Research Statement

In the spring of 2017, I took UHON 201-002, “The Articulate Citizen,” a UNM Core Writing and Speaking course that explored the relationship between democracy and the media in the United States. For my final project, I focused on a speech given by John F. Kennedy addressing racial disparities in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement of the mid 20th century. At first, my thesis centered on the context of the speech and how it was received the following day by five different news sources and its legacy as evaluated by scholars. I later found a recent New York Times article from UNM’s library database about resegregation, which helped me to expand my thesis to show that the issues Kennedy raised still persist in schools today, albeit to a lesser degree.

Before I started writing the paper, I searched for Kennedy’s address so I could see and hear him deliver it. After limiting the source type to “video” and searching “Civil Rights Address” with variations of Kennedy’s name, I had to refine my search to “Kennedy Civil Rights Speech” before I was able to find it. Although not directly cited in the paper, it was useful to hear Kennedy deliver the speech himself.

A major part of my essay discussed how his speech was received and reported on by five news agencies. I chose to use three national newspapers (the Washington Post, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal), a local newspaper from my hometown (the Las Cruces Sun-News), and a national magazine, Time Magazine. Given that the speech was delivered on June 11th, 1963, I looked for newspapers and sources published the following day. I easily found the issue of Time after searching for it on quick search and physically looking for it in print in the basement of the library. Out of convenience, I found the same text online to reference from the Academic Search Complete database. The Times and Post sources were both found using the “ProQuest Historical Newspapers” database.

When I attempted to find a Journal article from 1963, however, I realized that UNM’s online collection of the newspaper was limited to more recent years. I also found this to be true for Sun-News. Thus, after searching the names of the newspapers followed by the year, I was still unable to find any collections from the year I was looking for. I browsed several UNM research guides and discovered that some historical newspapers are only available on microfilm and found out that I need to search for them with the word “newspaper” following the title in order to find their location. This allowed me to find both the Journal and the Sun-News from June 1963 on microfilm. I had never worked with microfilm before, so I was pleased to be able to quickly find help from the service desk where I got help learning how to use the microfilm reader and save specific articles.

To find scholarly articles evaluating the speech, I used Academic Search Complete, limiting the results to peer reviewed articles, and searched headings like “John F. Kennedy Civil Rights,” “Civil Rights Movement Impact” and similar variations in order to find those that pertained most to my topic. I used that same method to find articles about resegregation in today’s America in order to support my argument. Supplemental sources used to write the essay were from texts required for the course that I had previously purchased or rented from the bookstore.

Furthermore, writing this research paper exposed me to the scope of resources available at the UNM library. In the age of expanding digital media, I was surprised to find sources that I needed that were not online, like the microfilm with the Journal and the Sun-News. I was even more amazed that UNM had an extensive collection of newspapers from Las Cruces, NM. One of the most useful skills I developed during this process was refining my searches when looking for articles by rephrasing concepts and limiting searches to a specific time or type of media. Even more importantly, I was exposed to media that I was unfamiliar with like microfilm, which allowed me to get sources I otherwise may have not included. The skills I refined while writing this paper are critical to any future research that I will have to do as the library served as an essential tool for writing this essay through the resources I was able to gather from it.