

**Transcript for The University Libraries Undergraduate Research Award 2011 –
Meet Sonia Haga, the 2011 Winner of the Libraries Undergraduate Research Award**

<http://iminervapodcast.blogspot.com/2011/04/meet-sonia-haga-2011-winner-of.html>

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BFW: The University Libraries Undergraduate Research Award is given in recognition of an outstanding UNCG undergraduate research project by an individual or a group that best demonstrates the ability to locate, select, and synthesis information from library resources and uses those resources in the creation an original research project in any media. The winning entry receives a cash prize \$500 funded by the University Libraries. This year it will be award on April 8 2011 at the undergraduate honors convocation. Students interested in submitting their work will need to be enrolled as full-time undergraduates during Spring 2011 at UNCG in any discipline and must have completed a research project for a credit course or a supervised independent study at UNCG during the Fall, Spring or Summer semesters in 2010.

What does it take to win the University Libraries Undergraduate Research Award? Let's chat with this years' winner Sonia Haga.

BFW: Sonia can you tell us something about the paper that you wrote entitled A Comparative Study of the Perceptions of German POWs in North Carolina for Senior Honors Thesis under Professor Jeff Jones?

SH: I started out by looking at German POWs in general, [...] that's German POWs held in the United States during WWII, because so few people were aware that they were here. Most people thought that they were totally in the European Theater. The research showed that there were two different schools of thought on how POWs were perceived in the United States. One shows that, because all of our able-bodied men were deployed overseas, they became adopted sons and even sex symbols because of the media's pushing and promoting of the Aryan Superman. The other school of thought, which I used for the Superman school of thought, came from Matthews Rice and his "Bronze Bodies" article. Robert Billinger Jr., who I believe is still the head of the History department at Wingate University, wrote "Nazi POWs in the Tar Heel State." His is a more matter-of-fact account. They were here, yes, but they were not media sensations or darlings like Rice had posited. They were not that well talked about since the military had really tight control over what would get into the papers. Remember, "Loose lips sink ships," so they wanted to keep everything as quiet as they could. What I did, since there were these two conflicting ideas, was research newspapers from North Carolina, since you always hear from your professors to keep it focused. So I focused on NC, researched newspapers, and used that to develop a comparative of how people really felt. I wanted to get that idea: what was being published in the newspapers. I interviewed people who had come in contact with German POWs during that time to see what their experience were and what they felt, and I tried to place that on the continuum, to determine whether they really were sex symbols or whether they were feared and hated.

BFW: What interested you in the first place to look into this topic, this idea?

SH: WWII and the Cold War are my areas of strong interest. Like I said earlier, so few people were aware that they were even here, and people to this day are surprised to hear that we had 18 camps here in NC. They were treating TB patients in Asheville; they were at Chapel Hill, at Chapel Hill hospital they were groundskeepers, maintenance, janitors within the hospital there; they were helping with tobacco in Winston-Salem. So many people are totally unaware, so that was bringing a part of NC history that is so overlooked to the people's perspective.

BFW: It seems you used the libraries a lot for doing your research. Can you talk to me about what areas or resources in the libraries and archives you used?

SH: Lynda Kellam was an invaluable resource, because she was able to help me locate newspapers that – as you know, newspapers go through ownership changes, name changes – she was able to help me trace that, newspapers from the three main regions that I studied in NC, and find the microfilm, and then the ILL were able to pull in newspapers that we didn't have here. I spent untold hours in here going through microfilm day by day. It took me about an hour and ten minutes to go through one month, and I went through a couple years. Those two departments were invaluable, and Stephen Dew, the history librarian, really helped in the beginning to get the project jump-started. He checked this out and when I was really trying to figure out which aspect to focus on, he gave me sources – you know, "Look at this, look at this, look at this" – and that really helped to focus it.

BFW: It must have been interesting to interview POWs as I see you have a few of those transcripts in your research? Can you tell me about that interview process?

SH: The people I interviewed were not actually POWs; they were people who had come in contact with them. What I did was try to see how many people were aware of this in the 1940s, and one of the people I interviewed, Mrs. Stallings, had no clue. She was working as a home demonstration agent in the midst of four different camps and did not have the slightest clue that she was amidst so many German POWs, but she did admit that she was more interested in going to the USO to dance with the naval officers – the USO club – and that's really interesting; the other perspectives that come out, the other experiences, and I tried to collect that in my interviews, in case someone down the road is wanting to learn about the blackouts, because she talks about those. She talks about gas rationing, how they rationed food, and how her job was helping with teaching homemakers how to make do with what they had. So I tried to encompass everything I could in these oral histories, not only pulling out information about POWs, but also trying to think about what they know that somebody down the road would think of maybe researching, and getting that in here before they're gone. I think we're losing a thousand a day of that generation. But I had one, Mrs. Wildman [sidenote – Mrs Wildman is a UNCG alum], who was a nurse's aid volunteer for the Red Cross in Wilmington. She was in charge of sponge bathing the German POWs held there. So it goes from "Oh, I had no clue" to "Oh, I sponge-bathed them!"

BFW: What other responses have you gotten to this paper or publicity for your research?

SH: Right now we're supposed to call ourselves George Marshall Foundation Marshall Undergraduate Scholar candidates, because we've been working on this since August. Our papers are turned in in May, and they then go through a validation phase to make sure we attended every meeting, that the page

length is there, and that all of our requirements are met. Then we can actually call ourselves Marshall Undergraduate Scholars, and the best paper there receives a \$500 scholarship. In addition to that, I believe that the paper was crucial in getting me accepted into a Masters program, so I have been accepted to UNCG for the fall in the American History program.

BFW: So maybe you can continue to research this area in your graduate program?

SH: Yes, I've received encouragement from both my home advisor and the JMU advisor for the Marshall Foundation to definitely continue this through to the PhD level.

BFW: Do you have any advice for other students who might be thinking about submitting their work for the award?

SH: Don't limit yourself. Try to do something that no one else has done, and whatever you do, do the best that you can. Try to set something that you think may be impossible, aim for that goal, and it's still going to be greater than you originally thought.

BW: Well, Thank you so much.