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Reflective Essay on *Exploring Immigration Politics in Frederick County*

I began this project for GVPT479I: Immigration Policy and Politics, taught by Professor Robert Koulish, Ph.D. I was born and raised in Frederick County and had no idea that immigration politics were controversial in my home town. After hearing that immigration policies in Frederick were reminiscent of the immigration fiasco which had just begun to culminate in Arizona, I sat down with Dr. Koulish and began plans for an ethnography of Frederick County. My thesis question: *What is going on in Frederick County with regards to immigration politics?* A question so broad and open ended could only be appropriately matched by a research scheme equally as encompassing: I was to focus the majority of my research on face to face interviews with officials, professionals, activists and scholars, and pair my research with personal stories from the residents of Frederick County.

I started by searching the UMD research port, CQ Researcher, JSTOR and Google Scholar to see if I could find any scholarly work on Frederick County with regards to immigration. My searches turned up nothing academic, but I discovered a lead: *Orellana Santos v. Frederick County*. The case had been somewhat well publicized and seemed a good place to start. I searched all the documents mentioned therein (e.g. statute 287(g), the Frederick County memorandum of agreement with ICE) and began to search relevant names.

As the project began I talked to people about my research constantly, and the topic was on my mind every day. I sat down with a friend's mother, who had recently been elected State Delegate. Through her I scheduled an interview with Sheriff Charles "Chuck" Jenkins, who had been named by Fox News as one of America's top ten toughest immigration sheriffs, and is perhaps *the* central figure in the debate. Once I had this interview scheduled everything else fell in line. When I mentioned the Sheriff, activists wanted to chat. When I mentioned the activists, politicians wanted to get a word in.

Over the course of several weeks I recorded eight hours of interviews with the Sheriff, a Maryland State Senator, the President of the Frederick NAACP, the Frederick City Chief of Police, a social scientist specializing in mediation in Hispanic communities in Frederick, and the co-founder and President of Centro Hispano de Frederick, Inc. I also spoke briefly with two immigrants and a Frederick resident whose parents migrated to the United States.

I took several measures to make sure I got the information I was looking for. First, I always made sure to educate myself before interviews. I would read and reread documents and articles. I had pertinent materials printed and highlighted with notes, and always at my side during the interviews. I also made sure, with the help of Professor Koulish, to craft an appropriate interview arc, which I would tailor to the person with whom I was meeting. I split the interviews into sections and with a list of need to know topics or questions. I left room for tangents and other surprises, but I always made sure to hit every point. I consulted this arc the night and morning before each interview, and never went in without a plan and preparation.

The project was fascinating. Each interview went well, and each interview went better than the one before. I regularly met with and emailed Professor Koulish, and I kept him CC'ed when I emailed people regarding the project. The most rewarding part was watching my research question develop as the project went forward. When I spoke with Police Chief Dine, he lectured me on the importance of narrowing down my question and focusing my work. You

might say this was a turning point in my research. I spent a long time sitting at my desk scribbling thesis statements to realize that I had not been looking for answers so much as I had been searching for a question. My mistake was thinking that I had access to the right question from the start. I had a topic, and I had a wealth of resources; what I needed to do was *pursue*, and the question would become clear. For the essay I have submitted, I accompanied my research with census bureau statistics, which I easily found with a Google search. Statistics about income, racial distributions, etc. are easily available from the census bureau website and plenty of other sites on the Internet.

This project is far from complete, and the questions I must ask are still formulating. I have begun to learn how to craft an interview, how to antagonize appropriately or inappropriately, and how to get people to talk. I have discovered that sometimes the topic paired with the will and the resources are more important than a fine tuned research question. I have learned that it is hard *not* to talk for hours with someone about that which excites them, so long as it excites me too, and I have discovered that politicians seem to have a lot more free time than do activists! I plan to pick up the pen and recorder when I return home this summer and start scheduling interviews anew.