The Plain Truth About *Common Sense*:
Dr. Benjamin Rush's Role in Promoting American Independence
By Aaron Mandelbaum

My research topic focuses on the storylines and publication process before, during, and after the publication of the famous 46-page pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776). Specifically, I am investigating the historical myth that Dr. Benjamin Rush contributed a significant amount of time and energy in assisting Thomas Paine to craft the renowned pamphlet. Additionally, I am highlighting the public reception of this significant piece of literature, both immediate and long-term.

In regards to my Summer 2015 research, I investigated the early life and education of Rush. To do so, I re-read Rush’s autobiography, focusing on this particular period of his life and his commentary regarding Paine and *Common Sense*. From the guidance of my faculty mentor, Professor Stephen Fried, I then reviewed historical newspapers in the hope of ascertaining not only if the press ever associated Rush with *Common Sense*, but also to gain an appreciation for Rush’s role and reputation in his community. Indeed, after meeting with librarians at both Van Pelt Library at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, I found two useful databases to search historical records: one solely dedicated to *The Philadelphia Gazette* and the other database being ProQuest, which offered hundreds of thousands of American periodicals from 1740 through 1900. The examination of these two databases was arduous; I limited the years from 1730 through 1815 and searched “Benjamin Rush,” “Dr. Rush,” and “Rush”. While I was mindful of moments where Rush was connected with Paine or *Common Sense*, I also took note of many of Rush’s fascinating biographical events as well.
Once I found an opportunity to pause in my research regarding Rush, I then focused my attention on Thomas Paine. While the task was daunting, I carefully researched the Thomas Paine section on the Fourth Floor of Van Pelt Library. I sifted through 93 books in total, regardless of genre; I read biographies of Paine, his writings, and modern contemporary scholars’ thoughts and opinions of Paine’s life and legacy. Many of these books were informative and insightful, but my favorite was Scott Liell’s *46 Pages*. Liell’s book in particular highlighted the publication process of *Common Sense* and included in-depth analysis about Rush and Paine’s relationship. Further, Liell’s book presented some commentary of the immediate reception of *Common Sense*, which I plan to research next.