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Entry essay

I first was exposed to the fair trade coffee movement in my senior year of high school. Before then, I had just happily chugged whatever kind of coffee was set before me. After learning about the controversies and challenges that exist in the coffee industry due in high school, the topic has stayed with me. When I had the chance to direct my own research and write up my findings in Professor Schwarz's Research Methods Class last spring semester, I knew that I had to do something on fair trade coffee. To tackle the entirety of the coffee industry was a challenge that I knew that I would not be able to accomplish well—I decided to focus on Starbucks because of their fame. Once I narrowed down my subject area within fair trade coffee, I started to collect sources to create the first section of my paper, theatrical background and historical information. This part of my paper took the most time of the entire project, for it was all a question of reading the relevant books and slowly connecting the dots within my focus. The trails of sticky notes in my research binder and the many pages of hurriedly scribbled notes are testament to the hours I spent pouring over articles from JSTOR and books from the coffee section on the third floor. Once I had developed enough theory for my paper, I went to all the Roanoke Starbucks locations along with cataloguing and analyzing language from the Starbucks website. The major challenge that I found while working on this project was that there was still a wealth of information that I had not tapped into at all. For every three articles on fair trade, ethics, marketing, and Starbucks that I read, there would be a dozen more. I just did not have enough time in the day to make sure that I could cover all my bases in this undergraduate paper. That's where Professor Schwarz (and Dr. Bohland) had to tell me that it would be ok if I wasn't able to discuss every single school of thought that existed on the topic. I continued with my research, agreed to the idea that my research was one more drop in a bucket. Being one more drop in the bucket was what I had to keep reminding myself when I felt challenged by the project that I had taken on. This was a project that I could still be working on to this day, but I did have to realize that I had a deadline and needed to be able to present it at a stopping point where I was happy with it. I'm forever grateful to my high school teacher for exposing me to this topic and thus to all the professors who supported me through the entire project. Fair trade coffee is such an important issue in this day and age, and I hope to possibly return to this topic at some time in my academic career.