

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Ridgeland, Mississippi



New Haven Farms and Fair Haven Community Health Center New Haven, Connecticut

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

This summer I worked with New Haven Farms (NHF) and the Fair Haven Community Health Center (FHCHC) to promote healthier lifestyles and to combat food insecurity through urban agriculture and our Farm-Based Wellness Program. I did a variety of tasks for the organizations, from advertising the program, leading exercise groups, communicating with patients weekly, and rewriting our program curriculum. I designed posters, banners, and flyers and recruited patients. I attended biweekly diabetes prevention programming and assisted in leading a nutrition and gardening class for children during the nutrition class for adults. I also worked on our farms regularly to meet and to coordinate community volunteers.

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?

I was able to edit the program curriculum, recruit a significant number of patients, and I learned to better communicate with people of different backgrounds, coordinate professional receptions, and describe the issues of the food insecurity and diet-related diseases in America. I gained marketing skills, designing posters for fundraisers and the program, maintaining our social media, and ordering large-print banners for our farms. I also improved my ability to distill and communicate important topics, regularly describing our program and mission to groups and patients in short voicemails.

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?

The most obvious problem that I helped solve this summer was the help I provided in recruiting patients. The program had low numbers of participants early on and I was able to help by working to get access to patient medical records to screen patients for pre-diabetes. There were times when I had

questions about whether patients qualified and I had to use my discretion and review charts to make recommendations for participation without specific guidelines, giving me more responsibility than expected. The leadership roles that I have had at Sewanee and the need to make decisions on the fly and to prioritize necessary tasks in those roles helped me screen patients more effectively.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

In this internship, I was asked to work with uneducated immigrant populations, business executives, organization board members, graduate level students, and undergraduate student interns, asking that I understand how to interact with people of all levels of education and background. In one instance, I was asked to edit the curriculum for our Farm-Based Wellness Program, a task that entailed working to create a curriculum that would be standardized enough for the CDC, incorporate the new literature for the nutritionist, emphasize health and family values for the clinic, and translate well to the program participants. This experience required that I communicate between all of these groups effectively and work to make compromises between people who had different expectations for the program. This task taught me invaluable teamwork skills and how to better communicate ideas of importance to the group.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

My internship exposed me to students and professionals in the field of public health and confirmed my desire to continue in the field of community and public health after college. I hope to one day start an organization like New Haven Farms in Mississippi and working with New Haven Farms showed me what it takes to run a nonprofit and how important it is to have dedicated people doing important work in communities. This internship confirmed for me that doing important and meaningful work that inspires you makes it hard to give up.

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?

Most of the people that our program served were immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries, a group that is very much the minority in my hometown of Ridgeland, MS. Many of the people we worked with were not educated and had limited English language skills as they lived in a primarily Hispanic community. Intentional one-on-one time to practice my Spanish and communicate with the women in the community, interacting with the children at the youth program, and being unafraid to mess up when I was speaking Spanish allowed me to establish connections with this new community. These people taught me that we all believe our families and our homes to be important. They also opened my eyes to the limited amount of diet education in this community, as well. And of course they also taught me a little bit of Spanish!

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

Having a car was helpful when traveling between program sites but not necessary

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

My experience this summer cemented my goals for the future and made me more comfortable seeing and naming my own strengths. Thank you so much for providing the opportunity to work in New Haven this summer and for supporting these important organizations that are doing amazing work in their community.