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LAURE Essay

I was given the opportunity to partake in the Undergraduate Summer Scholars Program (USSP) with Jacqueline Daugherty as my faculty mentor. Jacqueline mentioned her interest in student understanding of policies, procedures, and resources and encouraged me to cultivate my own research questions through USSP.

My research began through personal observations and my own personal interests in the realm of sexuality and policy. I noticed through conversations within my own peer group that students were not that well versed in sexual violence policies and resources. And, because of that, they did not know the resources that they could refer friends to. Therefore, I focused on the perspective of a student helping a friend. It is important to emphasize that all students should be aware of the policies and resources because students who are survivors are most likely to tell a friend about what happened (Sabina & Ho, 2014).

The interviews conducted during USSP provided me with insights into what would be useful to search for in the literature in regards to the importance of policy implementation challenges and website structure. After completing USSP, I realized that many students' understanding of Title IX policies and university resources were very limited much like hypothesized. I found much of the information about Miami policies on the university webpages. The constant searching made me began to wonder how easily students could navigate the sexual violence webpages. Also, I noticed there was a gap in the literature in regards to student perceptions of university webpages. There were a few studies examining ease of navigation, but the researchers conducted the click experiment themselves. Therefore, that gave me the idea to have students navigate the website. I also wanted to include an interview portion to my study, which was not included in previous studies, so I could understand how they feel it would be best organized to present accurate student portrayals to the Title IX Office. So, my process was tracking how many clicks it took people to find information about sexual violence, make a website map of the most common navigation paths, and asking students how they believe the website should be organized.

Since I am an interdisciplinary student, I have many disciplines guiding my research. The disciplines used are: sociology, psychology, women and gender studies, political science, and

computer science. The combination of sociology, psychology, and women and gender studies gave me the opportunity to understand how society affects survivors and victims and how those survivors and victims perceive other's treatment of them. Political science provided me with a background on policy implementation and how that works with sexual violence policies specific to universities. Even when the articles were not explicit with how they work together, I was able to critically examine articles from the social sciences and political science and see how they fit together. Computer science provided me with a background into the best format for webpages like university sexual violence webpages. I struggled the most in this discipline because I faced a challenge in finding academic literature pertaining to the proper number of clicks. My goal was to find how many clicks it should take a user to find information. So, I had to turn to Google to find information, which was found through marketing webpages referencing best practices and industry standards.

I attended a library session through Western that gave us the opportunity to use library resources. The librarian, Katie Gibson, at King Library assisting us helped me refine my searches and gave me tips on which academic journals were best suited for the disciplines I was pulling from. She also showed me the application Zotero that helped immensely in organizing my 40 sources throughout my research process.

The library was helpful beyond just an in-class session and finding sources. I was sure to take advantage of the interlibrary loan system and make sure that I had the articles necessary to inform my project. I realized that the best way to conduct my study was if people could use the same computers in the same environment each session. This is useful for my study because it decreased the probability of extraneous variables affecting the outcomes. I reached out to Lori Chapin, the Center for Information Management (CIM) Manager, to see if it was possible to reserve computers in the CIM. She pointed me in the direction of B.E.S.T. Library and the computer lab there where she was able to reserve 10 computers for me to hold the first part of my research sessions. I then reserved a study room near the computer lab to host the remaining interview portion of the research sessions. The library gave me a space to conduct my research in a prompt and professional manner. A challenge I faced in regards to the CIM is that the computers there did not have a click tracking software, but Bryan Partner pointed me in the direction of a software I could download to use in my research. But, the software was incredibly

complex and did not always work all the time. This was pivotal in creating my own click tracking method that had to rely on participants tracking themselves.

My experiences through USSP and my senior thesis gave me a taste of research in sexuality and policy. Without the accessibility of the academic journal articles found within the library webpage, I would not have the knowledge and skill set that I have today. I hope to continue to graduate school in a social science field and pursue more research opportunities. I would like to focus on different social problems that face specific populations (i.e. sexual violence survivors, domestic violence survivors, people experiencing homeless and poverty, and the elderly) and the policies that affect them. Without the opportunities presented to me through the Western Program, Miami Libraries, and Miami University I would have never discovered my passions for social justice and policy within academic courses and research.