When I began studying Anglo-Saxon English during the fall of my junior year, I realized it is impossible to study a dead language without library resources. As I stumbled my way through learning cases, i-mutation, and group 7 verbs in order to prepare for reading Beowulf in Old English, my English major capstone course, I made sure to take notice of the different databases Fondren had to offer in order to help me learn the language, which would be one of the most frustrating but also most rewarding experience of my undergraduate career. Databases such as the Oxford English dictionary, Dictionary of Old English Corpus, as well as Friedrich Klaeber’s renown notes and annotations on Beowulf were the key resources I needed to perform well in ENGL 413 and write my capstone research paper.

Old English is a language that was used during a roughly 700 year period, from the 5th to 11th centuries. The epic poem Beowulf, along with the other texts from the corpus we study, are written specifically in a dialect called West Saxon. Old English is a reconstructed language, and one cannot study it without access to the Old English Corpus. Within this database, we can find every recorded use of every word, phrase, or grammatical construction within the corpus. This ability to locate words and phrases within the entire Anglo Saxon corpus in a matter of seconds is extremely useful for performing research in Old English, and it was specifically useful in writing my capstone paper for multiple reasons. First of all, central to my argument is the idea of Old English formulaic expression. Old English verse was an oral tradition, and formulas, which are short phrases that fit easily within the meter, were used by the bard as a way to easily remember verses. The formula central to my paper’s argument is “Þæt wæs god cyning.” Using the Old English Corpus database, I can easily see that this formula is used eight times within the corpus. Therefore, I can take note that this is an example of formulaic expression, which
contributes to my argument concerning the use of formula in the division of territory between Beowulf and Hrothgar. Secondly, central to my paper’s argument is the idea of hyperbole used to describe Beowulf. In order to unpack these different uses of vocabulary, I decided to research how these hyperbolic words and phrases were used in other Old English texts. Searching the database, I could easily take a word such as “eormengrund” and realize in a matter of seconds that this term does not appear anywhere else in the entire corpus. It is a word specifically used to describe the hero Beowulf, defining his territory as the entire world’s expanse, reaching to the deepest foundations of the earth. Using the database, it is clear that this hyperbolic description of territory is not common among Old English texts. Rather, this hyperbolic statement is specific to Beowulf, enhancing my argument which claims the significance of this hyperbole. Therefore, it is plain to see just how important the Old English Corpus database is to learning Old English as well as performing research in this area of literature. Without knowledge provided by the database, my argument would not have been as strong.

Another important aspect to my capstone paper was having available Friedrich Klaeber’s foundational text, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. For scholars studying Beowulf, Klaeber’s extensive notes and annotations are essential. Therefore, when beginning research for my capstone paper, I picked lines of verse that interested me and then immediately read Klaeber’s notes on those particular lines. Klaeber’s notes, which I quote in my paper’s introduction, formed the basis of my paper’s argument. Concerning my chosen lines, Klaeber writes, “Take note of the delicacy of feeling and the author’s unshakable respect for kingship” (Klaeber 158). My thesis, emphasizing the hyperbole and claiming the weakness of formula, questions Klaeber’s ideas that these particular lines demonstrate irrevocable respect for King Hrothgar. Having Klaeber’s
edition of Beowulf at my fingertips through Fondren library was important for both class purposes and for performing research for the capstone. It not only shed light on the verse I used for my essay, but his comments provided the central point against which I would form my argument.

Finally, a Fondren resource that has been necessary for all my classes in the English department, has been the Oxford English Dictionary database. Having taken multiple English classes that are part of the medieval studies department, I have used the OED to close read passages of Old and Middle English in order to achieve a better text analysis. For this paper in particular, the OED was useful to understand the etymology of certain words and understand the extent of their meaning. The OED database provided by Fondren combined with Bosworth Toller’s Anglo Saxon English Dictionary (located for free on the Internet) were a strong combination of tools that I used to complete my essay.

Needless to say, having taken classes where the research relies so heavily on online databases and dictionaries not available to the general public, Fondren library’s resources have been essential to my success at Rice. As a scholar in the Humanities, my “lab” truly is Fondren library, and my research cannot be performed without access to these databases and texts. I am grateful to Fondren’s resources that have allowed me to perform research for my classes and help complete my English major capstone in a way that was not only enjoyable but incredibly rewarding.