Exhilarating, eye opening and fabulous; those are the words that I would use to describe my experience as a RRASC intern at the Mergerwatch Project. It was quite an experience working for an institution that focused mainly on women’s health care and health care rights. At the beginning of summer I remember thinking, “what will I learn from this experience and how will working in the women’s health care field be beneficial to me?” I was anxious and excited at the same time. Anxious because I knew almost nothing about women’s health and health care rights. Excited because I was going to be interning in the city, a place that was very different to my everyday school environment. Walking into the office that first day put my anxieties to rest. My bosses Eesha and Lois were very warm and welcoming. They took their time to show me around the office and familiarize me with the whole office complex. They gave me useful material to read, material that was especially helpful to someone who was unfamiliar with health care world terminologies. Within a few days I had become familiar with the particular language that was used in discussing health care.

Throughout the summer I was working on the Raising Women’s Voices Project, an initiative that was started specifically to give women a voice; a channel through which their stories could be heard. My work involved doing research about the different health problems that affected women of different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. We worked together with the other intern who had just completed her undergraduate degree and was thinking of going into the health care field. The data that we collected was used in creating of
fact sheets and talking points for women across the country. The talking points were intended to enable the women to ask questions to election candidates during their various meetings - for example, town hall meetings. The factsheets would provide a sort of backup system for them so that they could support their questions with facts.

These factsheets and talking points were also used in the nationwide launch call that we had for the Raising Women’s Voices Fall Campaign. The launch call was a great success and we received a lot of feedback from the different callers about what they thought about our ideas, how they thought we should go about implementing them, what appealed to them and what they thought that we should change. From the call we were able to charter our way forward in terms of working with the different ideas we had for Raising Women’s Voices and merging them with the ideas that we had received from all the feedback that we got from those who had called into the conference.

I got a chance to attend several conferences while interning at Mergerwatch, all of which were very exciting and informative. The other intern and I were sent to Washington for the Black Women’s Health Imperative conference in which we learnt a lot about our bodies and ourselves as well as had the opportunity to network with different individuals in the NGO and health care field. We also got a chance to just relax and enjoy the weather in DC and the ambiance of the lovely hotel that we were staying in. I was also sent to a Domestic Workers Conference that enabled me to learn a lot of things that I did not know. The conference basically involved domestic workers from different backgrounds and races talking about the different problems and challenges that they faced with their employers and what they wanted the
government would do to help them and accord them the rights that they deserved as human beings.

Another interesting conference that I attended was a Human Rights conference that was organized to sort of relaunch and revamp the image of NGOs and the role they had to play in terms of advocating for human rights. Many representatives shared their views on the roles that the NGOs needed to play in terms of promoting human rights in their different materials, be it handouts or websites. They also talked about some of the challenges that people might face in using the human rights language and how they could approach these challenges and solve them.

We also attended several meetings with the different NGOs around New York that are involved in one way or the other with women’s health and health care rights. Mergerwatch was on the steering committee for health care for all New York and as interns we got a chance to not only attend their meetings but to also listen in during conference calls. This enabled us to see how meetings are conducted between different organizations and individuals from very diverse backgrounds and with very diverse interests. It was empowering to see how different organizations around New York were coming together for a common good: health care for all women.

As interns with Mergerwatch we were given a chance to speak at an event that was organized by NARAL Pro-choice New York. The event was specifically to talk about young women and their health concerns and challenges. I believe that some of the RRASC interns attended the event. It was such a great opportunity to speak to all the young women in attendance about what Raising Women’s Voices and the Mergerwatch project were doing about health care
rights for women. It was also a fabulous chance to network with people and learn from their experiences and the different things that they had learnt from their jobs. Also it was really interesting to have people come up after the event to ask us questions and our opinions about certain issues. It really made all the research that we had done worthwhile.

Other than that, I was able to create a blog site from the Raising Women’s Voices. We put up news articles about health care and any violations of health care rights on this blog. This was so as to make it easier for people to find specific thoughts, ask questions about health care and also leave their comments about the different articles that they read. I also created a facebook group so that the young and old people on facebook could also get a chance to learn about the project and what was being done about improving the health care system. The other intern and I were also involved in creating factsheets that could be used by other organizations in their health care advocacy work. Towards the end of my internship we were involved in creating a health care advocacy packet of sorts to be used in Raising Women’s Voices campaigns in campuses across the country. This entailed formulating a plan of action for groups on campuses that were interested in getting involved with the health care advocacy work. This would make it easier for them to be able to organize people in a better way and get the word out there in a timely fashion. We also came up with different give away items that would be distributed to people who attended these advocacy meetings on campus.

It was not all work and no play at the organization. The bosses were kind enough to give us long lunch breaks where we could walk around New York and just enjoy the day. They also took their time to give us a tour of the Riverside and Harlem areas (which is where the organization was located). They showed us all the notable sites and reading spots and even took us to lunch so that we could experience the nice, famous eateries that were around
there. Our bosses also used to notify us of young peoples events that were happening around New York so that we could go and see them. I went to see a drama group from East Africa perform which was not only enlightening but also so much fun. We were also taken to see a Broadway show that had been organized by NARAL. It was very interesting to hear peoples stories told through music and poetry. That was a fabulous experience.

Working with Merger watch enabled me to grow as a person and as a contributor to society. I must say I left the internship a much better person than the day I first walked into the office. I was able to enhance my communication and computer skills while working there. I also got very valuable lessons in dealing with people in a professional setting for example my colleagues and other people who worked in the building that the office was located in. My bosses were very helpful throughout the internship with giving me information about starting one’s own organization, the career path that I am interested in taking and grant writing. They gave me the freedom to decide on matters that other bosses normally wouldn't allow their interns to decide on. They made me see that I could be anything and do anything that I wanted to do. They really proved to me that the sky is the limit and that one person can truly make a difference. At the end of my internship, clarity set in and I finally decided what I want to do with my life and how I will make a difference in the world.

This was my best summer yet, I learnt so much in such a short time and had such a great time while at it. I am very grateful to the RRASC and CLPP programs because it is through your organization that I got this internship and had a chance to experience all that I did.