**Final Report for Undergraduate Research Grant- Spring 2012**

Erin Hill

“Increasing Descriptive Representation: The Voting Rights Act and Institutional Fixes for Female Underrepresentation”

PSCI 491H- Dr. Chad Murphy

On March 24, 2012, I attended and presented my research on female candidate emergence at the Virginia Social Science Association’s Annual Conference at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. I presented my research to a panel of undergraduates, graduates, and professionals. I was one of four people to present on the panel of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity in U.S. History. After the presentations, the audience was given an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on how to improve our arguments. I found this opportunity to learn from other academics in the field to be useful in improving my honors thesis but also an excellent opportunity to network with important people who are studying similar topics. In addition to garnering helpful advice for my own research, I learned about other people’s unique, interesting research and provided constructive criticism for them. Exposing one’s research to a new audience inevitably leads to new questions and more ideas on how to approach the main research question at hand. There could not have been a better place to showcase my research and learn from experts in my content area than the VSSA Annual Conference.

In addition to providing opportunity for collaboration and improvement of my writing and ideas, presenting at the statewide conference allowed me to practice my public speaking skills, particularly skills in presenting academic research. Furthermore, presenting at the VSSA Annual Conference allowed me to not only represent the University of Mary Washington but, uphold and enhance UMW’s reputation for undergraduate research.

In order to attend and present at the VSSA Annual Conference, I was awarded $250, which I used for hotel accommodations, the conference registration fee, gas mileage, and per diem for food and expenses not covered during the conference.

Overall, I believe my presentation at the VSSA Annual conference had a positive impact on the audience, myself, and the University of Mary Washington. I am grateful for the opportunity to develop myself as a professional and reflect positively on UMW at a well known statewide event for social studies. Thank you!