In my research process, I was able to utilize library resources both on location and remotely. For me, the research process began long before the official start of summer research, with the process of writing of my research proposal. Though many people feel Mormon feminism cannot exist, this movement actually has a long, rich, history which required thorough background research. To study this background, I checked out books from ILLiad, a necessity for me as some of the most important writings on Mormon feminism are housed in Utah libraries.

Books I received from ILLiad and others already in the library were also essential to the development of my survey on Mormon feminism, my main method of research. To help develop these questions, I read literature with surveys similar to mine, literature on how to create surveys, and I met with both my advisor and professor of social sciences, who helped me phrase and focus my questions. An early literature study and solid background knowledge prior to summer research were also necessary for the Institutional Review Board approval I needed in order to survey people.

Through the literature research process, I struggled to find a framework to use in my study. To help with this I researched literature not only about Mormon feminism, but about feminism in general to get a better idea of feminist and religious frameworks other scholars were using. I also met with both my advisor and another of my religion professors to help establish this framework. Access to Sound Ideas through the library was very helpful for me in deciding where to start with my literature research. Reading the work of other students to get an idea of literature research and research in general was helpful and gave me ideas about journals and other places to look for resources.
A week after school ended, I left for Salt Lake City, Utah and continued to do my research there. This distance, far from limiting my ability to use library resources, enabled me to take advantage of what the library offers remotely. The online database provided by our library of academic journals, particularly the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, available through JSTOR, was extremely helpful in providing me with journal articles that contributed to my literature review. Even when I was not using articles from these databases directly, they allowed me to find article citations that then allowed me to use academia.edu to find other papers those authors had previously presented. A lack of literature on this topic led me to other forms of literature, such as papers presented at conferences.

In the search for some resources, I was again able to take advantage of the library’s remote service by using the 24/7 chat with a librarian feature to attempt to locate an unpublished dissertation regarding the agency of Mormon women, which led to the development of my thesis centering around agency in religious feminism.

2.) Tell us about a challenge you faced while doing literature research and how you overcame it. *

When I first began my research, I had no idea how applicable the title of my project would be. The idea that Mormon feminism is an oxymoron was not only popular in every day life, it was also a statement I found in academic journals. When its existence was acknowledged, it was often treated monolithically or even patronizingly. For example, while one study stated, “Mormon feminists reject the [LDS] doctrine outright,” another stated Mormon feminists were not, in fact, challenging the entirety of the LDS Church, as they were Mormon feminists. These opposite categorizations of the same group of people demonstrate my biggest problem with literature research: there was limited discussion of Mormon feminism, and treatment of this topic and finding sources that provided a complex and fair view of the movement were hard to find. My literature research therefore required research into unpublished writings.

While there was one publication by Nancy Ross and Jessica Finnigan that provided a complex view on Mormon feminism, which contributed hugely to my literature research, it was not enough for a complete literature review.

Papers presented at conferences were essential to my research. As I was working from Salt Lake
City for most of the summer, I was able to attend two conferences at which papers regarding Mormon feminism were presented. At the Mormon History Association conference, I listened to the presentation: "What are Mormon Feminists trying to do? Mormon Feminist Theory." I also attended the annual Sunstone Symposium, where five papers on Mormon feminism essential to my research were presented.

Many of my most helpful materials were not published, but were sent to me by fellow researchers. Jennifer Finnaylson-Fife sent me her dissertation regarding Mormon women and sexual agency, which was vital to the development of my thesis. Jessica Finnigan and Nancy Ross also sent me their raw, unpublished data for the survey on Mormon feminism they conducted similar to mine. These unpublished sources and papers presented at conferences were essential to my literature research, and allowed me to find characterizations of Mormon feminism beyond the monolithic representations.

The challenge presented by this lack of literature ultimately led to the development of my thesis. Important Mormon feminist Joanna Brooks points out Mormon women are often thought of as victims trapped in their faith, a stereotype present in academic research that presented a challenge for me in literature research. Because of this, I focused my paper on a feminist analysis of the concept of agency in religious feminism, studying the choices Mormon feminists made and why, and what those implications meant for the LDS Church. This stereotypical treatment of my topic made it difficult to find solid resources to use as the foundation of my research, but also gave me an idea of where literature in this field was lacking, and therefore what I could contribute to the literature.

3.) How does your research contribute to the scholarly conversation in your field? What is the significance of your research, in layperson’s terms? *

Mormon feminists are often criticized by Mormons sharing their religion and secular feminists. These dual criticisms and knowledge of their existence help emphasize the complexity and diversity of the human experience.

My research highlights this by building off a study of Mormon feminism done by Nancy Ross and Jessica Finnigan in 2003. As this is the only previous ethnography of Mormon feminists, I
designed my study to be both compared and contrasted with the Ross and Finnigan study. I corroborated some of their findings, particularly regarding Mormon feminist demographics, finding similar numbers of male Mormon feminists (15%), white Mormon feminists (over 90%), education levels, marital status, etc.

Beyond the demographics, I largely asked questions with a different focus than Ross and Finnigan, questions unique to this field thus far. Importantly, while both surveys were focused on Mormon feminists, my study alone asked if participants identified as Mormon feminists and gave an affirmative. This makes it the only study of specifically and solely self-identifying Mormon feminists.

My survey received over 1,200 survey responses; I initially anticipated 100. While exciting, this volume of data presented a challenge to analyze, compounded by the fact that I created a long survey with open-ended responses. To solve this problem, I focused on a small number of previously unstudied questions asked in my survey. This focus provided information on previously unstudied trends in Mormon feminism, while the qualitative nature of my survey provided many examples of diverse and, at times, completely conflicting narratives of Mormon feminism. Responses regarding a controversial LDS document, for example, ranged from, “It is perfect,” to “It ruined my life.” These narratives combat the idea common in both the academic field and everyday life that Mormon feminism either doesn’t exist or is a completely united movement.

Beyond presenting new information, my analysis of data also contributes to the conversation by putting my data into context with larger feminist movements as well, something previously not done. It revealed aspects of many different types of feminisms, not only within Mormonism, but within larger academic conversations on Mormonism—radical, liberal, and more—within a movement people often believe does not exist. Another important and unique aspect of my analysis was a study of the Mormon feminist women of color movement and blog. As Mormon feminism is criticized for repeating patterns very common in American feminism of ignoring the voices of women of color, this is a small but vital demographic to study. It has previously not be studied in any other academic capacity, and adds to the controversial conversation of race in Mormonism, race in feminism, and important intersections of race, religion, and gender.
The study of Mormon feminism is important to the fields of both gender and religious studies. The LDS Church is built to receive new revelation at any point, and change its structure, providing an excellent window into the way religious feminist movements change over time, and the way these feminist movements shape religion.