The Care Center is an alternative education program for young mothers. The Care Center provides parenting teens with the opportunity to obtain their GED and further expand their education in college. I was initially drawn to The Care Center because of the important question they pose on their website: “What does it take to instill a love of education, an understanding of one’s personal gifts and talents, and the determination to follow a path toward more satisfying and higher paying jobs?” This question struck me before my internship at The Care Center, but even more so after I had worked there. A specific line from the Valedictorian’s speech at The Care Center graduation further emphasized why asking questions like the ones above is so important. She said, “We were dismissed. People saw our pregnant bellies and our young faces and we were immediately deemed as worthless. The Care Center never dismissed us. The Care Center was a place where we could be mothers and students.” This segment in the Valedictorian’s speech reaffirmed my initial interests in interning with The Care Center. My goal was to provide the women at The Center with hope. I wanted to create a drive in the students for learning and I wished to help instill confidence in the students for their future goals. The women at The Care Center are all capable of excelling and obtaining a college degree and a good paying job. The Center provides them with the means and the assurance to do so. This past summer, I was fortunate enough to work with such a successful organization. The experience certainly changed my life.

My main responsibility at The Care Center was as a tutor. As an intern at The Care Center, it is very important to be able to make independent decisions. The Center provided me with a tutoring schedule but student attendance fluctuates often so there were many days where I
would go from classroom to classroom offering my help. The teachers are always happy to use the tutors if a student is in need; it just takes that little bit of initiative to make one’s self available.

As a tutor I most often worked with students one on one. I tutored in math, science, English and social studies but math was by far the area students struggled with most. Many students only had the math portion of their GED exam left to pass. One student in particular that I worked with made my tutoring experience extremely fulfilling. She had been a student at The Care Center going on four years when I started working with her. In her second year, she passed all of the GED subjects except for the math portion. After many attempts, she was still unable to pass the math portion, as it is very demanding. Unfortunately, the length of time that had passed was too great, which meant that all of her other subject scores were erased. She felt confident that she could pass all of her other subjects so she and I focused on math. For a little over a month we worked together almost every single day. She opened up to me about her dream to go to college and become a poet. It was extremely inspiring to witness such determination in the face of such adversity. I am proud to say that this young woman passed her math exam this summer and obtained her GED. She will be going to college at HCC in the fall. Working with this student was the most rewarding and challenging experience I have faced thus far in my life. It was certainly the highlight of my internship experience.

In addition to my position as a tutor at The Care Center, I was able to take on other projects that were of interest to me and that I felt would benefit the students. One project in particular that almost got on its feet was a nutrition project with Nuestras Raices, a grass-roots organization that promotes economic, human and community development in Holyoke, Massachusetts through projects relating to food, agriculture, and the environment. I met with
two very eager representatives from NR; both were very excited to work with The Care Center. We discussed the issue of obesity and overall nutrition of the women at The Care Center as well as within communities of lower economic standing in the Holyoke and Springfield area. Initially I had difficulties comprehending a way to relate to the students at The Center on this topic. The foods we eat reflect what we can afford. Healthy foods such as fresh vegetables and grains tend to be expensive. In connecting with Nuestras Raices, my goal was to learn how to communicate nutritional information in such a way that the students at The Care Center could connect with. I wanted to make the nutritional goals obtainable for the students. The representatives from NR were extremely helpful in bridging these difficulties for me. One rep in particular could relate to the students on a very personal level and I believed that her story would resonate with them and allow them to become more interested in nutrition. Another great idea we came up with was to teach nutrition in a way that was geared towards the student’s children.

For our first meeting we hoped to take the students on a field trip to the Nuestras Raices site and have an open discussion about nutritional habits. My ultimate goal for the project was to try to get The Care Center a plot of land donated from NR. This plot of land could be used for gardening fresh vegetables which could be used for lunches at The Center or could be used for an afternoon gardening activity for the students. Unfortunately this project did not take off. As an intern, I obviously did not have the administrative power to schedule and organize such events myself. This posed a lot of difficulty for me. I had to go through my supervisor to schedule these events with Nuestras Raices. The directors at The Care Center have a very large work load and they really do put all they have into the organization. The NR reps never heard from my supervisor. I assume the timing was not right or maybe there was not enough interest in the subject of nutrition. I would like to see this project take off sometime in the near future.
Another personal goal I had during my internship was to organize a project encompassing specific areas of reproductive justice that most applied to the women at The Center. I was fortunate enough to work with a very helpful professor from the UMass public health department on this project. As an intern it is very important to reach out and use as many helpful resources as possible. I met so many intelligent people over the summer because I took the time to contact them and to ask for advice or input for my projects. I worked with the professor to design the curriculum for a course she will be teaching in the fall. She teaches a Women’s Health/Reproductive Health class which studies community health education approaches to women’s reproductive and sexual health issues. The class explores the gendered, ethnic, culture, and class dimensions that underlie patterns of disease and illness. I chose to work with this Professor because her class will be working with The Care Center on a weekly basis in the fall; the class will be holding reproductive justice workshops. My part in the project was to create a small survey and to hold small discussion groups. I discovered what the women at The Center already know about reproductive rights, what they want to learn more about, what their greatest struggles are and so forth. This project was very interesting and rewarding. I learned more in a month by working with the students than I could learn in a year reading research papers. I am planning on continuing with the work I did this summer surrounding reproductive justice in order to write my senior thesis this upcoming year.

While working at The Care Center I had to use different skills. As a tutor, I focused on patience, attention to detail, pacing, understanding, and determination. Tutoring was very demanding and sometimes it could become tedious or frustrating. It was important for me to stay focused, patient, and to always remain positive. Motivation was also very important as an intern. I had a good amount of free time to facilitate my own growth and learning. It is important to go
in with personal goals and interests in mind. The Directors at The Care Center wanted me to learn and grow as much as they wanted me to help their students do the same.

As a result of this internship I believe that I have become more critical of the power systems that surround me. One of the most important things that I learned was that education cannot be taken for granted. I wonder how our public school systems can be failing these students so terribly. This is a question that I struggled with for the summer and will continue to struggle with. Working at The Center was taxing some days because these larger questions can consume you; sometimes these questions are difficult to handle because the magnitude of the issues make you feel as though you are powerless. I dealt with this by focusing on the small tasks that I could attempt to control such as educating the students on issues of welfare, childcare, and birth control as well as tutoring in core academics. As a result of the internship I believe that I have become more independent as well as personable. I had to do a lot of research on my own and I also worked to meet with many contacts throughout the summer to learn as much as possible.

Working at The Care Center fit perfectly with my academic background and future career goals. As a biology and women, gender, sexuality studies major I have a solid background in women’s health and reproductive health; I also have a solid background in feminist theory, and interdisciplinary ideals. Most importantly, I had a lot of knowledge about the idea of reproductive justice and all that it encompasses. My goals for the future are to attend medical school and to work in the Women’s Health field in the non-profit sector. I would actually be very interested in working somewhere like The Care Center as a doctor.

Working at The Care Center was more rewarding than I could have imagined. I learned lessons that could never be taught in a classroom. My advice for future interns would be to
follow your ambitions. My experience at The Care Center would have been great if I had stuck to tutoring but having the ability to create projects and more learning opportunities for the students outside of core academics was very meaningful to me. As an intern it is important to go in with all of the passion and excitement you have because you really can make things happen and make a large difference within your organization. I would recommend interning at The Care Center to anyone who is interested. It is a great organization that holds true to its mission and provides not only an education, but confidence and hope to young women who really need it.