

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Columbia, Missouri



**Politics Research Assistantship:
U. S. Wastewater Management
Sewanee, Tennessee**

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

I was a research assistant for Dr. Hopper in the Politics Department at Sewanee. The title of our research is **Evaluating the Politics of Wastewater Management in the American States.** The overall goal of this research is to learn about the feasibility for small communities to develop, update, and maintain wastewater treatment facilities, and to observe the participation of state and local governments in this expensive and highly technical process. We are also exploring the presence and tangibility of environmentally conscious wastewater treatment methods, and exploring the way environmentally conscious methods are marketed. Some of the greatest factors surrounding our research of wastewater treatment are socioeconomic and geographic conditions. As an assistant, I worked on three primary tasks over the summer: creating a literature review, procuring interview contact information, and developing interview and survey questions, in addition to other various tasks assigned to me.

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?

As a research assistant, I helped form a necessary base for future research on this project, which will likely span over several years. The purpose of the literature review was to look at all current and past literature on our topic, in order to gain a better understanding. To do this, I found any research related to our topic and summarized it on a large document. I also procured interview contact information, so that we may contact the right individuals for interviews once our research is cleared by the IRB. Additionally, I helped form the actual research questions that will be asked once we begin the interview process. These tasks significantly improved my ability to use research databases such as JSTOR, LexisNexis, and Google Scholar, as well as how to actually use a physical library. I learned to read through articles quickly while still obtaining the important information. I learned about survey methodology, which is an important concept to get the most out of the questions you ask and to

maintain ethical research. Lastly, I significantly improved and quickened my ability to find contact information, an important skill to be a successful researcher.

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?

I ran into various research problems while working on the literature review. I had trouble finding articles related to my topic, and especially more modern-day ones. While this lack of information was representative and meaningful of the topic itself (and the lack of data/research surrounding it), I was still able to use skills I learned at Sewanee to maximize my research results. During freshman year, my anthropology professor, Dr. Ray, reserved a period for us to learn research skills, explained by Ms. Heidi Syler of the DuPont Research Help Center. I was able to use these techniques, in addition to techniques from Dr. Hopper, during my summer research.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

During this research assistantship, I worked with both Dr. Hopper and another student, Georgia Konstam. I learned the importance of reviewing others' work and to use constructive criticism. I learned the advantage of working in teams—it can increase both efficiency and quality of work. In one instance, Georgia formed survey questions while I worked on application documents for the IRB process. We would then exchange documents and make improvements to each other's work. Finally, Dr. Hopper would look over our work, make edits or suggestions, and then we would move on to the next project.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

Prior to this internship, I was very unsure of my major and future career plans. Politics was always something I considered. Now, I want to transition towards the pre-health track, possibly majoring in biology. Fortunately, this internship has taught me a number of skills that will be necessary and valuable in all of my future endeavors.

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?

As a research assistant, most of my work was conducted in the library or at a desk. This did not prevent me from encountering new backgrounds and understanding the importance of environmental justice, however. Our research topic has allowed me to look into some of the problems faced by those living in small, rural communities. So far, I've discovered that those living in small communities, in addition to minority groups, are disproportionately affected by environmental issues. In 2000, over 50% of the US population lived in jurisdictions of 25,000 citizens or less; these communities struggle to adequately treat wastewater because they lack the economies of size necessary to do so. Additionally, they oftentimes aren't getting the assistance they need from state governments. This cyclical problem affects the health and overall quality of life for citizens. In addition to learning about the issues these groups experience, I formed interview questions that will eventually be asked to these citizens to gain a better understanding of wastewater treatment in their communities. Ideally, this research will be published and governmental bodies will be able to use it to improve laws, legislation, and structures, hopefully increasing the success of wastewater treatment in small communities.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

If your internship is on Sewanee's campus, I recommend joining/creating a Sewanee Summer GroupMe to stay up to date on carpooling opportunities, socializing, etc. At the same time,

disconnect every now and then. Summer in Sewanee can be a great way to slow down, relax, and learn a lot about yourself! .

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

I am extremely thankful that you funded my research assistantship this summer. Without your generosity, I probably wouldn't have pursued this opportunity. I will remember this experience forever. I have learned so much at this internship and it has certainly made an impact on my future plans and helped me to develop an understanding of the world! Thanks again!