On the first day of ENGL 3210: Writing Practices and Processes, Dr. Fishman presented to the class our semester-long project as a project to do “whatever we wanted.” I was initially perplexed. I felt the questions just gathering on my tongue: How many pages should it be? How many sources should I have? APA or MLA? What should I write about? The only criteria she had was that it be a project that could span the semester and contained research. The endless possibilities left a person who needs the parameter of a prompt feeling overwhelmed. Little did I know that this class would provide me more growth opportunities than ever presented in a class, while revolutionizing my very limited definition of the word “research.”

With much thought and self-reflection, I decided to write a five-part article series for a Marquette student audience. I feel very strongly that when we chant “WE ARE MARQUETTE,” we should also be able to say that we are Milwaukee. Aware that this was not the case, and that the infamous “Marquette Bubble” is either the barrier or result of a segregated city and campus, I set out on my research quest to figure out how we as both an MU and MKE community can burst the Marquette Bubble.

Given that this was a semester long project, it created space for in-depth research from many different types of sources. In past courses I have taken, whenever a research paper is assigned I jump on JSTOR and my research pursuits do not travel much farther than that. With this project, I did instinctively start on JSTOR. The particular database supplied me with two urban studies that gave me context to the statistical data that quantifies urban issues. In addition to studying urban data I needed to study the heart of Milwaukee at its core. To do this I read community posting sites like Dear MKE and Milwaukeeir Than Thou, and attended a public discussion at Redeemer Lutheran titled, “Beyond Segregation in Milwaukee: A City-wide Dialogue.” I also became much more conscious and noted my own experiences as a Milwaukee citizen walking around the city or sitting on the bus. The final facet to my research was not only better understanding Milwaukee, but also Marquette’s place in it. This research consisted of reading the bi-weekly Marquette Tribunes, DPS’s Annual Fire and Safety report, and talking with the peers in my class.

Another way that this project experience was unique was I gained a broader understanding of how sources can be used. For example, every teacher I’ve had since middle school has said, “NEVER use Wikipedia for a research paper.” This is partially true. Due to its ability for anyone with internet access to be able to edit on Wikipedia, it is not credible enough to be a cited source for any academic writing. It can however, be consulted as a very surface level introduction to a topic. I recorded the sources that influenced me but not end up showing face in my finished product as “work consulted.” Having a division of works cited and consulted is a characteristic of MLA. I decided on using MLA versus APA, or Chicago because I wanted this separation of source credit and MLA is custom to humanities-certainly fitting for my English class.

There were multiple criteria for what I decided would be deemed “cited” versus “consulted.” For starters, in the platform I decided to use, Medium, it is not customary to have a formal citation as one would see in a standard academic essay. Instead sources live with your work on the internet. If I want to give credit to something that was quoted in my work, I mention it and then hyperlink it so that my reader can click directly to the site. One criteria for what
would become a cited source in my work was if it had an online presence that my reader could have direct electronic access to. Another criteria was that the source directly benefit the work. My works consulted contains dozens of articles, posts and conversations about the good and bad of our city. All of these sources were extremely valuable to me in gaining more context and understanding of Milwaukee, but did not directly address my research questions, so I did not feel they should be used in my final project. Lastly, because my articles are not academically defined, there is room for my personal voice and ideas. This meant that I was not as limited in using sources that had a point of view or would be otherwise deemed “biased” in academia. With that being said, I was still skeptical and was sure to only use sources whose stances were supported by logic, even if that logic had some bit of subjectivity.

I felt the need to use a variety of sources because this is a dynamic and multi-faceted issue. Whether it was statistical urban research studies, DPS campus studies, student newspaper, community discussions, conversations with peers, community web postings or other related blogs, they all helped paint this complex problem and helped me construct my thoughts on how to address such issues. This was such a unique project and experience because I found validity in sources other than JSTOR. I learned how valuable a stimulating conversation with a peer or community member could be, and did not realize that was research at its most grass roots.

The biggest difficulty I had in the research process was getting past my gut instinct to stick to JSTOR. Just how I felt having the parameter of a prompt to be more comforting, JSTOR also had its parameters. Only using JSTOR meant I did not have to find any additional information outside of that database and I could still have a solid, well-supported academic essay. Stepping away from JSTOR required continuous reading of many different sources and staying up to date on news- not just typing a topic into the database and citing the first five peer-reviewed articles that pop up. I will always remember how shocked I was when Dr. Fishman said, “Why don’t you come back to JSTOR in a week or so? For now, how about you ride the bus for a half hour this week and think about what you see?” In my head I’m thinking, “that’s research?!” But she was right, and introducing me to the most basic form of research early on, I then took the rest of the semester to really expand what I read and how I defined “research.”

Lastly, the most important thing I learned about the research process is even if people cannot be cited sources in your work, they can still be resources. There were countless times that I was inspired by conversations I had with people, or felt relief after an appointment at the writing center or with a research librarian. Even now when I am no longer researching or writing anymore to my project, I continue to use people as a resource to get my articles more publicity. I feel strongly that this message is something that the Marquette student body should hear and I know I will need the help of others for it to be heard. Sources and resources can be found all around you, if only you widen your search.