

Amy S. Millin, MSW, MA
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Reflection Essay

As a whole, my Capstone research, “The Public Park as Liminal Space: A Study of Spontaneous and Intentional Behavior and the Impact on Community” serves to further my growth as an academic researcher as well as to strengthen my skills in the application of theory. The final product is not an ethnographic report on Patterson Park. Instead, it uses data observed in Patterson Park in concert with conclusions drawn from academic research conducted with support of the Goucher College Library. The submitted section, “Making Connections: Literature Review and Fieldsite Data” highlights the ways in which the two types of research speak to each other. I could have chosen to conduct either a standalone literature review or independent fieldwork. However, the opportunity to pursue both allowed me to create a much richer and more comprehensive research document.

Extensive time in the library, over the course of several semesters, allowed me to develop a robust and diverse resource list. Utilizing the online platforms provided me the opportunity to conduct countless word and subject searches within the various databases. With practice, support, and patience I grew to appreciate the process of investigating my topic – even allowing myself to be distracted by sources that were more tangential to my research. The resulting bibliography is vast and includes newspaper articles and academic journals as well as full texts, census data, blogs, and sources that speak to historical context as much as theory. For the purposes of the Julia Rogers Research Prize, I opted to include the full Capstone Bibliography. While the bibliography exceeds the sources cited in the submitted section, it better demonstrates the extent to which I benefitted from the library.

Throughout the 2020 Cultural Sustainability Capstone class, the library provided opportunity – albeit virtually – to focus more intentionally on specific aspects of my research. At several points during the research phase, I reached out to the librarians to secure journal articles and resources that were held in partnering institutions. The support offered by the librarians proved to be a valuable addition throughout the summer and fall of 2020. Furthermore, the librarians’ quick responses allowed continuity in my research without disruption.

As a Baltimore-area graduate student, I had the opportunity to access the library throughout my graduate program. In today’s hybrid world, the pragmatic purpose of the library, to provide resources and services for research and learning, continues to be met despite the impact of the COVID pandemic. What I missed most in 2020 was the ability to access the physical space of the library. Walking through the library, down a flight of stairs, and settling into “my” spot had provided the transition and comfort of familiar space in which to delve deep into the research and writing process. I strived to re-create the physical setting in my home – surrounding myself with stacks of books, headphones on, and computer fully charged – so that I could “enter” the library through the online portal.

My Capstone research may be used to inform future programming and approaches of engaging community. Academically, the research will support the development of the field of cultural sustainability by striving to build understanding within and among cultural groups in public spaces. The research will further support the study of whether public spaces, which provide opportunity for spontaneous and intentional intersection, ultimately fulfill their stated missions. Relying on the many features of the library – online databases, resource librarians, and physical space – all directly impacted my success as a researcher. As an alum, I continue to return to Worldcat to seek articles in the *Journal of American Folklore*, the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, and *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies* to name just a few of the many sources. I believe that producing a work of research is a type of snapshot, an example of what one is reflecting upon in that moment. By continuing to access the resources of the Goucher College Library, my research continues to change and grow. One of the more important “aha” moments, I had in the research process, is that it is never complete.