

Applicant: Sandra A. Shaker
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I began my research for my senior thesis, which would satisfy both the Latin American Studies Capstone (LASC458D) and my Honors History Thesis (HIST399). I decided to begin my research through the discipline of Latin American Studies, not only because it was to be completed first, but also because as an interdisciplinary project it allowed for more creativity with the sources I picked. As a Latin American History major, I feel competent in the themes and narratives that make up the field, but as someone of Egyptian descent, I've always felt that my interest in the Middle East has been more personal than academic or professional. Because I have such a large interest in both regions, want to work in both areas, and believe that both regions show similarities today because of their shared colonial past, I really wanted to take this chance to do a comparative piece. My topic became looking at how the Palestinian conflict was understood and perceived in Latin America. The results have been better than I expected, although my research topic is so specific.

To begin with, I spoke with Dr. Karin Roseblatt, who was the previous director of the Latin American Studies Center (LASC) for some information on secondary literature of Middle Eastern immigration to Latin America, and with her help and a basic catalogue search, I found a few sources to begin with. Because of my personal interest in the politics of each region, I had a lot of news sources that comprised the part of my research that focused on popular responses to the conflict. The UMD databases were invaluable when looking for scholarly journal articles—especially comparative ones—about the rhetoric of racism, a shared colonial past, and other parallels between the regions. It took quite a bit of practice to learn search the online databases, because I had several regions and ethnicities at once, so UMD librarian Pat Herron was very helpful in this process. Her demonstrations in our LASC library session introduced us to all the relevant databases, which would have materials from research to newspaper articles to how to locate an archive full of government documents from all around Latin America. In addition, she sat down with us individually during the class, typed keywords in for us, and really put herself in our place in order to help us.

About midway through my research, I noticed I was having difficulty finding secondary literature, which would comprise the historiography and background of my research. I emailed Pat again on my own, and not only did she show up with search results, but she sat down with me again and tried variations of keywords until I was left with several additional sources. She was extremely helpful, efficient, and encouraging at a point in my research where I could have gotten discouraged.

Because I organized my paper to look at the official political response to the Palestinian conflict, as well as the popular/cultural response, the amount of information available was overwhelming. I took a look at all the relevant sources, in order to get a good understanding of the historiography and research already done, but as I had more secondary literature than primary sources, I often used the

introduction and first few chapters to inform my paper. While evaluating my sources I kept in mind who the author was, what audience they were writing to, and whether it dealt with my topic specifically. In this way I was able to have many sources but use only the relevant information.

A few weeks before my paper was due, Dr. Guzmán-Gonzalez, my professor and advisor for the capstone, noticed my research didn't have enough on the Palestinian conflict specifically. As a result, she suggested rerouting my paper from focusing on how Latin American governments, intellectuals, and the masses relate only to the conflict to how they relate to the Palestinian *experience*, with the conflict being a central part of that experience. I think it was a wise move that more accurately reflected the contents of my paper. Dr. Guzmán-Gonzalez also believed it would open me up to opportunities to do graduate field research, if I so desired.

Her interest in my topic, along with Pat Herron's and Dr. Roseblatt's, has been very encouraging in this process. It has been a very dynamic research process now that I am accommodating this paper to be my Honors History thesis and consulting other archives, as well as a very helpful one. Although I was excited about my research from the beginning, these mentors have helped me see that I could expand the scope of this project past my undergraduate career. Because I have had to do so much research on different sources in different places, I have had to learn so much about what information is out there and how to get it. At the end of this process, I very much feel like a historian who is able to carry out independent research, and feeling like I really have those skills is a great end to my undergraduate career at UMD.

I am grateful to have learned so much through this project and for all the help I have received along the way.

Sincerely,

Sandra A. Shaker