

LAURE Research Process and Scholarly Growth Essay

When I registered for my 407 seminar, I knew my research would be on a topic in Pacific Northwest history. This class is designed by the History Department here at the University of Oregon to provide different thematic focuses, determined in large part by whichever instructors are teaching seminars that term. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, I jumped at the opportunity to conduct research on regional history. Knowing that choosing a topic is often a main challenge for me, I started my initial research at my local public library. By the time Fall Term started, I had several different ideas floating around related to my interests in religion, the turn of the 20th century, and women. I came to my eventual topic through a database I am very familiar with – the Oregon Historical Society’s Oregon Encyclopedia. Using their thematic browsing function, I stumbled upon an entry for a court case titled *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1924). I was unfamiliar with the compulsory education bill and the subsequent case, intrigued also by its thematic similarity to a paper I had done on the Philadelphia nativist riots of 1844. I used a book recommended by my professor, Linda Gordon’s *Second Coming*, to learn more about this bill and its context. I used the guidelines of this class – must be about Pacific Northwest history and must be doable for a term project – to further refine my research questions and examine how the socio-cultural landscape of the Pacific Northwest was influenced by the discourse on education, democracy, and religion surrounding this court case.

Since this project was on an Oregon history topic, the first place I consulted was the Oregon History research guide on the UO library webpage. I used the encyclopedia article and Gordon’s book to identify keywords such as “*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*”, “Oregon compulsory education bill”, and “1920s” for my search in databases such as JSTOR and the Oregon Historical Quarterly. As I was reading these articles, I combed through the footnotes and

bibliographies to make note of what sources were frequently cited. This is a strategy I have developed throughout my studies and one that led me to another crucial secondary source – Paula Abrams’ *Cross Purposes*. I was then able to search for this book in UO’s LibrarySearch and request a copy. I also found a webpage on this bill and similar legislation in Washington on a social and labor history project hosted by the University of Washington. While I couldn’t access the database, I could apply those terms and search for those articles through the UO Library’s website. I kept a detailed list of articles and links in a running online document, supplemented with a physical notebook for brainstorming and drafting as I prefer to write by hand before typing. Once I started to solidify the articles I was using as sources, I used Zotero for annotations and managing these sources.

When it came to evaluating sources, I leaned on the criteria discussed in the seminar and previous history classes. Among the various elements to consider, I looked for influential sources that kept being referenced, newer books that showcase the recent conversations on the topic, and reputable publishers to gauge both the relevancy and usefulness of my selected sources. Both Gordon and Abrams’ books, for example, provided a relevant historiographical discussion that helped me situate my own research and were much more recent publications. I was also delighted to discover that the library’s Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) had several collections relevant to my topic. While SCUA has the Marcus Pierce papers, I ultimately chose not to request this collection. Marcus Pierce was the governor of Oregon and represented the State in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. While tempting to look through this collection, it was significantly larger and I could find sections of the legal memos elsewhere. Instead, I focused on the collections of the Lutheran Schools Committee and a folder containing Voters’ Pamphlets. These were richer in materials designed around opposition towards the bill and continued efforts

after its passage. They allowed me to answer questions regarding the rhetoric used and analyze how these materials would have been presented to the public. This last piece embodied a critical point in using sources as evidence of the intellectual conversation I as the researcher am engaging with – in this case, the development and establishment of rhetoric around democracy and education within the social discourse of the United States through this historical legal case.

Now in my fourth year of studies as a history major, I have become well acquainted with the library's research support services. When I was struggling to identify those key terms from the encyclopedia article, I reached a point where the results continually yielded the same few results. This was a useful indication that these sources were relevant to my topic but also led me to revisit the online tutorials for keyword and advanced searches. Even more crucial to my research was the help I received in utilizing the archival collections at SCUA. Good historical research claims are grounded in a researcher's analysis of their primary sources. Having done an internship with Special Collections two years ago, I had a basic familiarity with the ArchivesSpace database from a processing archivist perspective, but not so much one from a historian's perspective. By no means was this my first time ever using archival materials in my research, although those had been primarily from digital collections. I utilized the finding aids to search for collections held at SCUA, as well as the Archives West repository to find additional items accessible via digital collections. When it came to accessing these collections, I referred both to the SCUA webpage and filled out the research assistance form to clarify questions about visiting policies. This process went smoother than I anticipated and made it much easier to request other collections throughout the research process.

Historical research, and research more broadly, is a time-intensive process. It is further challenging to produce such a project – one that provides original and thoughtful contributions to

the existing scholarship – in the relatively fast-paced environment of the 10-week term system. As someone who has often struggled with writing those first words because I want the initial draft to be effortlessly polished, the inevitable clash between this expectation and the reality proved a significant obstacle for this research paper. It became enough of a concern to warrant several meetings with my professor. These discussions and the workshop-style structure of the class were key to developing problem-solving strategies. From the workshop came a classmate's advice to type in single-space, which would then later be switched to double-space as per proper formatting guidelines for academic papers. This mental reframing made the writing appear much more manageable and a reminder to be mindful of how much space background information is taking up in relation to the main body. My professor's advice to sit down in a place with no access to my computer or sources and just write helped me get words down on the page. Having spent so much time with the materials at this point in the process, I had the knowledge of my topic and was able to move past that mental block.

Researching the events and context of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* emphasized for me the importance of historical research and why I study history. As my professor expressed throughout the seminar, we are examining these past events to better understand the systems and issues of the present. The focus of my project is exceedingly relevant to current events, especially as we see similar rhetoric recycled and debated. The actual process of conducting this research was also very insightful regarding what writing strategies work best for me. Mentally reframing my approach to writing is something I continue to use in the classes I've taken this Winter Term. These are helpful for outlining my arguments and are integrated with time-management strategies that I intended to use when adapting this paper for the Undergraduate Research Symposium in the Spring. Lastly, the self-management systems I've developed for my project

help prepare me for a successful professional career in archival and records management. I can bring the experience and perspective as someone who has used the archives for research into my approach for managing these records and collections. Overall, it has been really rewarding to engage as a scholar and a historian to produce this research at the culmination of my four years as an academic here at the University of Oregon.