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UGA Libraries Undergraduate Research Award

Migration, Conservation, Truncation: Developing research strategies to investigate Amazonian environmental politics

Last spring, a particularly engaging course—Dr. Pete Brosius’s ecological anthropology seminar on “Conservation and Community” — inspired me to undertake the most intensive and rewarding independent research project of my undergraduate experience. One question in particular intrigued me: How does immigration into the Peruvian Amazon impact rainforest conservation outcomes there? In order to ensure that my work would be both well rooted in and relevant to current academic research on the topic, I undertook a thorough interdisciplinary literature review, incorporating sources from anthropology, developmental economics, demography, and conservation biology, and including not only academic papers but also non-governmental and governmental publications. On this foundation, my first paper analyzed the current state of the existing body of literature on migration and conservation in the Peruvian Amazon, focusing on the relationships between these distinct disciplinary approaches. Based on my findings, I narrowed my research question to encompass only the impact of one specific immigrant population, designed surveys based on anthropological methodologies, and collected responses during a six-week research trip to the Peruvian Amazon, funded by the Honors Program. I analyzed my findings in a second research paper (see attached abstract).

In the process of constructing my literature review, I collected, analyzed, and synthesized over one hundred distinct sources. I remember the literature review process as the most intense period of academic growth in my undergraduate career: I learned to utilize

academic search tools effectively, to deal with vast amounts of information efficiently, and to integrate academic sources with primary sources such as interviews and gray literature.

I began my search for relevant literature using basic search tools such as GIL and Google Scholar, but through an information session with librarian Elizabeth White, I learned to use the “Advanced Search” functions of EBSCO Host, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, and the relevant subject databases available through GALILEO. The strategies I learned through that information session proved invaluable: I learned how to filter out sources that were either not peer-reviewed or unavailable in full-text form and how to use the truncation functions built into each search tool to my advantage. In a later consultation, librarian Caroline Barratt introduced me to another search tool, Web of Science, which I have since used to further develop my papers in preparation for presentation at the 2011 CURO Symposium.

Beyond these information sessions and consultations with UGA librarians, my development as a researcher also continued through alternative paths. For example, I adapted the strategies for truncation that I had learned from Librarian White in order to retrieve sources in both Spanish and English simultaneously by choosing search terms with similar roots in each language and truncating them where the two languages diverged—for example, “migra*” to retrieve results related to both “migration” and “migración”. I also learned to adapt my search terms according to my results, broadening or narrowing them as necessary, or incorporating phrases that did not necessarily appear in my research question but that seemed to appear frequently in relevant papers, such as “rural-rural migration” and “Andean-Amazon migration”. It was also through this research project that I learned to use

UGA Libraries' Interlibrary Loan and Reserves request services to retrieve harder-to-find print sources.

Further, a graduate student in my field taught me how to download and use EndNote citation management software from the UGA Libraries webpage to better store and organize my source materials. The "Groups" function of EndNote proved particularly helpful to the literature review process: by sorting each new source according to its discipline (anthropology, developmental economics, demography, or conservation biology) and its source (academic, non-governmental organization publication, or governmental publication), I developed a clearer picture of the body of literature as a whole, which disciplines and sources were well-represented, and which were underrepresented.

Perhaps the most valuable skill I learned through the literature collection process was where to turn when it seemed that the flow of new sources had run dry— references and citations. Whenever I identified a particularly useful paper, I scanned its footnotes for relevant titles, then followed these leads to new sources. Whenever a particular author reappeared several times in my searches, I located their faculty webpage and scanned their curriculum vitae for further leads in new formats, such as books, lectures, or interviews. Similarly, whenever a non-governmental or governmental organization was mentioned in a source, I searched that organization's publication archives for relevant documents. In this way, I learned to squeeze every last drop of utility out of each source, allowing me a new confidence in the comprehensiveness of my literature review.

Beyond the literature collection process, the analysis and synthesis of these source materials pushed me to engage more deeply with my source materials and to become a more intelligent library researcher. Given the highly interdisciplinary nature of my research

topic, it was tempting to attempt to include every tangentially related source in my literature review. However, I gradually learned to balance comprehensiveness with relevance, and to distinguish useful sources from distracting ones. Further, I learned to more intelligently evaluate each source's objectivity and usefulness according to its discipline or origin. For example, what assumptions does research in developmental economics make that research in anthropology does not? What bureaucratic biases might influence a non-governmental or governmental publication that might not influence an academic publication?

My literature review process exposed both a lack of cross-disciplinary dialogue and a lack of up-to-date research on the relationship between conservation and migration in the Peruvian Amazon. My second paper represented an attempt to fill these gaps in the literature through the collection and analysis of new primary sources through interviews with migrants to the Peruvian Amazon. Throughout my research project— from the collection of relevant literature, to the analysis of the composition and shortcomings of that body of literature, to an attempt to resolve those shortcomings through my own independent study— I have developed a more intimate understanding of the challenges of the research process, as well as a fuller set of research tools and strategies with which to meet those challenges.

**“Cuando uno toma el agua del Tambopata...”:
Migration and the urban environment in Madre de Diós, Peru**

The region of Madre de Diós, Peru, contains the best-preserved area of the Amazon rain forest and the highest levels of biodiversity on earth. Because of this notoriety, Madre de Diós is also home to a high concentration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on conservation and sustainable development. These NGOs are predominantly staffed by non-local professionals who were raised and educated in urban areas of Peru and later migrated to Madre de Diós to work. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether the non-local and originally-urban characteristics of these NGOs' workforces affect conservation outcomes in rural versus urban areas of Madre de Diós. Interviews were conducted on a sample of fifteen employees of NGOs in Madre de Diós. Interviewees' responses were analyzed with reference to the social constructivist school of thought in environmental anthropology, which argues that social constructs cause people to value rural landscapes over urban landscapes, resulting in greater investment of conservation resources into rural landscapes at the expense of urban landscapes. In contrast with the predictions of the social constructivist literature, interviewees' responses demonstrated approximately equal valuation of rural and urban landscapes. These results suggest the need for further research, including a larger sample of interviews, to determine whether Madre de Diós truly represents a counterexample to social constructivist predictions.

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