Reflective Essay

The capstone research project we are submitting for consideration is a 50-page research thesis that is a requirement for the LMU SOE; it took approximately one academic school year to complete, and it centers around deconstructing the narratives of Latina Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) teachers. As high school science teachers ourselves, we realized that as marginalized people, we faced many obstacles in our journey to higher education and felt that our narratives deserve to be explored and told. This type of research required deep exploration and analysis of different narratives of marginalized women in STEM. Upon starting our research, we learned that our initial methodology aligned closely with the format of a *platica.* Our discovery of the *platica* came from the work of Fierros and Bernal (2016), which we found on the online database *ERIC*; however, this was not an easy find. There is a wide range of literature available in the section of Latinas in STEM, and this required us to reflect on what kind of information we were truly searching for. This led us to start our research with learning more about the latinx culture. We had to move away from merely using search phrases like "STEM" or "university" or "latinas", and we had to use keyphrases like "culture" and "familial norms". This initial search not only led us to learn more about the culture and find our primary method of study, but it also allowed us to expand our research by learning which key terms are important.

We quickly learned that using broad terms can lead to an extensive influx of information, and it can be extremely time consuming to comb through all the information to find the specific literature that supports our narrative. Thankfully, our faculty advisor, Dr. Krikorian, provided an invaluable resource that changed the way we managed our research; we were introduced to an LMU librarian that specializes in education research and is an expert in finding information specific to different studies. The librarian's in class presentation was invaluable as she shared different strategies for narrowing down searches. She shared the importance of keywords in our

searches. She used an example topic of increasing science self-efficacy in girls so they can pursue a STEM career and explained how the most useful keywords for finding literature related to the topic were synonyms of "science" and "self-efficacy". She also explained how Boolean searches work and the importance of truncation. With all of the tools she provided, we were able to access more specific literature. Initially, we were using *ERIC* and searching for "Latinas" and "STEM" which resulted in over 50 peer-reviewed publications, but once we updated our search using truncation and used the keywords "Latin*" and "STEM" and "women" we were able to narrow our search down to 47 peer-reviewed publications that were more specific to our topic. Similarly we had to use this technique to find information on various aspects of the lantinx experience in the United States and how it impacts higher education for women.

The primary tool for our research was the Hannon Library's online database and libguides. The education libguide served as our landing page for all research databases, how-to videos, sample theses, and additional help. We found that *ERIC* was the most useful database since it returned to most topic-specific peer-reviewed articles. At times, we came across the issue where the abstract was available through LMU and the article appeared as a linked full text, but when we attempted to access it we were denied and were not able to see the full article. This was when we reached out to the librarian that had provided us with all of the invaluable information earlier in the year. We emailed her with the article name, author, source, and URL. The next day, she responded not only with the article pdf, but she provided us with the journal list link and a how-to video for using *Google Scholar* to find articles and books. Our work required an extensive analysis of narratives with specialized information that required in-depth research. We were able to achieve this through the guidance of library staff and the online databases available to us at LMU.