Last year, I told the beginning of my research story, but this story did not end with completing my Honors Thesis last spring. In fact, writing my thesis as a junior presented me with a unique opportunity to continue to conduct research as an undergraduate. And so, I chose (yes this was a voluntary choice no matter how strange that sounds) to write a second thesis this year in the psychology lab, the Work and Family Transitions Project, where I am a Research Assistant.

So far this has been an extremely beneficial decision as it has validated and given me confidence in the research skills I learned last year, and has helped me to further appreciate the value of the Honors Thesis process. Going through it a second time has given me a new perspective on how to pick a topic, develop research questions, and scour journal databases for relevant peer-reviewed research articles, that I did not have the first time around. Last year, I was consumed with anxiety, doubting my capabilities as a researcher, and would definitely not have even labeled myself a researcher. However, this time, I have been able to set aside the anxiety and really enjoy the process, which has also helped me to realize how much I did learn through completing an Honors Thesis.

Here are a few words of advice—from one undergraduate researcher to another—for those of you who may be just starting out this process:

1. **Pick a topic that you are passionate about (or at least seriously interested in).** While this may seem obvious, I found it to be absolutely essential. You will be studying this topic inside and out for the next year and you will probably start to get sick of your topic by the end. While I definitely faced many challenges along the way, one of them was not having enough to write about because I felt inspired by the topic and research question I was analyzing.
2. **Use your faculty advisor.** I have absolutely learned the most by talking through my ideas and receiving feedback from my faculty advisor and graduate students. They are there to guide you through this process and to teach you what you may not know. This is an extremely valuable resource so be sure to ask questions.

3. **Trust the process.** This advice was given to me last year and although I did not truly understand what it meant, it was a nice mantra to repeat when I started to doubt myself. Research is conducted in a specific order for a very specific purpose. Do not try to reinvent the wheel. Trust the process that research takes and do not get overwhelmed by the moments of ambiguity or confusion.

4. **You will finish, I promise.** I know developing an Honors Thesis can seem daunting, especially when you are just starting out, but I promise you that come May you will have a beautiful end product that you can be proud of and show off to everyone you know (Proudly post that picture on social media of your cover page with your advisor's signature!).

While I know there are still challenges ahead of me and so much more to learn about research, I feel ready to tackle each obstacle as they come. No matter what your feelings are toward conducting research, just remember that the skills you are learning now are extremely valuable.

Source URL (retrieved on 10/14/2018 - 3:06am):
https://www.honors.umass.edu/blog/ahennigar/continuing-my-research-journey