

Beth Blonigen  
Research Bibliography Award  
Application for Consideration

For my senior honors thesis, titled “A Re-examination of the Slave Diet,” I combined three disciplines into one paper. I am a double major in history and nutrition, and I received a lot of help in economics when working on census manuscripts. Since my topic of study (slave diets on rice plantations) occurred in the past, and I could only rely on a few primary documents, I used inter-library loan and the libraries’ research resources to find the information that I needed. I used JSTOR to a large extent to find secondary sources to support the census manuscripts and to find historical evidence to support the results of my study. I also used a large amount of government statistical data from 1860, which I found at Alcuin library with the help of a couple of reference librarians who worked specifically with the government documents. Many of the books that I used were borrowed through the WEBPALS and MNPals systems, most of which were from decades if not a century ago. In order to decide which sources to use, I had to read through much of each book to find out exactly what information I could use from that book; I went through over 100 books to write my thesis.

The most rewarding aspect in my research is that I found evidence that contradicts recent slave studies—I calculated an average diet for an adult male slave on an 1860 rice plantation, and it was inadequate relative to the amount of labor the slaves had to complete; recent slave studies have argued that slave diets were well above adequate levels. At times, my research was frustrating because I would continuously search for a specific piece of evidence to support my argument, and that often meant going through a dozen books before finding that information. I would encourage other students to work closely with their professors in order to be exposed to all of the necessary sources that are out there for our disposal through the Clemens and Alcuin libraries. I would not have found many of the books or search engines that I used, if I had not been advised to do so by my advisors and other faculty members.