Internship Final Report: Research with Professor Julie Berebitsky

My research assistantship this summer was with Dr. Julie Berebitsky researching moderate Republican women prior to the Reagan administration. I spoke with Professor Berebitsky prior to applying to work with her over the summer and understood that my job was to help her complete research in preparation for the book she was writing about Republican feminists. I knew that my research would take place in Sewanee, but I did not know the specifics of my work prior to my arrival.

In preparation for my work, I read several articles pertinent to the research I would be doing. I was required to be knowledgeable about the *Roe vs. Wade* court case, its ramifications, and the political standing of women in the years leading up to Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Once my internship began, Professor Berebitsky met with me and allowed me a certain amount of freedom in determining my responsibilities. We decided that the first part of my summer would be spent performing research tasks and the second part would be creating a research paper answering a question of my choosing that would be beneficial in Dr. Berebitsky’s larger research. The research tasks I completed involved using a newspaper archive database to search for articles related to the political careers of various women and saving them for future use. While this seems simple, databases can be difficult to use and each search may turn up thousands of results, so moving through the
list of over two hundred names was a rather formidable task. The second part of my work involved writing my own research paper on a topic of my choosing. I decided to answer the question “What does it mean to be a Republican Feminist?” This involved utilizing the primary sources collected using the newspaper archive to explore the identities of “feminist,” “Republican,” and “moderate” women both prior to and throughout Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Though the writing of the paper required that I continue working after the official completion of my research assistantship, I was happy to have the opportunity to make my paper the absolute best it could be.

Throughout this experience, I developed many skills that would have been difficult to practice during the school year. For instance, I gained valuable research experience. I had never done research in any capacity before, so working with Dr. Berebitsky allowed me to venture into historical research. I also became much better at independent work. Almost all of my work allowed me to create my own schedule, so I was required to develop my time management skills very quickly. In addition, I also became much more diligent as I allotted myself an eight-hour work day. The time management skills I cultivated combined with my living in Sewanee without the typical amenities of the school year, such as dining service and regular library hours, truly helped me learn how to be more independent. I count these as the most valuable skill I
developed as I will be much more prepared to take on future projects that require me to be more self-reliant.

This research assistantship was a wonderful learning experience for me. It allowed me to explore a field I love, Women and Gender Studies, through a historical lens and prompted me to delve into my studies in a hands on way that would be impossible given the time constraints of the school year. Though I have learned that historical research is not something that I would like to pursue as a career, I am glad that this experience gave me the opportunity to discover the facets of my personality that make me ill-suited to this career path. Furthermore, working closely with Professor Berebitsky allowed me to build a relationship with my professor that I will value as I continue my studies. In conversations with Professor Berebitsky, I have come closer to determining how to fit my love for Women and Gender Studies into my career goals. I now wish to pursue a Politics major and Women and Gender studies minor and potentially go on to a graduate program in Public Health. Without this research assistantship, I would not have had the opportunity to foster the relationship with Professor Berebitsky that has led me one step closer to being confident in my future plans.