, I needed to access an immensely wide range of scholarly topics. The library's commitment to broad academic research provided the needed materials. With background information gathered, I was then able to formulate theoretical orientations and argument statements to use with field research.

Anthropological research heavily relies on the human experience; as researchers, we are charged to draw our conclusions from the stories and lived realities of the interlocutors we interact with. As such, an in-person element to my research was critical to finding anthropological success with my thesis. Over the winter break, with an awarded grant from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, I was able to travel to New York City to interview housing justice advocates, tenants' unions, and tenants themselves about their relative experiences in the housing field. Having collected numerous audio recordings and field data, I turned to the Hesburgh Library for support in transcribing and analyzing my results. The library's specialized technologies and transcription pedals allowed me to transform audio data into written data- a crucial step towards analysis. I checked out the transcription pedal for multiple weeks to work through each individual interview.

With background research and literature collected, field interviews completed, and transcription of interviews finalized, I then relied on the library for the final process of writing. I

have long considered myself to be a “library rat”- the type of student who spends the majority of their time in the Hesburgh Library to complete homework assignments, study for exams, and write essays for my classes. From the first semester of my freshman year, up until the end of my academic career, the library’s study spaces have provided conducive academic environments to complete my scholarly endeavors. Therefore, when it came time to write my thesis, I could regularly be found in the second-floor reading room or at the bay of Mac computers next to the elevators. Late nights writing were made possible with the late hours the library stays open to support students wrapping up projects.

A couple of weeks ago, I won the Father Patrick Gaffney Integrative Anthropology Paper Award from the Department of Anthropology. The award recognizes a senior thesis with research that crosses traditional boundaries and draws upon diverse areas of scholarship. It was a moment of great accomplishment for me as a scholar, having spent nearly an entire year working on one singular project. However, it also was a moment of realization of the fact that my senior thesis would not have been successful without the support and resources of the Hesburgh Library. From my first steps utilizing physical research copies and online resources to the end stages of writing, I utilized many diverse opportunities with the Hesburgh Library to make my senior thesis come to fruition.