

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Meredith Nini, and I am a fourth-year English major at the Ohio State University. This past semester (Spring 2013), I enrolled in Honors English 4590.08, a seminar with Professor Elizabeth Renker. The title of the course is "Archival Research Methods and American Literature, 1860-1910." Every student in the class was to conduct original research and write a substantial essay by the end of the term. I would like to submit my project, "Articulating a Deaf Identity: Education, Poetry, and the Deaf Experience (1827-1914)" for consideration.

When I began my project, I knew I wanted to focus on the perspective of deaf individuals in this period. Looking through the Jerry Tarver Elocution, Rhetoric, and Oratory Collection, I began to wonder how deaf people related to a culture saturated with vocal and oral signifiers. Were their identities or rights even acknowledged? I had some basic knowledge of today's Deaf community before I began this project, but at first I was worried that I would not be able to find enough resources to pursue this topic. But after speaking with Anne Fields about this idea and a few other topics, I felt confident in pursuing this particular project. And, after meeting with Professor Renker and Natalie Kupferberg, I was able to refine my focus to include the works of poets who were deaf.

Much of my archival research occurred within Ohio State's Tarver collection. I also referenced some works of poetry in from the general Rare Books Archive. I accessed many resources in the library through general keyword searches and looking through finding aids. Keyword searches were most helpful in locating secondary sources, but I also used this method to find primary sources. (For instance, once I realized Alexander Graham Bell would be a prominent figure in the paper, I was able to find his essays through a keyword search.) I found more secondary sources from recommendations from librarians and my professor. I also used the inter-library loan system on multiple occasions to have books delivered to Thompson Library.

Most of my research occurred online, however. I was able to use Google Books to find copies of some of the books in the Rare Books Archive. This was an interesting find, because many of the books online were different editions than they physical copies I had studied. I was able to find an extensive online database for the periodical "American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb," and peruse

Gallaudet University's databases and photographic archives. Especially helpful were online versions of books of poetry, including *The Venture* by Angeline Fuller-Fischer, which Natalie Kupferberg was able to find online.

The research portion of this class was the most interesting and engrossing, as I was able to explore both new methods of research and new topics. This project was a large and intimidating undertaking for me, until I was able to narrow my research focus. As I proceeded more deeply into the work, I was fascinated by the history and culture within the deaf community, particularly in this period. This was an important project to me personally, as I have an interest in American Sign Language and was eager to learn more about Deaf people's lives and history. The Deaf are a social and cultural group in our country that mainstream society often overlooks or misunderstands. This project certainly broadened my understanding of the issue, and I hope reading my paper may inspire others to do more reading and broaden their understanding of this fascinating and rich culture.

This project also seriously challenged me as a writer; this has been one of the largest writing projects I have undertaken in my undergraduate career. I am very proud of the final work I have produced. Despite some challenges and frustrations in the writing process, I feel that the final result is one of my better pieces of writing. I am proud to share it with the Library Research Prize Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Meredith Nini