

*My Experience with the Coastal Conservation League
and Its Impact on My Career Goals*

This summer I had the privilege of interning at the Coastal Conservation League in Charleston, South Carolina, for two months. The experience was very rewarding. The work environment at the League was great and being one of only two interns (for most of the summer), I was given a lot of responsibility and independence. My work during those two months both helped the organization and me as I begin to look towards a future in environmental policy.

The Coastal Conservation League is an environmental non-profit organization in Charleston that specializes in the protection of South Carolina's coastal environment. Working with the government, businesses, community members, and other conservation groups in the area, the League strives to protect and enhance the beautiful natural environment of the South Carolina coast. The organization has four main programs: Energy & Climate, Land & Communities, Air, Water & Public Health, and Sustainable Agriculture. I had the privilege of working with the director of the Sustainable Agriculture program.

The Sustainable Agriculture program, as a whole, works to promote locally grown food through educating farmers, consumers, local organizations, and state policy makers on the importance of sustainable farming practices. This sustainable agriculture movement benefits the health of the local environment, community, and economy.

The League, under the leadership of Lisa Turansky, recently launched the Grow Food Carolina campaign to help the local food market reach full potential. By securing food supply in the region and making sure rural lands remain in agricultural use, Grow Food Carolina will connect local farmers to the large food market in Charleston. The sustainable agriculture movement supports small farms that do not use as many fertilizers and pesticides, protecting

the coastal waterways from pollution and marine species from chemical exposure. Supporting locally grown food and farming also reduces the transportation associated with farming products and, therefore, fossil fuel dependency.

I had a handful of projects dealing with this new Grow Food Carolina campaign. My boss, Lisa Turansky, gave me a lot of independence with these and I spent most of the workday researching, attending meetings with her, and writing reports. My policy research and comparisons of state regulations will be included in a proposal by the Coastal Conservation League and influential business executives to the Department of Commerce and key decision makers dealing with funds from the Conservation Bank. My reports will help support the argument that agriculture is a viable business in South Carolina and is worth significant capital investment.

I learned a lot about policy making when I compiled and summarized all of the state laws that affect agriculture. This helped to further my education in environmental policy and helped my boss make a case for necessary changes as the state rewrites some key food and health codes this year.

I also researched and compiled strategic plans for each state's local food economy. This required a lot of research skills and initiative when contacting state experts on the matter. This was in the first week of my internship and my boss was very impressed with the leadership I took on this assignment as she was very busy and appreciated my independence on this first project and others to come.

During my internship, I realized one of my strengths was the ability to relate to people I do not know in a professional setting. This was helpful in settings such as board meetings and important networking opportunities. The League's quarterly board meeting was at the very beginning of my time in Charleston. After this boarding meeting, they always hold a big reception with major donors and board members. I did not know anybody except for my boss,

but I was able to make many contacts with major players in the conservation and business field in Charleston. Hopefully this skill will be useful in whatever career I choose, but I'm glad to have the opportunity to push myself out of my comfort zone and gain confidence in such important business settings.

I helped to make a difference in the Charleston food and health community by helping to raise awareness, organize community members, and analyze specific needs and projects for the future. The projects I worked on will help local farmers get help from the state and federal governments. This is very important, particularly in Charleston, where there is so much potential for restaurants and individual consumers to support and buy food from nearby farms.

During my time at the League, I not only had to quickly learn about region-specific agricultural issues and policies, but I also had to adapt to the unique and fast-paced work environment at the League. Working for the Coastal Conservation League was eye opening in many ways. I gained insight on the ins and outs of non-profit management and leadership in general. I learned that working with the government is very hard and that, because of the nature of the non-profit world, a lot of time is put into the job. However, working with the League has showed me that working with sharp people that are positive and create a good working environment is priceless. I specifically learned about sustainable agriculture and community organizing, as well.

One thing that I found particularly helpful in my learning experience this summer was the fact that I was working in the same room as most of the League. A donor gave the organization a house in downtown Charleston to use as their main workplace, so we had close quarters. I had a desk in the same room as my boss and three other members of the organization's land-use team. Because of this setup, I was always involved in meetings and got a great feel for what it's like working there full time. The development staff worked in the room next door and they

showed me what it would be like to work in the development side of non-profit leadership, something I think I would also like to do in the future.

There are numerous environmental causes that I am passionate about and I do not know where my interests will lead me, but it is the policy makers and organizations such as the Coastal Conservation League that make the most progress in tackling today's major environmental issues. I really respect those that dedicate their careers to those issues. I also really respect the Coastal Conservation League's mission and success in the Charleston community specifically.

Working at the Coastal Conservation League this summer has confirmed my suspicions this spring—this organization is exactly where I'd love to be working after I graduate with a degree in Environmental Policy. Between the experiences I've had with the internship and the opportunity I had to make some great contacts, I think I'm on the right path to someday working with the League again.

I am grateful that I was given this opportunity to learn about non-profit leadership and environmental policy. I believe the internship not only helped prepare me for a great career, but has also helped me gain some perspective as I go on to study abroad in Panama this fall. The program in Panama is called Tropical Ecology, Marine Ecosystems and Biodiversity Conservation. There, I will be learning about sustainable agriculture, coastal conservation, and numerous other overlapping issues and areas that, once again, all strengthen my education in Environmental Policy. I look forward to bringing back what I learned in Charleston and in Panama to Sewanee this spring.