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Civil Liberties and Public Policy Internship Program

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Final Report

Working Title: United for a Fair Economy

My internship at United for a Fair Economy (UFE) turned into a mission for me to increase my knowledge on unfair economic practices happening at the national level and educate local residents on practices occurring in Boston. The outstanding staff at UFE not only helped me achieve my goals, but they provided me with a number of substantive learning assignments, which gave me insight into the function of non-profits. While I officially worked with the Education Team (ET), I was assigned various projects with the Development and Communications teams as well. In addition, I got the opportunity to travel and work side-by-side with the Tax Fairness Organizing Collaborative (TFOC) team.

My long-term project with the ET was to create a questionnaire for former UFE Training of Trainer (TOT) participants to receive feedback on how the ET could enhance their popular education workshops. These workshops are designed to raise awareness on economic injustice in the United States and to provide social activists with the necessary tools to effect change in their communities. This assignment enabled me to use and enhance my research, computer software and translation skills. In order to compile an accurate list of TOT participants, I had to navigate UFE’s large database and export a list of contact information for about seven hundred people. I then had to draft questions that would elicit as much information and feedback as possible and post them in a questionnaire format to our website using specific computer software and HTML
formatting. Last, translating this questionnaire into Spanish helped me work on my Spanish writing skills.

While working on this project with the ET, I juggled other assignments from the Development and Communications teams. With the Development Team (DT), I worked on an extensive research project, which taught me the important dynamics of foundation fundraising and how to research potential donors. I learned that in doing this work, it’s effective to research the donor lists of non-profits with similar missions and to try and forge relationships with these donors through networking within your own organization. This project also taught me a great deal about other organizations that fight against economic inequity that I would consider joining in the future. While I didn’t necessarily join UFE expecting to learn about foundation fundraising, I was honored to work with this team to learn about this vital aspect and to improve my research skills in the process.

Working with the Communications Team (CT) provided me with the opportunity to read our website content and to learn about specific economic policies that impact members of my community. I got to work on my writing skills by contributing some short blurbs to the website and by writing a final piece about government corruption in Boston. I am particularly passionate about this issue and was excited to submit this article and have it published on the website in the hopes of starting a larger discourse in Boston on economic issues that have a direct impact on me and other local residents.

One difficulty that I encountered during my internship was addressing to staff how the organization should and could raise awareness about economic and racial inequitable practices on a local level. While I understood that UFE is a national non-profit and I truly believe that
they do an effective job of raising awareness nationally, I thought that they could make more of an effort to follow local elections and practices, considering that the organization is based out of Boston. Rather than approaching the Education and Communications teams separately, I addressed this topic at a staff meeting to get everyone’s input on how UFE could execute more local awareness. Fortunately, staff members agreed about the importance of getting involved locally, based on the notion that change stems from the ground up, and were very receptive to the idea of learning more about citywide issues and effecting change.

Because of the diverse and substantive nature of my internship, I experienced a highlight everyday. I found that each day brought forth a new challenge and more knowledge. I enjoyed traveling throughout the summer, the first time being with the Civil Liberties and Public Policy program (CLPP) to Detroit for the US Social Forum and the second time being with the TFOC at UFE to Washington, DC. I experienced a number of highlights on both trips, but was particularly content networking with staff at the National Education Association (NEA) and social activists from a variety of fields in Washington, DC. I also enjoyed attending our ET’s popular education workshops which were presented for local social activists in Boston and in Detroit for statewide activists. Overall, it’s always productive - whether in personal or professional endeavors - to meet people with similar interests.

As a result of my internship, the three most important skills that I’ve developed were research, networking and working independently with minimal to no supervision. With the DT, I learned how to use basic common sense techniques to find ample information starting out with the bare minimum. I’m aware that in many professional settings supervisors will assign research projects and expect their interns or staff members to perform with little to no instruction. Having these assignments allowed me to sharpen my research skills to perform this work in academic
and other work settings. Having the opportunities to travel also allowed me to hone in on networking skills, such as, approaching people without feeling intimidated. I realize that this skill will always be useful to me considering that the field I want to pursue will involve interacting with people from all backgrounds. Last, I really learned how to be a self-starter and work on assignments with minimal supervision after my supervisor had to take family leave and was out for about eighty percent of my internship. Although I was given other contacts, staff members overall were extremely busy. I learned to create and adhere to daily task lists and only approach staff members with important questions. I found this method effective as I was able to execute quality tasks in a timely manner.

Interning at UFE helped me understand specific economic policies and how they impact members of society. Because I’m interested in working in the public sector and running for office, I believe that it’s important to know and understand specific policies rather than just agreeing that inequality is wrong. I like to be able to pinpoint issues and have a stance on them, so I believe that UFE contributed a great deal to my career goals. I was relieved to find that my organization was realistic in their endeavors; they weren’t set out to “save the world,” but more so to work with people from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds to achieve a greater good. I enjoyed the casual atmosphere of my office and the fact that everyone was talented and excelled in their positions not needing to be dressed in business attire to do so. I also admired how closely the teams worked with each other and supported the work of every team whether or not if their work was directly related. On many occasions, I witnessed interaction between the DT, ET and CT when it came to supporting each other’s assignments.

Learning about UFE and social justice issues as the summer passed taught me that there isn’t a strong distinction between these issues and reproductive rights. If anything, reproductive
rights fall under the social justice umbrella as just one issue that activists strive to gain equality for. Speaking from a UFE perspective, everyone in our society has the right to achieve their idea of economic success without experiencing social constraints. This is the same for reproductive rights and other social justice issues; as human beings we inherit basic fundamental rights and should not be prevented from making personal decisions or reaching our definitions of success due to societal structures that promote inequality.