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Library Research Award

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Student Name: Julia Banasikowski

Advisor Name: Alexander Martin

Award Level: 20000-40000

Award: Honorable Mention

Project Title: Slaughter, Suit, and Sorrow: The Experience of
Witomiła Wołk-Jeziarska and the Katyń Massacre

College(s): Business, A&L

Major(s): Accountancy

Minor: European Studies

Graduation Year: 2015

The topic of the 1940 Katyń massacre is not a new interest of mine. Being raised in a Polish family with immigrant relatives and visiting the motherland almost annually, I learned from a young age the importance of historical events in Poland and how people aim to preserve it. Coming to Notre Dame as an undergraduate in 2011 and subsequently pursuing a minor in European Studies through the Nanovic Institute, I quickly learned that I was able to continue with this specific interest. Last semester, I made the decision to write my capstone essay for my minor about the Katyń massacre. Through the resources available to me at the Hesburgh Library, I wrote a proposal for and received a grant to go to Poland, achieved a very high final grade on the composition, and was chosen to present this year at the 2015 Undergraduate Scholars Conference at Notre Dame.

The Katyń massacre was a mass killing of over 21,000 Polish soldiers, officers, and intellectual leaders that took place throughout April 1940 in the towns of Katyń, Kharkov, and Tver in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union covered up the massacre throughout the majority of the 20th century, which caused deeply-rooted and drawn-out trauma for Poles. Even to this day, many Poles continuously make efforts to discover the truth behind the killing, since various documents detailing the whereabouts of the victims are still withheld by the Russian government.

My work was primarily based on oral interviews I conducted in Poland with people closely connected to researching the massacre or to the victims themselves, but began with intensive reading and analysis of historical accounts relating to the massacre, which are available at the Hesburgh Library. The accessibility of documents, both in Polish and in English, at Notre Dame was extremely helpful in writing my capstone. Before my fall break trip to Warsaw, for example, I was able to find books online by the director of the Institute of National Remembrance (the organization that helped me coordinate my interviews), Łukasz Kamiński. Overall, the Hesburgh Library has an impressive physical collection of Polish

materials, ranging from books to articles to microfilms, which I incorporated into all stages of my research.

In addition to providing academic primers for the Katyń massacre, the library also gave me the means to prepare a successful proposal for a grant to complete my project in Warsaw. Among other interviews, I wanted to speak with Witomiła Wołk-Jezińska, the daughter of a lieutenant who was murdered in the massacre, whose body was never returned to Poland, and whose information Russia still withholds. The proposal entailed my schedule, my budget, how I would conduct the interviews, and why this project is important to my studies and to the interest of the Nanovic Institute. This last point was where the library's Polish and English resources became pivotal in supporting my argument for the significance of the Katyń massacre: "Scholarly inquiry into this topic will transcend the study of the Polish people, document oral history for future generations, and will provide examples of what kind of people support historical memory of a country to preserve its past."

After a fruitful weeklong trip to Warsaw, I came back overwhelmed with material and information collected from my meetings with five interviewees. The Hesburgh Library, this time, became a haven for the remainder of the work I did on my capstone that semester. I spent countless hours on the 11th floor, surrounded by History of the Eastern Hemisphere, where I eventually completed my thesis.

Writing a capstone essay that is so characteristically Arts & Letters was not an easy task for a niche business student like me, but it forced me to expand my ways of thinking and allowed me to further study something I was innately passionate about. Without the Hesburgh Library, I would have struggled to find adequate documents for my thesis about the Katyń massacre. I am fortunate enough to be presenting my capstone at the Undergraduate Scholars Conference this semester, so my work at the library is not done yet. Nevertheless, I am

extremely grateful for the support and material the Hesburgh Library provides to students like me.