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

The Tennessee Justice Center is a nonprofit and nonpartisan law firm that works to provide Tennesseans with access to health care. I worked on their advocacy team. The advocacy team works to educate and engage the public and our representatives on how important health care is to the success of our citizens and how many health care related issues exist in our community. My main project has been collecting health care stories. We have found that one of the best ways to influence our legislators and encourage others to get engaged in advocacy is to share the stories of individuals who will be directly affected by the policy decisions that are being made in Washington. Through this process, I have gotten to know so many hardworking and courageous parents, caregivers, and seniors across the state who are fighting for their health care to keep themselves, or their kids, healthy and alive. We share the stories of these people online or through social media in order to get these stories in front of our representatives and encourage them to vote for what is best for their constituents.

One of my other main tasks was helping with rallies and press conference. During my time at TJC, republicans in DC were working at full force to repeal Obamacare, which would leave millions of Americans uninsured. Healthcare advocacy was more important than ever. We attended multiple rallies with other concerned Tennesseans outside of our Senators’ offices. We also hosted several successful and powerful press conferences. One of which involved driving tractors through downtown Nashville, to show Tennesseans and legislators what is at stake for rural hospitals in Tennessee, 32 of which are currently at risk of closing. During my time at TJC we also hosted two forums, in Nashville and Jackson, in which experts discussed the effects the AHCA would have on our communities. They were both incredibly informative and influential events.

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?
During my time at TJC, we helped hundreds of Tennesseans get access to health care. By calling individuals and talking with them about some of the most difficult times in their life involving serious healthcare issues, I learned a lot about communicating with people. I also helped these people find ways to get involved in advocacy and reach out to our representatives and share their stories on a larger platform. I also learned a lot about reaching people through social media and the internet because I was responsible for posting these stories on our website and social media pages. Furthermore I learned a lot about planning and budgeting as we hosted many events with limited funds and in a short amount of time. I also learned a lot about working on a team in a professional environment. The advocacy team was 7 people, including myself. Everyone had equal roles and we all worked incredibly well together. In the last few weeks of my internship, the senate voted against a bill that would have been detrimental to the healthcare of millions of Americans. It felt like a huge win for us. Furthermore, Tennessee’s senators voted against two different previous versions of the bill, showing that our work and the advocacy work going on throughout Tennessee really does make a difference.

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?
Learning to work on a team that I was new to and feel confident enough to share my ideas was a challenge for me. Because I am comfortable working in small environments and on a team through my educational experience at Sewanee, I was able to quickly overcome this challenge.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?
As I said previously I worked on a small team of 7 people. We worked together every day to accomplish our goals. It was occasionally challenging because we all come from different backgrounds and sometimes have different ideas, but we worked very well together.

How did your internship affect your career plans?
Coming into this internship, I really thought I might want to pursue a career in politics. However, I now see how difficult a life in politics can be. You can work so hard, but in reality, everything comes down to a vote that happens in DC. It is incredibly important work, and I am glad I had this opportunity. Now, I am more interested in the legal side of things because I got to see some of that in the office.

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?
I talked to people on the phone every day who were from extremely different backgrounds than me. Many were struggling to pay for their home or food because their kids, parents or themselves had life-threatening and incredibly expensive health issues. Sometimes this was really hard, but I learned that a lot of times people just need someone who will listen to them and try to see the situation from their perspective. Through this experience I learned how fortunate I am to not only be healthy but have access to good health insurance. This is a luxury that so many do not have, and I was not fully aware of this until my experience at TJC.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:
I learned so much during my time at TJC. I learned about health care policy, advocacy, health care law and the individuals that all of these affect. I got to meet and build relationships with so many people. I
also got to make a difference in my community. I would not have been able to have this life changing experience without your funding, so thank you so much!