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As a senior English major, I've always had a rather close relationship to McConnell Library, but this semester has driven home for me what a vital resource our library is. With my enrollment in Senior Seminar and selection of Dr. Donald Secreast as an advisor, I had the opportunity to write an in-depth research paper on the work of my favorite author, Flannery O'Connor. The project was daunting, but I quickly found that McConnell Library had on its shelves several books on her life and work, ranging from the widely-used books published just after O'Connor's own stories to some of the most acclaimed studies of recent years. To supplement these books and aid scholars further in their studies, McConnell Library had also stocked a number of guides to criticism on O'Connor, which provided me with several steps in the right direction as I continued my research.

When I wanted to see how other students had gone about writing on O'Connor, I discovered that McConnell makes the master's theses of past students available to its patrons. I spent hours in the library's archives taking notes on sources and arguments. Reading the theses also helped me further develop my plan of action, for, by reading the work of other students, I came to several conclusions about what had been done before in O'Connor studies and what had not.

Through subscriptions to online databases like JSTOR and Project Muse, the library provides access to countless peer-reviewed, scholarly journals that proved invaluable to my research. As I continued to solidify my paper's direction, I found many of the arguments that would be cornerstones of my thesis. However, not every article on my topic could be found in those databases, and McConnell, thankfully, recognizes the need for other methods of obtaining any journals, and participates in the Interlibrary Loan System. ILLIAD allowed me not only to order articles, but also conference proceedings and entire excerpts from books. Each of my requests was processed within only a few hours of being placed, or sometimes within mere minutes, and I never had to wait more than a week to receive my orders. This quick turnaround allowed me to work constantly, which, I feel, benefited my paper immeasurably.

Early in the semester, my class attended a workshop led by McConnell staff member Lisa Vassady, who helped us solve perhaps the biggest problem I'd encountered in my research: how to find and obtain a source listed in another article. Equipped with this new knowledge, I went home to order more articles, only to encounter another roadblock when one of the most important articles in O'Connor studies was cited with abbreviations and incorrect page numbers. I contacted Ms. Vassady personally, and over the next several days she worked to track down the correct information for me.

The resources McConnell Library provides the RU community have helped me grow not only as a student but also as an academic researcher. As I prepare for grad school in the fall, I feel confident that the skills I have developed through the library will continue to serve as an invaluable advantage.