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

I completed my internship at the Carter Center, which is a non-governmental organization started by former President Carter. The motto of the Carter Center is “Waging Peace Fighting Disease. Building Hope.” My internship is in the vector born disease division for Onchocerciasis elimination. The aim of the initiative is to end the transmission of Onchocerciasis or river blindness. This is a difficult task as the regions where river blindness is endemic are remote and border The Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. I work primarily with data analysis and validation in the field. I use programs in Excel and EpiData 3.4 to do statistical analysis. Outside of the office in Kampala, I have the incredible opportunity to visit the field to collect and validate data. So far I have spent three weeks in the field in Nebbi district and Gulu district, which are post conflict regions. Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army began mobilization in Odek sub-county in Omoro district, and the war has disrupted Onchocerciasis treatment in these regions. In these regions, we took blood samples of children aged 3-9 years as a representative sample of the population in order to identify villages where blood tested positive for the parasite. Later we returned to verify the registers of treatment recorded by the local ministry of health. Unfortunately we found that much of the data in Omoro district was forged, so this will change the way that medication (Ivermectin) is administered in the area in future treatment rounds.

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?

One of the things I most admired about the Carter Center Uganda is that it is 100% run by Ugandans. The other Sewanee intern and I were the only Americans in the office. I certainly think that we were able to help them in the fact that we were two extra hands and they have a lot of work; however, we
did not make a difference. The Carter Center enjoyed having Americans there, but we did not do anything groundbreaking that they could not have done themselves. This is not a bad thing. The Carter Center in Uganda is an incredibly successful and sustainable organization. I think it is positive that they allow undergraduate and PhD students to come in and help analyze their data, particularly since the Center is funded by the United States, but they do not need our help.

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?

There was an issue in Omoro subcounty with the district health officer (DHO). He was not properly distributing the drugs to treat river blindness and forging data on treatment rounds, or at least enabling these practices to continue. My coworkers told me to begin the meeting with our grievances. You see the DHO just knew that I was an American working for the Carter Center, so he assumed I was important rather than an intern. He called a more formal meeting in a conference room and had three people taking notes on what I said. Although my co-workers certainly knew more about these issues than I did, they seemed to think having an American report their issues would be more effective. The small discussion-based classes at Sewanee helped me begin the meeting and report to the DHO. I had no warning or time to prepare remarks, so being used to small discussions was very helpful and allowed me to feel confident in an unexpected situation. The DHO was uncooperative, but hopefully our meeting will have productive results as the Carter Center monitors him closely. I also was able to use the skills from my lab courses in the biology major while working in the epidemiology lab. I was already familiar with PCR before I had to use it at the Carter Center.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

I think it is important to adapt yourself to the pace of the people around you. I have a lot of experience in data entry from work and research. I know how to enter data very accurately and efficiently; however, it does not look very good to go faster than the other people in the office. Although this was less efficient, I think that it looked better overall and helped the people I work with enter data faster.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

My internship did not drastically affect my career plans. I still plan to attend dental school; however, it has made me more interested in public health dentistry in the United States.

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?

My internship was abroad so I encountered people from different backgrounds everyday. Social concepts that are commonplace in the United States like gay marriage are viewed as abhorrent in Uganda. Conversely, polygamy is still practiced in Uganda, which makes many Americans feel uncomfortable. Many of my friends in Uganda were brought up in polygamous families and some of my colleagues had as many as four wives. This seems strange at first, but when you consider polygamy from the viewpoint of divorce, which is endemic in the United States, it makes a lot more sense. I think when the average American pictures polygamy, they imagine five people sharing a bed and constantly fighting, but in actuality once a man takes another wife he no longer associates with his previous wife, but continues to support her financially. This sounds a lot like divorce, which is accepted in the US. So while I do not condone polygamy, it is not quite as awful as we have been led to believe.
Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you so much to the donors of the Civic Engagement fund at Sewanee. I am so thankful to have had an opportunity to live overseas as I never studied abroad; however, I am even more thankful to be coming back to Sewanee. Thank you so much for this opportunity, I could not have done it without your support and kindness.