

Over the past nine months as I have labored away at writing my senior honors thesis, the library has opened itself up as an endless source of possibilities and opportunities. Upon starting the project, my knowledge and understanding of the resources available in the library was limited; however, through the process of research I discovered that there is almost no source of information beyond reach.

From the start, the development of my research topic was strongly informed by my use of library resources. In my effort to formulate an original research question, I first searched through the library catalog and electronic databases such as “Expanded Academic ASAP” and “Proquest Databases” to gather a comprehensive collection of documents that covered my topic of interest. This exercise guided me through a variety of resources, from social science books in Suzzallo Library and online academic journals to the Government Publications Stacks and the Architecture and Urban Planning Library. Through this process I gained an understanding of the established literature on the broad topic of water privatization as well as the specific events of Cochabamba’s experiences with private sector participation; in turn, I was able to identify a gap in the literature through which my thesis could contribute.

Once I narrowed down my research question, I poured over the bibliographies of the journal articles and books that I had collected to find other relevant works. The use of reference lists became a key method to my research, leading me down unexpected avenues towards a variety of sources. On many occasions I ordered books through the Summit Union catalog and the interlibrary loan system – I was even able to obtain a doctoral dissertation on microfilm from the UK. This method also guided me to a number of useful internet sources, both in English and Spanish. Specifically, I utilized the websites of the Democracy Center, the World Bank, the Pacific Institute, the Public Services International Research Unit, PRINWASS, *Corporación Latinobarómetro*, and *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*. Overall, these resources allowed me to access a wealth of information that was even beyond the confines of the UW library system.

There were two dominant challenges that I faced while carrying out my research. First, it is difficult to determine the reputability of some sources, especially when using the internet. Thus, whenever I came across a questionable resource or site I would try to find other works that cited those resources; when that was not possible, I would investigate those resources myself to determine if they were politically skewed or ill-informed in some way. I also used the guidance of my mentor, Wolfram Latsch, in making judgments about certain resources. Second, the other major challenge that I encountered was knowing when to cease research and data collection. I found that there is no limit to the amount of information available; for example, once I would discover one good article, I would be led to another four possibilities. In this way, my search for information seemed never ending – and indeed it may have been – but at some point I realized that I had to stop and work with the materials I had already collected.

Overall, this research project has illuminated the world of possibilities that our library system holds as well as helped me to appreciate them. For example, while performing my research I had the opportunity to travel to Bolivia to carry out some location-specific research. At this time, I conducted interviews with local scholars and visited Cochabamba’s university library. While the library had made arduous efforts to document and organize all print sources available, the supply was scarce and manually operated. This experience opened my eyes to the inequitable distribution of information that exists globally, and filled me with gratitude for the resources to which I have access in Seattle. On the whole, my senior thesis would not have been possible without the numerous and varied resources that the library offers.