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Summer 2018 Provost Fellowship
Project: *USC Digital Voltaire*
http://scalar.usc.edu/works/voltaire/index
Participated as a research contributor for USC Digital Voltaire, an online polymathic and interdisciplinary critical edition of digitized manuscript letters and poems written by Voltaire and his contemporaries.
Danielle Mihram

Throughout the summer, I served as a research contributor for the *USC Digital Voltaire* Project. The goal of this project was to create a website containing the images, transcriptions, translations, and annotations of USC's collection of manuscript letters written to and from Voltaire, a major figure in the French eighteenth-century Enlightenment. My main role as a member of the Undergraduate Research Associates Program (URAP) working on this project was to create annotations and mini-essays to provide in-depth information on topics which are mentioned and referenced in the letters. The purpose of the comments on people, places, and cultural phenomena is to contextualize the more esoteric contents of the letters written between Voltaire and his intellectual community. In order to create concise yet informational annotations, I would first collaborate with my research professor to identify the terms in each letter that needed explanation. Then, I would conduct my research by consolidating information from various print and electronic sources into mini-essays with citations which explained the significance of the subject as well as Voltaire's connection to it. Once the completed essays are reviewed, these annotations and footnotes will be uploaded within the next month, and included in the translations of their corresponding letters. The *USC Digital Voltaire* Project presents the letters in Scalar, a media-rich and interactive scholarly interface. Scalar is an ideal publishing method for such research because users are able to manipulate, organize, and interrelate information in a highly fluid way, creating a more engaging experience than the letters alone could have provided. At first glance, Scalar's design appears blog-like, but it's sophisticated "path" system makes all of the information malleable: readers can connect across images, annotations, places, and times, creating immersive educational experience.

I learned a great deal about the people and trends of the Enlightenment era, but beyond the literal topic of my research, working on *USC Digital Voltaire* gave me many valuable experiences and skills that I can apply to all further research or publications to which I plan to contribute. My experience functioning as a research contributor taught me about the publishing process, and gave me valuable insights to the minutia that goes into each of its steps. Specifically, the level of precision needed with the citations was beyond anything I had ever experienced in a classroom, as they exceeded the standard bibliographic citations to which I was accustomed. Through working with

Dr. Mihram on the citations, I gained a valuable learning experience I can use for publishing my own work in the future and contributing to the advancement of knowledge.

One aspect of my training and research experience that was especially unique was the Scalar workshop I was able to attend. Beyond learning the advantages, functions, and properties of Scalar, I was able to connect and network with many USC faculty and staff, and learn about the history and purpose of Digital Humanities and technology like Scalar. This workshop made me appreciate the group of academics that dedicate themselves to *USC Digital Voltaire*, which itself falls under the umbrella of the greater Digital Humanities community. This workshop served as a gateway for opportunities for me to work with other staff members on the Digital Voltaire Project, such as when I was able to work with Senior Technical Project Leader, Mike Jones, to learn how to properly format and compress the digitized letter images for Scalar while simultaneously sharpening my Adobe Photoshop skills. These experiences underline the holistic approach to research that my mentor Dr. Mihram was able to instill upon me. At the beginning of the summer, I expected this research to feel like a more advanced version of what I would normally do for a research paper in a USC class. However, Dr. Mihram helped me understand that depth of knowledge and understanding is more valuable than the sheer quantity of annotations I was able to write. I am thankful for the insight of how to commit my studies to discovering the backstories and details that make learning about eighteenth century intellectuals interesting, valuable, and even entertaining. Understanding that research can be something to be experienced rather than merely a means to an end goal is something that will stay with me even after I leave the university. This approach to research was made possible by Provost Undergraduate Research Funding (PURF), which provided the means necessary for me, a student of both Business and Environmental Studies, to pursue a field of study outside of my degree requirements. PURF allowed me to dedicate the hours needed to delve into the multitude of resources available, utilizing and appreciating the extent of USC's resources while being able to contribute to them.