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Library Research Award for Undergraduates

Reflective Essay

1 May 2023

At the University of Washington (UW), I am on the path to having a minor in Real Estate at the Runstad Department of Real Estate. The Showcase Text final for my ENGL 288 course was the perfect opportunity to explore my studies independently. I wanted to connect the relationship between my generation, Gen Z, and real estate.

While I enjoy using my creativity to make a project eye-catching and aesthetically pleasing to an audience, I dreaded the frustrating and lengthy process of research. Feeling lost, I scheduled an appointment at the Odegaard Writing & Research Center (OWRC) where I met a student tutor named Matthew. I came into the session with the initial idea on if Gen Z is able to afford housing in the future. Instead of going onto the Internet to begin researching, he breaks down my idea while creating a mind map on paper. From this, Matthew changes my way of thinking. Instead of asking me what I want to learn about real estate, he asks what I want within real estate. He told me to keep that question in mind as we moved on to exploring the UW Libraries Search website. He taught me the use of keywords, filters, and Boolean operators to find scholarly articles and sources. We began with keywords such as “housing” and “real estate”, further specifying our search with filters such as topics on “Real Estate Industry” and using boolean operators to combine keywords such as “‘affordable housing’ AND ‘Seattle’ OR ‘Gen Z’”. Learning from his expertise in database searching, we were able to narrow down to less than 100 results. As we looked into the results, there were articles that went against my idea. Matthew explains that during the research process, I may come across opposing articles that are

stronger and more evident. Instead of forcing these sources to a specific idea, let the research guide me to my inquiry.

As Matthew left me with his research experience and advice, I got to know him more. What surprised me was that he was around the same year as me but has more knowledge in research. He also gave kudos to my pursuit in real estate, having learned a few technical terms from me during our session. Going into my own research, none of the results sparked my interest. Meaning the favorable idea I originally came up with had faded, but I knew I came out of the session with a better understanding of finding a research-guided inquiry. I wanted my audience to be Gen Z so I, as the creator, can be connected by our same identity. After meeting Matthew, someone who is my age and an undergraduate at UW, I realized that both of us have different knowledge levels with real estate due to what we choose to study. I want real estate to be accessible to other UW undergraduates like him. Narrowing down my audience's identity to a Gen Z UW undergraduate made me look to the right where we live and study, the U-District. What better way to research about U-District than at UW itself, specifically the Built Environments Library. I went into the Real Estate Studies research guide where I found UW Professor, Margaret O'Hara, who wrote, "Community, Creativity, and Innovation: The University District and the University of Washington", an article about the relationship between UW and U-District through the participation of their students in the urban planning of the neighborhood. Seeing the research show me the topic of urban planning development in the U-District, it inspired my inquiry.

Getting over my research hump, I was able to find articles and sources that explained about U-District's development. With Professor O'Hara's article, I wanted to reach out to my audience to make them be aware of what is happening to their own environment. Just like

Matthew, my audience would have little to no knowledge about real estate. I would have to process what I have researched into a medium that can deliver that information to my audience in an understandable and enjoyable way. I knew that Gen Z UW undergraduates do not read papers. We do not have time from our hard classes to read another article in our spare time. Having a mini-documentary posted on Youtube can allow my audience to access the video, easily share it with their friends, and watch the video either in their free time or when they are multitasking. Furthermore, I wanted the audience to recognize the buildings and landmarks that I point out in the video when they go out to the U-District on their own. As I wrote the script, I knew that my audience would need definitions of technical terms such as “rezoning” and explanations of concepts such as the “Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA)”. In citing my sources in the video, I utilized the description box on Youtube to link a document to my video notes and citations so that my audience would not be overwhelmed with information and can choose to learn more. I filmed around the U-District with my iPhone and edit with the free iMovie software, resources that are readily available to my audience as well.

The research process was nonlinear and imperfect. What surprised me was that I enjoyed finding the sources and integrating the information into my medium, more than I would have thanks to the guidance of the OWRC and UW libraries. I am willing to be more open-minded to opportunities that can change my way of learning. Taking advantage of a course assignment to dive deeper into my minor and to revisit an old interest of video production further makes me want to share this journey. I am proud that my mini-documentary, “Urban Planning of U-District”, is a project for students made by a student. Passing on the advice that I have learned and will be bringing with me after this project, let the research guide you to your inquiry.

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