As a RRASC Intern, I ventured to Boston, Massachusetts for the summer to work as an intern at Political Research Associates (PRA). PRA is a progressive non-profit which studies social movements and specifically, the influence of the Right-Wing. The organization studies a wide variety of social issues such as Civil Liberties, Government Spying, Reproductive Justice, and the Christian Right. PRA produces *The Public Eye*, a magazine produced approximately bi-monthly, and numerous special reports that extensively research specific social issues.

As a summer intern at PRA, my primary role in the office was working alongside the research team and tracking down information of use for Pam Chamberlain, a senior researcher who oversaw my work. The second staff member I worked with closely was the editor of *The Public Eye*, Amy Hoffman. The specific project I was assigned to required me to compile information for an article regarding the recently passed health insurance reform and its impact on reproductive justice. In addition to conducting research, I was also responsible for answering and screening phone calls for other staff members in the office. Since PRA was undergoing major renovations, I occasionally helped with the moving process.

Completing my internship at PRA required the utilization of many skills that I’ve acquired throughout my education. With my primary responsibilities being research, it is vital for a future intern to have some confidence in their ability to navigate databases, recognize potential biases in texts, and recognize a particular source’s point-of-view. Since research is something
that I have always enjoyed, I felt relatively comfortable detecting sources that were not the most accurate or truthful. The biggest challenge I faced during the research process was my confusion as to what sources PRA deemed appropriate. Since their writing is scholarly, it is important to use discretion when bookmarking sources. I subscribed to numerous blogs and websites which provided me with informative daily updates on the climate of the Reproductive Justice movement and the Right. As a way to organize all of the research which I had compiled, I made an extensive spreadsheet which broke down sources that I found useful or at least valuable to spark ideas. The spreadsheet was a convenient way to leave behind a trail of what I had accomplished during my time at PRA and a convenient tool for Pam to use when she organizes the information. Another research method which I had to familiarize myself with was conducting telephone interviews. When I arrived at PRA, I had not conducted any formal interviews since my time working as the editor-in-chief of my high school newspaper. Even when I was in high school, there was not much pressure since I knew the majority of my interviewees. Needless to say, I was certainly shy and nervous about how I would perform when talking with prominent figures in the reproductive justice movement. Pam and Amy offered me an abundance of support to help me overcome my insecurities in this area. Thanks to them, I became progressively more comfortable speaking to activists with each interview. I felt extremely accomplished after speaking with the group of hardworking, devoted, and intelligent women that I chose to interview. One the interviews I conducted easily became the highlight of my summer work at PRA. As a pro-choice Catholic, I was honored to speak with Frances Kissling, the former President of Catholics for Choice. I found her to be extremely relatable, clear, and realistic. I often distance myself from my religion for numerous reasons which go beyond reproductive
justice. After speaking with Frances, I felt better knowing that there are Catholics out there who share my ideas and are willing to accept my beliefs.

While my internship was an overall positive experience, there were some difficulties which I needed to overcome to make my summer more enjoyable. The biggest stressor was fully understanding my role as an intern in the office and the office’s expectations of me. The topic that I was studying was somewhat broad and it often was difficult to decide what PRA would find relevant when it came to the actual construction of the article. I had plenty of support from Pam and Amy, but I should have inquired about this issue earlier in the summer. I had the expectation that I was going to be told exactly what to do when in reality, my role was more self-motivated than anything else. As a person with high amounts of energy and a wild attention span, it was difficult for me to remain focused being at a desk and computer all day long. Luckily, Pam encouraged all of the interns to step away when necessary and take a walk around the block. On average, I probably took brief strolls around the neighborhood twice a day. These walks really helped me clear my head because the subject of my research became emotionally taxing after awhile.

Spending my summer as an intern at PRA has contributed to the development of new skills. I have had strong political values and opinions since I was a child, but PRA is an environment where you learn to think your opinions through very carefully. There were often discussions where staff members would make numerous insightful points that I would not even have considered. As a result, I have become better at thinking through and presenting my political arguments. I felt like a sponge while working at PRA, absorbing so much new and exciting information.
In hindsight, I am truly satisfied with my experience at PRA. However, when I look back there were certainly things that I would have done differently. If I could do my internship over again, I would have tried to work out a scenario which allowed me to work one day a week from my apartment. The days were long and I often found myself distracted by the promise of fulfilling my required hours and heading home, as opposed to the task at hand. This mental response was not at all due to the conditions at PRA or the staff. I just am simply not cut out for a desk job. Another part of my internship that I would have done differently was to have been more confident in my talents. I was the youngest intern in the office as a rising sophomore with the other two women approaching their senior years. I often second-guessed myself which bothers me greatly when I reflect on my time at PRA. Finally, I would have been more aggressive about seeking out new tasks. My days were often repetitive and lacked variety which really made time pass slowly. At the start of my internship, I pitied the other interns who were transcribing lengthy interviews, but I later began to envy their direct assignments.

My career goals have shifted as a result of working at PRA. I still want a career that is committed to social justice and serving the public, but I now realize that law may not be the best fit for me. I have been considering a career as a primary care physician or a psychologist. Both careers offer me opportunities to serve the community as well as obtain a more interpersonal experience in the workplace. I still intend to complete a Master of Public Health in addition to whichever graduate path I choose. The knowledge I gained from PRA will certainly help me in any medical profession since it will allow me to empathize efficiently with my patients.

PRA is not for everyone, but I would certainly never discourage a political “junkie” like myself, or an advocate for Reproductive Justice, from applying. With a good sense of humor, patience, and an open mind, you will gain more than you expected.