LMU’s Von Der Ahe Library was an invaluable resource for my research project on the Chilean and South African truth commissions. This project was conceptualized when I was first exposed to the idea of truth commissions by Dr. Jodi Finkel in her Comparative Politics class in the political science department. The project grew into an entire summer research project that I completed by August 2008 for the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts. Every day for weeks during the summer of 2008, I would spend hours upon hours in the Von Der Ahe Library, tapping into its digital and print collections as well as working closely with helpful and friendly reference librarians to explore the facets and complexities of these nations’ truth commissions. Without the Von Der Ahe Library’s resources to assist my project, I would not have come to the conclusion I arrived at in my final research paper: that truth commissions, while well-intentioned in their aims of greater social reconciliation and commitment to human rights and dignity, are complex, ever-evolving political institutions that can both help and harm societies recovering from a legacy of human rights abuses.

I drew upon a number of different types of sources as I worked on my project. Von Der Ahe Library’s extensive and accessible research databases were invaluable for building a comprehensive literature review on truth commissions. Utilizing Academic Search Premier in EBSCO Host, Columbia International Affairs Online, the Congressional Quarterly Global Researcher, and the wealth of full-length articles available through JStor, I had access to decades of articles written about the evolution and impact of truth commissions on democratizing countries. This ranged from classic articles written on the subject, such as Elin Skaar’s article “Truth commissions, trials—or nothing? Policy options in democratic transitions” in Third World Quarterly, to the most recent graduate studies papers on truth commissions, such as Emily Rodio’s paper on truth commissions and democratization presented at the International Studies Conference in 2007. I also utilized these databases to access the primary source transcripts of the final truth commission reports published by the Chilean and South African truth commissions in 1994 and 1998-2000, respectively. The library’s reference librarians were extremely helpful to me in navigating these electronic resources to find the evidence I needed for my paper.

Perhaps the most invaluable resources I found for my research at Von Der Ahe were the extensive print materials relevant to my study of Chile and South Africa’s truth commissions. I was impressed to find the complete three-volume work of the United States Institute of Peace Transitional Justice series, a recent compilation of material and research on transitioning democracies that proved to be cutting-edge material for my research. The library also possessed hallmark books published on truth commissions (Priscilla Hayner’s classic Unspeakable Truths) as well as the most comprehensive book I found anywhere on the history of Chile under Pinochet (Chile Under Pinochet by Mark Ensalaco). In tracking truth commission policy recommendations over a period of eighteen years for my research, I could not have completed this section of my analysis without the library’s extensive collection of both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International annual country reports, ranging from 1990 to 2008.

My professor and I were truly proud of the final product of my research, which I presented to the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts in November 2008. The Von Der Ahe Library was instrumental in helping me experience the thrill of independent research on a topic I am truly passionate about, and I am grateful that its staff and exhaustive resources are available to all LMU students.