I used my InULA research grant funds to travel to the Rockefeller Archive Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York. I traveled there after ALA and researched on site between June 26 and June 28. During that time I examined portions of the Near East Foundation (NEF) records, the Office of Messrs. Rockefeller records, and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial records. I also received scans of larger portions of the NEF records.

My research focused on the organization that became NEF in 1930. The philanthropy started in 1915 as an American response to the Armenian Genocide. It went by various names until 1919, when it became Near East Relief (NER).

One chapter of my dissertation on American Protestant foreign missions argued that NER reflected a new approach in the mission movement. Shortly before I completed the dissertation, a book came out that came to the exact opposite conclusion. It argued that NER broke sharply with the mission movement tradition, that it was one of the first modern, secular, bureaucratic, international philanthropies, that the leaders in the United States (whom I focused on) were incompetent and irrelevant to operations on the ground, and that the front-line staff in the Eastern Mediterranean were all that mattered. This new book surprised me, but has become a great foil to argue against.

Two repositories hold the bulk of NER/NEF records: Union Theological Seminary and the Rockefeller Archive Center. The former keeps documents from the early years of the organization and the latter, the later years. The author with whom I disagreed had relied exclusively on the records at the Rockefeller Archive Center and I had relied exclusively on those at Union Theological Seminary. The InULA grant allowed me to draw my own conclusions based on both sets of records.

I am still reading through the thousands of pages of documents that are now on my computer, but I can say that while I still disagree with the book, it was not a case of scholarly malpractice. Criticism of the NER leadership is in the Rockefeller Archive Center records, including complaints about their connections with Protestant foreign missions and lack of modern, bureaucratic organizing. What is also there, though, is a singular perspective, stemming from the Rockefeller Foundation and its allies, who essentially disagreed with the concept of temporary relief, preferring to solve society's problems rather than react to problems that arise. One vocal critic sought a leadership position himself, which he eventually received with help from the Rockefellers.
In terms of deliverables from this project, the research will go into a chapter of an edited volume that is currently under contract with Bloomsbury Academic. My chapter is due on May 1, 2020, and we anticipate a publication date of 2021.