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When I first learned about the semester-long assignment for Dr. Byrd’s seminar Race and Education in the American South, I was apprehensive. Aside from a survey I created as part of a psychology course, I had never done original research, and I had certainly never conducted interviews or used archival data. Although I was passionate about my subject - the history of African Americans on Rice women’s sports teams - I had no idea where to begin. Since then, the Fondren Library has been a critical component of my ability to complete this project successfully. From physical books to boxes of archived files to the interlibrary loan system, library resources have been central to my research process.

The most important library resource to my project was one I did not know existed before this semester - the Woodson Research Center. Both Norie Guthrie and Dr. Melissa Kean pointed me towards useful sources, including the online archives of the Rice Thresher, the McKinsey report on the Rice website, the physical archives, and the Campaniles kept in the WRC. Dr. Kean also showed me the website for the 50 Years of Black Undergraduate Life at Rice celebration, which helped me find early African American athletes to interview. All of these sources were crucial to my investigation of Rice’s history, and specifically the development of the women’s athletic program. To my knowledge, no one has yet written a history of women’s athletics at Rice, so finding primary sources was key. I would not have been able to complete this project without the archives, both online and physical, as well as the guidance of the WRC staff.

I also used more conventional library resources, including checking out books, using the online journal databases, and requesting articles through the interlibrary loan system. This allowed me to support my analysis of Rice’s history with scholarly work on race, gender, and sports more generally. Consequently, while the Woodson Research Center was certainly the focal point of my use of library resources, the access to books and academic journals allowed me to situate my work within broader historical and sociological contexts.

In short, the library was an essential resource when I was completing my project on the history of African Americans on Rice women’s sports teams. I used the online archives of the Rice Thresher to explore the history of early women’s athletics, physical archives to get a glimpse of the inner workings of the athletic department (especially the academic advising office for athletes), and the Campaniles to see how the demographics of Rice women’s sports times changed over time. I used the Woodson Research Center’s contributions to the 50 Years of Black Undergraduate Life celebration to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of early African American students, as well as to find interview subjects. Finally I used books and journal articles to support and contextualize my primary source research. I would not have been able to successfully complete this project without the help of Fondren Library and its staff members, and I am thankful for the opportunity it has given me to engage in research I previously found intimidating. Fondren has given me both the resources and the confidence to complete this project and my future research endeavours.