After completing over 1000 hours of volunteer work at clinics, hospitals, and other organizations around Las Vegas, I recognized that I wanted to conduct my own healthcare-related research. I had seen some of the disparities that LatinXs faced when seeking healthcare, and I wanted to do my part to help offer some guidance ­to providers. Luckily, being a student in the Honors College, I knew that I could ask specific research questions to accomplish my goal through an Honors Research Thesis. Under the supervision of Dr. Melva Thompson-Robinson, I fell upon this project that I am submitting where I specifically assessed factors associated with PrEP and PEP (anti-HIV medications) among the LatinX population.

At the start of my thesis, I had to conduct my own literature review. While I initially thought that this process would be easy due to the existence of search engines and databases like Lied Library’s online Quick Search and Google Scholar, I was wrong. I struggled with searching for topics that were directly applicable to the scope of my project because I was not refining the terms I used or knew what research questions I was exactly seeking to answer. Consequently, the entirety of my first draft was essentially rejected by my advisors. I had to regroup and hone in on what I had learned throughout my undergraduate career.

For my second draft, I avoided generic expressions like “HIV history” and instead opted for specific searches like “PrEP uptake” and “LatinX and PEP.” From what I had learned from Professor Kate Wintrol, I knew this was the best way to gather the information I needed. I utilized Lied Library’s advanced search options and narrowed my results to include only articles, journals, and content that were timely relevant. I deeply analyzed the articles I did find and read for any mentions of other scholarly works that would help me. The LatinX community had been ignored in much of the literature, and this process required careful attention to detail of these articles such as their methodology sections. Through this process, I also discovered books that gave me historical background to my project, which allowed me to better understand where my work fit into the greater picture. I was directed to several websites and reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and with it all was finally able to understand what I was doing and how to synthesize a functioning literature review.

“Much better,” I was told after receiving permission to progress onto the next steps of my thesis project. While excited for what I had accomplished, the joy was temporary as I quickly ran into another obstacle. I was assessing six different independent factors, and I required survey questions that would not only be relevant to them but would also be able to assess relationships between them and my dependent variables, PrEP and PEP uptake. I had found some survey items through the research articles I had reviewed but was missing questions related to the cultural factors that I was exploring. No matter what I typed into the library’s search engine, I was not generating any relevant results. Admittingly a bit dramatic, I slowly told myself that I was not cut out for research for I was failing.

When I finally took a step back, I recognized that I was hoping to find survey items that directly related to relationships between LatinX cultural factors and two novel medications. Realistically, I was not going to find these as they did not exist. With the help of Dr. Thompson-Robinson, I found survey items that did assess the three cultural factors that I was interested in. Question by question, I completed my survey. While I did have to use resources outside the walls of Lied Library for these, I finally created a questionnaire that would help me gather the necessary data.

My thesis explored LatinX cultural factors that had been ignored in the literature. While it found similarities with extant studies, it discovered areas of inquiry that needed further exploration and attempted to answer them. While I could not find statistical significance between all of my factors and the medications I explored, I know where to expand on my work and believe that I can with the new skillsets I have developed. I submit my application for the Lance and Elena Calvert Research Award having finished a project that has not only opened many doors for me, but one that has also made me a better researcher.