

## UGA Libraries Undergraduate Research Award Essay

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## Indian-American Identity: Merging Cultures in University Spaces

I wouldn't say I was a stranger to research when I started CURO. I have done research projects before, even ethnographies and participant observation. In my fields, Anthropology and International Affairs, you can't take classes without writing papers and doing research. I wanted a bigger challenge, however, and began the CURO process last December by talking to my future mentor- Dr. Christina Joseph. She initially helped me find my focus and limit my interest by advising me to study ICE, the Indian Cultural Exchange group here at UGA. Since December, my research topic has narrowed and come into better focus. Following the research process through hard work, consideration, and a lot of reading was complicated, but I have become a better student as well as a more experienced researcher, and I hope to continue to do research in my future careers.

Although my research started as following the process of ICE and exploring the politics of the organization, it has developed into investigating the formation of self-identity and hybrid culture in 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian-Americans. I want to understand and write about how 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian-Americans understand their identities, how they form their identities, and whether the University setting affects identity formation of students. My original research is based on observing and participating in ICE functions like India night or social events, and will, in the future, include interviews and free-lists by participants. My research is still ongoing, and in the spring of 2014, I plan to write an honors thesis on my topic. In order to begin participant observation, however, I had to understand what exactly I was studying, so I began my research with Galileo, my research mentor, and the UGA library multi-search database.

At the beginning, my mentor's research is what inspired me to investigate hybrid cultures in more detail. Dr. Joseph's article, "Bollyculture: Ethnography of Identity, Media and Performance," originally inspired me to investigate hybrid cultures in more detail and provided me with a starting point for my research. Starting from the works cited in this article, and my professor's suggestions, I began to accumulate sources. Some of these sources were from the communications and media fields, and therefore, not necessarily useful to my research. I however, did uncover several cultural studies resources and authors from this technique like Sunaina Maira, who writes specifically about the South Asian population in anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies journals. From this point, I started using the UGA library multi-search website and Galileo. Because identity formation is studied in psychology research and sociology research as well as anthropology research, I needed broad databases in order to acquire my most basic sources explaining identity formation.

I have found the Web of Science database particularly helpful in determining which articles were truly the best and the most foundational articles in the field of identity formation. For example, I searched "identity formation" and organized my search results according to highest cited in the database, and discovered Nagel's article that was cited 298 times. I have also recently started using cited reference searching in Web of Science to find sources that cite certain other sources, for example cited reference searching Brettell's 2005 article led me to two other studies (Brettell's 2009 study and Bhalla's article) that helped me conceptualize the relationship between hybrid culture and the University setting.

At this point, my sources were very mixed. My working reference list actually shows the multi-disciplinary nature of my research. I have sources from sociology, psychology (specifically developmental psychology), and ethnic studies. At my research conference my librarian,

Caroline Barratt, suggested that I start focusing my topic in the field of anthropology. Therefore, I started using more specific databases like Anthropology Plus and AnthroSource. At times, these databases seemed limited, but using keywords and Boolean search terms like “hybrid AND identity” and “identity formation” I found anthropology sources that applied to my topic, if not to the ethnic group I planned to study. Munasinghe’s article about Indo-Trinidadian hybrid identity was particularly helpful in developing my ideas about ‘spaces’ and how they change identity. I additionally started looking for articles using keywords like “South Asian OR India\*” in order to acquire articles that specifically researched the group I was also researching. During this process, I became more familiar with how specific groups define themselves- using terms like “Desi OR Halfie OR 2<sup>nd</sup> generation.” These search words enabled me to find sources on 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Indian immigrants in social science using databases like Humanities International Complete.

One of the most important new skills I developed over the course of this research is the use of the EndNote program. In February, I made a training request with the Library and was instructed about how to use the program on my MacBook. This program has helped me organize my research, cite my articles, and save my documents all in one centralized place. It has helped me understand how I cite articles in my works cited, which is now in Chicago style, the style preferred by the American Anthropological Association. I have now started using EndNote even outside of my CURO research, and I believe every undergraduate student should do research and appreciate the resources they have available them.

I am very grateful that this experience has taught me about the research process, not just as an undergraduate student, but also as a future professional researcher. My research, although still in its beginning stages, is starting to take form into new knowledge and understanding about

a culture that I hope to contribute to the University of Georgia and to the greater knowledge and literature of the field of Anthropology. I hope that this experience will guide me in future exploration, and support me in further opportunities for undergraduate success in research.

*Abstract*

The purpose of my research is to investigate the identity of Indian students at the University of Georgia. I want to explore the construction of identity, of hybrid culture, and how this hybrid culture informs student's lives. I will also investigate by which mechanisms do hybrid culture and identity construction of these students develop? Finally, the connection between the space of the University and the construction of a hybrid identity will be investigated. During this study I will attempt to discover how 2nd generation Indian-Americans define their own culture, as well as how they define Indian and American cultures. Through one-on-one interviews and participant-observation I will determine if the 'space' and setting of the University has an influence on constructing a hybrid identity amongst this population, and the real definition of hybridity. Additionally, I will categorize how this population views itself by asking them to make free lists of what they would describe as their identity.

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