UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON Libraries

Library Research Award
For Undergraduates

Personal essay
Research is a process you will repeat throughout your life – for work, for consumer decisions, and for social and citizenship responsibilities. The Award review panel is interested in your ability to perform university-level research and suggests that you reflect consciously on the process by which you select and acquire the information that goes into the development of a project, the solution of a problem, or the making of a personal decision.

You will need to communicate the *specifics* about the growth in your understanding and use of information tools and resources in the discipline appropriate to your project. A 750-1000 word personal essay describing your research strategies and use of research tools is a required element of your application for the Library Research Award. The review panel is interested in your application of *independent* information-seeking beyond the use of course text-books and reserve readings. The use of materials provided by an instructor does not disqualify you, but should be balanced with a selection of sources discovered through your own active research process.

As you develop your essay, consider the following questions and suggestions: (You do not need to systematically answer each question, but use them as a guide to developing your essay)

- **Developing a research topic:**
  How did you think about and refine your preliminary research topic? Reflect upon the process of adapting your interests to the *scope* of the project, the time you had available for research and writing, the required length of the project, and the nature of the information you found.
- **Research strategies:**
  What *specific* strategies did you develop for finding and using relevant information? What discoveries did you make by chance and which through planned search strategies? How did these events impact each other? Highlight for the jury the strong points of your use of your sources in supporting your thesis or argument.
- **Library research resources:**
  What *specifically* did you discover about tools and techniques for research? What are the primary research databases and other finding aids in your topic area? ("Finding aids" refers to bibliographies, catalogs, reference books, subject experts, online discussion lists, Web sites, etc.) Which did you use -- why and why not?
- **Finding and evaluating information:**
  What did you learn about finding and evaluating information on your topic or in your discipline? Did you have trouble finding some kinds of information? Describe your decision-making process for solving this challenge. What were some of your reasons for *not* selecting specific sources, even though they appeared promising?