To be considered for the Collins Memorial Library Undergraduate Research Award, please complete the questions below and submit the form electronically to Jamie Spaine (jspaine@pugetsound.edu). Your answers should be brief (no more than 500 words per question), clear, and detailed.

We’re interested in all aspects of your learning process, so answers that detail challenges or problem solving are encouraged. You won’t lose points for encountering obstacles, but we want to know how you overcame them. Students will be evaluated on the degree to which they:

- Make extensive and creative use of library services, resources and collections in a variety of formats
- Clearly state their research problem and situate it within the scholarly context
- Demonstrate enthusiasm, knowledge and competence in their subject area
- Articulate the development of their research skills during the project

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Project Title: The Historiography of the Black Student Union at Puget Sound: Retrenchment as a Problem of Silencing

1. Reflectively describe your literature research process. Tell us how you used library resources or services of any kind (from ILL to online databases to archives collections to meeting with your liaison librarian).

I used library resources extensively for my research, which examines the historiography of the Black Student Union as a lens through which to understand our current conditions on campus in terms of race relations, and in what ways silenced histories have contributed to this moment and how it has grown. From my beginning stages of studying books concerning research methodology, to the depths of the university archives, to tracking down journal articles and books from the library's electronic database to support my findings, the library has literally served as my second home for the summer.

Alongside my extensive study of research methodology literature, which I found predominantly in the library, the archival entry point to my project on the historiography of the BSU was the Puget Sound Trail, the University's student-run newspaper. I began with the 1959 issue of the Trail to provide context for the BSU’s inception in 1968, and worked towards the present. Once I began working in the university’s archives after an orientation from Jane Carlin, I spent hours on end almost every day in the archive work-room sifting through the Trail and marking pages and articles that pertained to my research questions. For the amount of time I spent
looking through the Trail, I spent an equal amount of time digitally scanning articles. This allowed me to spend time with the articles outside of the accessible hours of the library and also provides a digital preservation of the sorting work I have done.

With the Trail as a predominant primary source in my production of the BSU narrative, I studied the role of the newspaper as a historical source from different disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Liaison librarian, Lori Ricigliano assisted me in finding the necessary sources in the library for this piece of my project. For example, she assisted me in finding resources in History and Sociology journal databases as well as relevant books housed in our library.

In the next step of my research process, I sought to further complicate the narrative being told from the Trail by increasing the type of primary sources from which this portrait was being drawn. Therefore, I aimed to uncover names of former BSU members and affiliates who would serve as primary sources supplementary to the Trail. The archives, again, were instrumental in this step of my research. The names I gathered for the interviews I chose to conduct came primarily from the Trail itself, at which point I was able to cross-reference those names with university yearbooks to determine what year said students graduated. Knowing their name and confirmed year of graduation allowed me to search for current contact information in Alumni Relations.

Ultimately, I cannot express the extent to which my research skills have developed over the course of this project. I had the opportunity to become acquainted with archive collections for the first time, grew in my capacity to be alone and focused for the extended periods of time it required to sort and scan the sources I uncovered in those archives, and refined my ability to search for secondary sources in the library’s extensive database with repetitive practice and the assistance of my faculty mentor, Dr. Grace Livingston, and my liaison librarian, Lori Ricigliano. I have no doubt in my mind that the skills I have developed in this research will stay with me through the rest of my undergraduate experience and into my post-graduate career.

2. Tell us about a challenge you faced during your literature research and how you overcame it.

A significant challenge I faced in my library research was the extent of solitude in which I was working for the past three months. This is something I had never learned to do for such an extended period of time in all of my years of school. The writing process for short assignments and papers for classes yield no comparison to the solitude a ten-week research project requires, and this was something I had to learn and develop. I never realized how much I depended on talking with friends, was attached to my cell phone, and plugged in to my email as much as the first weeks of this research process revealed to me. I found myself constantly getting distracted, and as a result, frustrated with myself for not meeting my personal goals for the work I had planned to get done at the end of each day.

More so than electronic distractions, what proved most difficult for me in being by myself with only books, old newspapers, and my writing to keep me company, was how difficult it was for me to talk with other people about my project, aside from my advisor, for most of the process. It felt like I was too far inside of it to come out and be able to explain it to people who hadn’t been inside it with me. This dynamic added to the isolation of the work itself. The weekly meetings I had...
Forcing myself to write, with some added push from Dr. Livingston, is what finally allowed me to work through the insecurities I felt when working alone. Even now, in the first two weeks of the academic year, I notice myself becoming increasingly better at working in solitude as a result of the discipline I developed throughout the summer in both the practices of working in isolation from distractions and writing in my research journal everyday. When I look back at my journal from the beginning of the first weeks of summer and read my reflections on how much I was struggling with the solitude, I am able to appreciate the amount of work I can now get done two months later by putting that energy, which was once frustration and insecurity, towards the development of my academic and co-curricular work.

3. How does your research contribute to the scholarly conversation in your field? What is the significance of your research, in layperson’s terms?

From my grounding in African American Studies and History, I have learned that history survives in several spaces when it cannot be recorded, and even when it has been officially recorded. My research contributes to the fields of History and African American Studies in that it questions what counts as valid evidence for the making of history and the notion of objectivity regarding evidence held by many historians. In so doing, it and also examines the process(es) by which knowledge, specifically historical knowledge, is produced. Working predominantly with primary sources as the bases for my research, which are considered by historians as the most enduring touchstones for the making of historical truth, my work also questions the ways in which even evidence that is considered primary is not objective and that all evidence is contextualized. Pulling from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s Portraiture methodology, I constantly reevaluated my own positioning as the researcher in the process, and thus the historical portrait I was producing, especially in relation to the ways in which my experiences as a student of color at Puget Sound informed the entry point for my research. The archives, as a site of primary source evidence, play a significant role in how the researcher accesses the pieces that make the portrait.

According to historian Jeffrey G. Barlow, the business of the historian is “[T]he collecting of data, it’s thinking about it, piecing it together, trying to extract meaning from it and trying to establish patterns out of thousands of little scraps of information.” From this description of the job of the historian, “the little scraps of information” resonates most with my research in the Trail’s archives. In examining the experiences of the BSU in relationship to the Trail, I sought to further complicate the historiographical narrative by increasing the type of primary sources from which this portrait was being drawn. I therefore aimed to uncover names of former BSU members and affiliates, as another primary source. The narrative I have produced thus far begins to make visible the routes through which our campus arrived where it has in its current state of race relations and understandings about race, specifically at the level of student organizations. It is my hope that these routes become visible to students who felt similar historical silences as I did around them, as well as to those students for whom race relations and racial injustice, problematically, do not typically enter into their consciousness.