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8 December 2021  
SOCL 345-01

## Reflection

Before my senior Social Research and Statistics Evaluation class, I knew little to none about conducting real-life research. Of course, during my years at university, I had written and submitted plenty of research-style papers. Still, I primarily based those on studying and analyzing film, books, articles, and class textbooks. I studied other people's research and used their findings. I had never helped create a survey to give to actual participants before. Prior to this course, I was unaware of proper APA formatting, and I was ignorant of all the different methods of data collecting. This class transformed my knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the ins and outs of scientific research. During the course, I learned about ethnographic research, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, coding methods, and much more. It informed me of what a literature review is and the purpose of a literature review. I learned the guidelines for asking research questions and different types of sampling. All the planning, reading, researching, and analysis conducted to write the literature review significantly helped me understand our class research project entirely. The steps to writing the literature review taught me how to find credible, peer-reviewed articles and the importance of the "times-cited" feature on a database. I will carry this information with me as I continue my academic journey.

I used Longwood University's Greenwood Library page to find reliable, current, and credible databases and research for this project. I also used Google Scholar to help find appropriate research for my paper. Using Google Scholar was easy because I could put quotation

marks around the phrase I was trying to find for a more sufficient and accurate search when I wanted to find something specific. I used peer-reviewed sources and used sources published in the last several years. I used resources that applied to my research topic and supported my project. I did not use opinion pieces, blogs, or anything from a ".com" domain because that is not professional. When writing the introduction paragraphs to my final paper, I included an additional citation from the Habitat for Humanity organization because that is a credible and well-known nonprofit, non-governmental organization. This was okay because an introduction alerts the reader about the particular topic before data and research are introduced. It is a distinct style and has other requirements than the rest of the paper. The introduction is supposed to play with a person's "emotional strings".

This year was the first year that the research team at Longwood could not interact with the children of Head-Start and their families in person. In previous years, the students in the Social Research and Statistics Evaluation classes would visit the children of Head-Start to create deeper connections, bonds, and trust. Visiting the children showed them just how many people cared about their academic achievements and wellbeing. The regular visits were also important because they helped influence the parents to fill out and return the teams' surveys. The parents were more inclined to give back to us to show appreciation for time, effort, and interest invested in their kids—not being allowed on these Headstart canvases limited our interest in the project's outcome. We overcame this problem by routinely talking about the issue by discussing the importance of our research and everyone involved and communicating through the professor and virtually. Another challenge was that we could no longer give \$5 gift cards to the parents of

Head-Start to incentivize them to fill out the surveys, but we overcame that by providing books instead.

My confidence level in conducting research has changed because now I know the appropriate language and framing when creating survey questions and research papers. I had a very knowledgeable professor that had excellent attention to detail and teaching methods. I am more confident because of my professor's feedback, critiques, and information. I feel secure in finding quality research and models and ways to continue to grow in this field. At the beginning of the semester, the professor laid out all of her expectations for the class. It was extremely intimidating. I remember becoming wide-eyed on that first day. However, with guidance, I became successful in this class and eventually completed a lot of what I didn't expect to be able to do - independently.

To "think like a researcher" is to be open-minded, curious, and engaged. It is to think collaboratively and inclusively and be mentally flexible to change and challenge. To "think like a researcher," there must be a desire for understanding or discovery. There must be an appreciation for research and data that supports your work and hypothesis or research that disproves your work and hypothesis. A researcher must be okay with failure and stay humble.