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Research Process and Scholarly Growth Essay

Developing my Honors thesis has been the most challenging and rewarding experience of my education, and the journey from generating a research topic to putting together a finished product has taught me far more than I ever expected to learn.

In my first year at the University of Oregon, I became a disability studies minor after taking a course through the Clark Honors College centered around critical disability theory and the disability justice movement. Declaring this minor was the first step in developing my research topic, as my eventual thesis would combine disability studies with my major in communication disorders and sciences. In my disability studies courses, I gained both foundational knowledge and a curiosity to learn more about my role in advocacy efforts.

In my junior year, another Honors College class helped me direct my curiosity and hone skills that would become necessary in crafting my thesis. The class introduced students to the software R and how it could be used to create compelling data stories through data visualization. I chose to investigate if California's public colleges and universities could provide comprehensive American Sign Language (ASL) instruction to hearing parents of deaf children. By the end of the class, I had identified a possible solution to deficits in ASL learning access for hearing parents of deaf children, but I also made the problematic assumption that learning ASL was the goal of every hearing parent of deaf children. In an audiology class the following term, I learned about how complex decisions about communication and hearing technology can be for new parents of deaf children, and this new understanding shaped the first iteration of my thesis topic: investigating the factors most salient for hearing parents of deaf children when deciding how to communicate with their child.

I turned to the University of Oregon's Libraries to begin my research. I started with the Libraries' Research Guides' Communication Disorders page. In the Background Information section, I found a link to the American Speech-language Hearing Association's (ASHA) Practice Portal, a site that helped ground my research by directing me to reputable papers housed within ASHA's five peer-reviewed journals. After becoming familiar with these journals and their research topics, I returned to the Library Catalog, using the Boolean search method and inputting the terms "speech AND sign AND parent AND decision AND deaf". This search yielded a study by Kathryn Crowe et al. titled "Speech, Sign, or Multilingualism for Children With Hearing Loss: Quantitative Insights Into Caregivers' Decision Making," published in ASHA's Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools journal. In this paper, Crowe and her colleagues in Australia investigated a topic nearly identical to my research topic. Curious to see if this research had been repeated in America, I used the Library Catalog's backward citation feature and found Maranda Jones' and Megan Roberts' paper titled "Speech, Sign, or Both? Factors Influencing Caregivers' Communication Method Decision Making for Deaf/Hard of Hearing Children," published in ASHA's Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research. I was initially discouraged by this finding, as it meant I needed to revise my research topic. However, the existing research provided me with benefits in both methodology and analysis. Crowe graciously offered me access to her survey for my own distribution and use, and Jones' and Young's paper ended up serving as the backbone of my literature review and a point of contrast for my analysis.

To refine my research topic, I brought an intersectional lens to the research, focusing specifically on how Black hearing parents of deaf children make communication decisions with their children. I chose this community for multiple reasons. First, as a member of the Black community, I am uniquely positioned to conduct this research appropriately and respectfully as

compared to my majority-white peers in speech, language, and hearing sciences. Next, Black families are critically underrepresented in research on this topic, as evidenced by Jones' and Roberts' paper, which only included input from 4 Black participants in a sample of 105. Finally, examining the intersection of race and ability is important not just in academia but to me personally, as my introduction to research on speech and language was through my mentor's research on the unique experiences of Black women who stutter. With a unique research topic and a solid foundation of previously existing literature, I started the research process.

I began by expanding my literature review to develop a stronger understanding of the community I wished to serve. To explore the Black Deaf experience, I searched the library database using the terms "deaf AND black AND identity AND intersectionality", resulting in the discovery of Irene Leigh et al.'s book titled "Deaf Identities: Exploring New Frontiers," featuring a chapter by Lindsay Dunn and Glenn Anderson titled "Examining the Intersectionality of Deaf Identity, Race/Ethnicity, and Diversity Through a Black Deaf Lens". This source gave me unique access to the challenges within the Black Deaf community and how members' intersecting identities can compound marginalization in different spaces. While building my literature review, I saved each source to Zotero, a software I first discovered during an information session by UO's research librarians in another Honors College class years ago. During this process, it was very important that my sources were trustworthy, relevant, and timely. For Jones' and Roberts' paper, this was easy to determine due to the research's close proximity to my topic and publication in a relevant peer-reviewed journal in just 2024. Similarly, Dunn's and Anderson's chapter was published in 2019 by Oxford University Press and had clear ties to my population of interest. Armed with these sources, my literature review provided me with methodological

strategies, points of comparison, and insight into the specific lived experience of the population of interest.

For these two sources in particular, I read through each carefully rather than skimming for specific information to add. For Jones' and Roberts' paper, this meant closely examining their methods section and findings to see where my research could overlap or deviate from their model. For Dunn's and Anderson's chapter, this meant reading the passage line by line and organizing content into thematic sections to be further analyzed in the literature review. The chapter's partial narrative structure prompted me to consider not only what was said but how it was said, taking into account the rhetorical choices the authors used to give their writing further meaning. I read the remaining sources with the intent to extract specific information, so I spent more time evaluating their reliability than dissecting them deeply.

After developing my literature review, I began conducting my research. I started by consulting the Libraries' Data Services team. In the spring of 2025, I met with Cameron Mulder to learn more about survey design and distribution. He helped me understand how a questionnaire's design could either help or hinder the quality of the responses I received, and he encouraged me to refine my data visualization skills over the summer before attempting to analyze any results. This past fall term, I learned from Cameron again in his eight-session "Introduction to R for Non-Programmers" course. Through this course, I honed my skills in R in preparation to make the complex visualizations I planned to present in my thesis. By the start of this winter term, I had received 32 quality responses to my survey, and to begin my data analysis, I again sought out the guidance of the Data Services team. Isabel Dalisay walked me through statistical testing and statistical significance, helping me project my research into the future by

identifying potentially significant relationships in the data that future researchers could investigate.

I am proud of the thesis I produced from my research, but I am equally proud of what I learned about research in the process. I learned how important it is to learn directly from the communities I aim to serve, regardless of whether I identify within that community. Hearing directly from the population of interest helped me avoid assumptions and become more understanding of how the complexities of parenthood can increase when navigating the intersection of race and disability. Further, I stopped viewing speech and ASL as binary communication opposites but rather as different ends of a spectrum of communication choices. Personally, I learned that I can conduct meaningful research and learn complex new skills in data science, coding, and qualitative research methods. Finally, I learned how unexpected challenges can emerge at any stage in research. Early on, I was challenged by Jones' and Robert's paper on my original research topic, but I overcame this hurdle by improving my research topic. Later, I was challenged by my inexperience with survey design and distribution, but I overcame this challenge by consulting the Data Services team and sending my survey to every school for the deaf in the country. At each challenge, I sought out the expert guidance of my advisors and the vast on-campus resources, most frequently the University of Oregon Libraries.