As a dual History and Criminal Justice major in the Honors College, I have become familiar with various research methods throughout my studies at UNLV. However, I never realized just how involved research could be until I delved into the story of the Volga Germans, a group of German farmers living along the Russian Volga River since the mid-18th Century. Initially, I used the Quick Search feature of the Lied Library website to find books and articles regarding my topic. I visited the book stacks to find works by historians such as Fred Koch and James Long to assist with background knowledge, as well as journal articles through online databases such as JSTOR. I found American and Russian works on the issue, but none from the Volga Germans themselves. I used keywords and phrases such as *Germans in Russia, Russian Germans, Volga Germans, Volga, Wolga,* and *Deutsche,* and after minimal success began widely searching keywords such as *Saratov,* or *Saratof* to filter by region, as well as the time period 1910-1923, which was met with more success. I was initially worried that documents would be in German and I would struggle with the language barrier, but fortunately since I have taken multiple semesters of German language, I was able to decipher which documents applied to my project. Although this process was at times frustrating, it was interesting, and in a way motivating, to see how difficult it was to obtain documents on this topic. This was an issue that I addressed in my project, as I argued that the Volga Germans have received very little attention by scholars and researchers, and not enough attention has been given to the destruction of primary sources.
I discovered the Volga Germans in History 251; I remembered stories that my grandmother had told of her German family in Russia, and I believed this could be an opportunity to not only research the origins of the Volga Germans for the paper, but to learn more about my own heritage and answer my grandmother’s questions about her family history. I felt that the story of the Volga Germans was compelling and needed to be told, so I decided to continue my research for History 451. Further research led me to focus on the experience of the Volga Germans as they lived in Russia during World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian Famine, covering 1914-1921. Many sources argued that the events were isolated when exploiting the Volga Germans, but I did not believe that was the case. Instead, my research revealed that a combination of these events weakened the state of the Volga Germans, so that by the end of the 1921 Famine, the Germans would be disabled beyond recovery. As a result, I named my project “A Series of Political Russian Events to Exploit and Destroy the Volga Germans, 1914-1921.”

Upon deciding on the time period of 1914-1921, my research was supported and facilitated by the excellent resources at Lied Library. After a meeting with our subject librarian, Priscilla Finley, I searched databases such as Historical Abstracts, Periodicals Archive Online, ProQuest Historical Newspapers and WorldCat. Historical Abstracts was most beneficial, as it led me to several documents through Interlibrary Loan. A large amount of these documents came from the Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans From Russia, which to my
amazement was a journal dedicated to the Volga Germans. I navigated the society’s online archives to gather primary documents and photographs from Germans in Russia, and contacted authors who have written on the subject, although I never received their response. I also used Interlibrary Loan to receive documents from various research institutions, which brought a world of research to me here at UNLV. I placed several requests for documents, and despite some restrictions on access due to the fragility of the documents, I obtained fascinating primary documents. These included most importantly letters, which allowed me to understand what the Volga Germans were experiencing during this time.

I also met with my professor, Dr. Tusun, and she provided me with books through Lied Library that specialized in the Famine of 1921 and mentioned the struggles of the Volga Germans. I also contacted Dr. Paul Werth, and he assisted me in obtaining Russian resources from the book stacks. Upon further discussion with Dr. Tusun, I visited the Microfilm section of the library to analyze documents from the Save the Children Fund, because perhaps the relief workers interacted with the Volga Germans. After a research assistant showed me the Microfilm cabinets and machines, I examined hundreds of slides which discussed the devastation of the famine. I was ecstatic to find primary documents from workers interacting firsthand with the Volga Germans, stating that the Volga German experience was much more horrific than official Russian accounts. This took my thesis to a new level, as the extent to which the Volga Germans were exploited and discriminated against was much larger than I had expected. How much larger, though, I did not know until after a second meeting with Dr. Tusun. She suggested that I search for numbers to prove exploitation, which was difficult since it was hard enough finding sources on the issue. Academic speeches as well as primary census information that I gleaned
during the course of research revealed that hundreds of thousands of Volga Germans had been killed or exiled from Russia between 1914-1921. This changed my view of this issue entirely, as I never expected it to be so large.

With the surprising information demonstrating the dramatic extent to which the Volga Germans had been exploited, writing my research and finishing my paper took on a new urgency. I believed that I had an obligation to tell the story of the Volga Germans, fully utilize all available primary sources and compile answers for my grandmother to read. I had a drive to tell the story of my great grandparents and so many other Volga Germans, to preserve their stories, and it is my belief that the resources made available to me, I was able to accomplish this. My paper has been nominated for the Best 451 Paper in the Department of History.