1. What was the name of your project? What was the purpose of your research experience?

A: An early name for my project was something like "Lifting and Lowering the Veil in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man." The Prize funds went towards thesis research on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

2. Did your experience with the Knox Prize influence your thesis work, either directly or indirectly? If so, how?

A: The research did directly influence my thesis work. I went to the Library of Congress to see Ralph Ellison's collected papers. Being able to go through those archives gave me a much more comprehensive understanding of Ellison's literary career. Before I left for the Library of Congress, I contacted an Amherst alum who gave me tips on using Ellison's papers and piqued my interest in Ellison's essays. While there, I spent more and more time looking at Ellison's drafts for essays and speeches that he wrote during his life time. Because of my focus during that time in Washington D.C., I am now planning to write my English thesis about Ellison's nonfiction.

3. What were the most challenging aspects of the research you conducted?

A: There were two phases to my Knox prize research and a challenge came up in each. For the week that I spent at the Library of Congress, I had difficulty narrowing my focus. Ellison's papers are quite extensive and, to be honest, it was a bit overwhelming going into the collection at first. I would start in one place, feel like I was getting useful information, and then wind up in a very unfamiliar or unexpected place. Other times, I could only make so much sense of the finding aid for the collection and would come up with very little information or material that I felt I could directly use. The second phase of my research was spent looking at the Du Bois Papers at UMass-Amherst. I initially thought going into the project that I would be able to use Du Bois's metaphor of the veil to analyze *Invisible Man.*After my focus shifted to Ellison's essays, I found I could not easily make a connection to Du Bois. Therefore, the time spent at UMass-Amherst was challenging because it felt like I was not going to find anything I could then use.

4. What were the most rewarding aspects of your research experience?

A: I found the freedom and the sense of intellectual exploration to be the most rewarding. This was my first independent research project and I really enjoyed being able to come up with my own schedule and to determine the shape of my own research.

5. What did you learn from the process (of applying for funded research, of doing the research, of figuring out what the heck to research, etc.)

A: I benefited a lot from the application process. I didn't have the most experience writing cover letters and proposals for academic research. After many drafts and visits to the writing center, I feel more comfortable with the administrative aspects of research.

6. What do you know now (about the Knox Prize, about your specific research, about the research process in general, etc.) that you wish you’d known before you began your Knox Prize-related research?

A: I wish I knew more about my research. I would have spent a lot more time looking at certain essays and less time muddling around in interesting but things that I didn't necessarily need to look at. I also would have extended my stay in Washington D.C. because I felt more comfortable researching by the end of the week and because I didn't have the most success the second week at UMass-Amherst.

7. What do you know now that you’re glad you didn’t know before you began your research?

A: I'm glad I didn't know how huge and at times confusingly organized the Ellison papers were. It was tough knowing where to go, but I would've been a little more nervous about starting if I knew.

8. If you could give rising seniors advice about the Knox Prize, what would it be?

A: I would encourage students to put a lot of thought into what they would like to do. It's not going to help anyone if you throw something together that you have little knowledge of and are just doing it to do it. With that said, I would hope students can be open with how they approach their research. Don't be too narrow in your thinking and close yourself off from new areas and materials that could lead to great and unexpected discoveries.