Being a leader in research can look different in a lot of ways. For me, being a leader means taking responsibility for my work while also helping others to reach their full ability. While in Mexico this past summer, I was able to put that idea to the test when I began conducting interviews with Central American migrants for my honors thesis in anthropology. I was there with a group of other students in the Undocumented Migration Project field school trying to understand the complexities of migration through an ethnographic lens. It was the first time any of us had conducted semi-formal interviews before so the prospect seemed daunting. I was scared at first because even though I am a good conversationalist in English, improvising questions or probing an interviewee in Spanish was a challenge. My first interview was a little rocky but after a few stumbles and flubs, I was soon conducting lengthy interviews regularly. I am proud of the connections I made with people and the data I was able to collect in those meaningful interviews.

For all of these interviews though, I still saw other students struggling to break over the hurdle of interviewing another person. I spent a lot of time with others informally debriefing about the difficulties of working in the fields. Through discussion, we unpacked a lot of the invisible power dynamics pertaining to race and nationality that prevented them from feeling comfortable asking for interviews. Many people, including myself, felt guilty or exploitive by asking people to share intimate stories about their lives in interviews. I shared tips and my experience approaching migrants about interviews with other students who felt this way. Quickly I became a proponent of the idea that sharing and recording stories in themselves was a valuable aid for migrants because it provides them a platform to be heard and listened to, which rarely
happens while migrating. This idea kept me going and centered my work. By sharing it with others, the idea was solidified and many others took comfort in it as well. Leading these discussions helped me and others formulate our research in a more productive way.

I also plan to make my research relevant in the current discussion on migration policy. This project has the potential to shape our understanding of migration on a large scale and I hope to be a leader in that as well. What became clear to me from studying in Mexico was that there are multiple levels of structural violence acting on migrants to prevent them from crossing safely, seeking justice should crimes occur, and keeping them in a liminal space without state protection. It is this transient space that poses the biggest threat to migrants because it means they cannot access typical safety measures, such as a police force, which a citizen would have. Understanding their position is key to creating policy reform to help them and I plan on this research being used to enhance our collective understanding of migration.