John Keithly, C’19  
Hometown: Cumming, Georgia

The Street Trust  
Portland, Oregon

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

As an intern of The Street Trust, I primarily worked on the outreach staff with two of the other interns. This included tabling at many different events throughout the city of Portland, where we would tell people about our mission, and how we work within the city and the state. We also encouraged state residents to sign a petition that went towards demonstrating interest for securing funds for safer access to roads for cyclists, pedestrians, and public transit users. Inside the office, I worked on various projects aimed towards the rebranding of the organization. In January, The Street Trust, formerly the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, changed its name in order to show support for all types of alternative transportation. Much of my work has focused on this change and ensuring donors that we still were fighting for the same mission. This also applied to tabling, where we told people how our name change helped us in building better roads for all types of alternative transportation, instead of just biking.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

Perhaps the most valuable skill I picked up during this internship was the ability to talk to people. By tabling at a variety of different events, I was able to respond to comments, questions, and complaints about walking and biking throughout the city. Prior to this internship, I had little experience going out into communities and speaking directly with people about various topics that impact their everyday life. Through these interactions, I now have more confidence and experience when talking to people. Additionally, I also learned more about being able to contact and speak to state senators, representatives, and decision makers. Throughout my time with The Street Trust, one of our staff
members spent most of his time in Salem, the state capital of Oregon, working to secure funding through a Transportation Modernization bill that passed through the Oregon House and Senate in July. Afterward, one of my tasks included arranging thank you calls to be made to all of the senators and representatives that voted for the bill to pass. This included researching the different decision-makers and making sure they received calls. Though I had never done anything similar to this job, I enjoyed learning about the processes involved in contacting local decision-makers.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

In the beginning of my internship, it seemed as though we were not getting the maximum amount of signatures signed on our petitions as we thought we could. Though we would table at busy intersections throughout Portland and the surrounding suburbs, we wondered how we could change our strategy in order to maximize our chances to receive signatures. Through being on the Women's Center Auxiliary board for my sophomore year at Sewanee, I had the opportunity to table and fundraise for the ACLU chapter of Tennessee. This experience taught me about why people stop at tables, and what times work best in order to reach the maximum amount of people. Sure, Portland and Sewanee are very different places, and gathering petitions is a different task than fundraising. Still, I was able to apply those learned skills towards this problem. Instead of tabling at peak rush-hour, we moved our tabling event from 4:00-6:00 pm to 2:00-4:00 pm, when temperatures were milder in the city, and people were more likely to stop at our table. Due to this switch of time, our outreach team picked up more signatures than previous tabling events.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

Due to the nature of The Street Trust's outreach team, most of our work centered around working in groups in order to devise the best strategies towards collecting signatures and telling people about our work. In order to be effective as possible, we needed to work as a team in order to attract people to our table and getting them to sign our petition. This helped with my teamwork skills because while I usually try to complete everything in a mostly solitary effort, working with this particular team showed me that teams work best when each member uses their skills to produce the best possible outcome for each tabling event.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Up until this summer, I have always seen myself working in the non-profit field. I believe this internship changed this. Although I've enjoyed previous internships and volunteer work with non-profit organizations, I also enjoy having clear expectations and responsibilities on a daily basis. For many nonprofits, this is hard to gauge because nonprofits may have different needs depending on the day. As many people in my office said, nonprofit work contains a high degree of ambiguity. I saw this often from this internship, as one week could contain one outreach event, one development project, and one educational event. Though this type of schedule allowed me to learn more about all types of non-profit work, I hope that my career will have more consistency.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

While working in an outreach position throughout various parts of Portland, I met many people with many different backgrounds. Though I wouldn't have guessed it originally, there weren't many differences between communicating with different people. Everyone came from locations where roads needed improvements, even though people from lower income neighborhoods
disproportionately suffered from worse road conditions. People voiced these complaints to us in a helpful way so that we could report them to the city. Communication was not at all a problem through this internship, whether it was working with people we met through outreach or staff members within the office.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:
Thank you so much for providing me with this opportunity! Because of this internship, I have a much stronger idea of which types of careers I look to pursue after I graduate from Sewanee. I also discovered a lot about myself, and my experience of living alone in an unfamiliar city. Thanks again!