

## **2010 Winning Essay by Kristy Shew**

In my Political Science Senior Seminar course last fall, the course developed around the broad issue of executive-legislative relations. Each member of the class chose a research topic based on that issue, but each member narrowed the focus to a very specific aspect of executive-legislative relations. Since my political science concentration is in International Relations, and since one of the issues with which I have been most intrigued throughout college is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I knew that I wanted to focus on Israel.

I began the process to narrow down my topic and develop a thesis by doing some preliminary research on Israel's government and elected officials. I examined official government websites, news articles, and even websites and documents from parties or organizations in opposition to Israel's government. From this, I found that settlement policy would be an issue by which I could examine multiple influences and consequences through Israel's executive-legislative relations.

I decided that my topic would examine the influences on settlement policy and attempt to pinpoint which one was the most influential. I knew that this would require not only much research into the history of settlements, which includes the history of the state of Israel and Zionism, but it would also require research into the waxing and waning peace efforts, including the current state of the peace process. I immediately found as many relevant books in our library as possible, and ordered many more through Interlibrary Loan. I also searched for relevant articles using Academic Search Premier, and while many of these articles were available in HTML format or as a PDF file, I ordered others through Interlibrary Loan.

My class spent approximately two hours in the library after everyone had at least preliminary topics. Becky Byrum talked to us about research methods and how to best utilize the Christopher Center's resources for our papers. These hours in the library were very helpful for me, for I was able to focus on research and make a lot of progress in finding good sources. Using Academic Search Premier, I found that I was able to find excellent sources most easily by clicking the "find similar articles" button after I had found a good article. That would lead me to a new list of helpful resources, and from good sources on that list, I would repeat the process. Doing research with Academic Search Premier was so easy, and the articles that I found there would often lead me to find books or other materials by those same authors. In addition, most of the articles and books that I found using these online databases gave my research a strong intellectual foundation that complemented other sources that I used.

Since my research applied the present conditions of Israeli settlement policy to the long history of settlement development and Israel's political situation, I found many news articles that provided very up-to-date and relevant information. The New York Times published new articles on Israel almost daily, and I found numerous articles on the BBC's website that provided different perspectives on Israel than the New York Times articles. I decided early on in the process that my research paper should begin with the most current information about settlement policy, and because the issue was in the news so much, I had to change my introduction many, many times! Rather than finding this constant need for rewriting to be a nuisance, I found it exciting because I knew that this paper was examining something very important.

Together, using information from official Israeli government websites, Israeli political speeches, the U.S. State Department, news articles, books, academic articles, and the websites of both opposing and

supporting groups of settlement activity, I was able to compile this research and apply it to my thesis. Sources offering different perspectives on issues surrounding settlement policy allowed me to use the information I had to make conclusions about the many influences that affect executive-legislative relations regarding settlement activity. The research that I found opened my eyes to new ways of perceiving why settlement policy is such a polarizing issue in Israel. I know that even with all of my research, the fact that I can only truly experience this issue from a distance—not as an Israeli or Palestinian actually engaged with the issue—makes my conclusions somewhat limited by nature. However, I am confident that my research provides an accurate portrayal of settlement policy, its influences, and its consequences in Israel today.

