Hey there everybody – my name is Kayden and I’m here to tell you about how awesome a RRASC internship can be. This summer I was an intern for two great organizations, the Pro-Choice Public Education Project (PEP) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, both located in the greatest city in the world: New York!

Before I get into the details of the work I did at each organization, I just want to tell you how different a RRASC internship has been than what I’ve heard from my friends and classmates about their summer internships. Most of them felt like they were either ignored or being given boring busywork all the time. However, as a RRASC intern, I’ve never been in that situation. My supervisors and coworkers have been totally open and welcoming to me, from buying me flowers and taking me out to lunch on my first day, to sitting in on departmental team meetings every week, to listening to marathon sessions of the Buffy musical soundtrack (which is surprisingly awesome)! I felt like a valuable part of the organizations I worked with, which is a huge distinction from a lot of summer programs for students.

More specifically, my chief responsibility at PEP was to come up with a design for their new research report, *On Our Terms*. This report, about young women of color and their reproductive rights, is a follow up to their recent focus group research on the subject. PEP plans to distribute *On Our Terms* both online and in print to reproductive justice organizations around the country, so at first I was pretty intimidated about designing it! Although I’ve always been interested in graphic design, I had never undertaken such a large-scale project before – the report ran about thirty pages, some of which needed original graphics and all of which needed to have text laid out.
My supervisor Mary gave me an overall creative vision for what PEP wanted this report to look like; she thought it would be cool to make it look more like a zine than a typical research paper, and let me run with that concept. Zines are something I’m more familiar with designing than a professional research briefing – I’ve designed two for WOZQ 91.9 Smith College – so relating those projects definitely helped with my confidence. After laying out my ideas on paper, I used Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator to create and manipulate the actual graphics – photos of young women engaged in activism, layered and deconstructed to give them a more d.i.y. feel – and arranged the graphics, text and headlines in Adobe InDesign. By the time I left in August, I had completed a digital version of the report; the print version will be released in September.

Along with *On Our Terms*, I designed a set of reproductive justice cards to be used as promotional materials and teaching devices. On the front is a graphic from PEP’s *Recognize!* campaign, and on the back is a Q and A related to an area of reproductive justice, like abortion, LGBT issues, birth control, and a number of others. I designed them in a similar style to the research report since they’ll be released around the same time, so hopefully they’ll have a cohesive design and impact.

At the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, my primary responsibilities concerned two major projects of the Public Policy Department – Causes in Common and Promote the Vote. Causes in Common is the Center’s national conference on the connections between the reproductive justice and LGBT rights movements that also explores the intersections they have with class, race, and other social justice issues to help form a more cohesive and inclusive movement. Promote the Vote is
the Center’s new voter registration drive that is aiming to create an LGBT voting bloc by getting 2000 people registered by Election Day.

For my work with Causes in Common, I did everything from stuffing folders with relevant articles and materials to picking out vegan-friendly restaurants in New Orleans for the participants (no easy task, let me tell you!). After the conference, I compiled and summarized respondent comments, ranging from what topics they’d like to see discussed to which city the next meeting should be located in. Along with my work on the actual meeting, I helped the Center’s web manager update the Causes in Common website with current partners and compiled a list of helpful articles and websites relating to reproductive, LGBT and social justice issues.

For Promote the Vote, I compiled a running spreadsheet of registered voters and volunteers, as well as registering voters on the street – which was a great way to meet people and explore different parts of New York that I wasn’t familiar with.

In addition to my standard work, I was able to take advantage of various opportunities outside of the office. My supervisors RJ and Mary invited me to different meetings and seminars on reproductive justice, which was a great way to learn about issues I wasn’t normally encountering in my day-to-day work – like the law and LGBT rights panel that RJ hosted at the Center, for example.

For me, the biggest difficulty was my relative inexperience in the field. During my internship, I was exposed to totally new ways of thinking about the concept of reproductive rights, LGBT rights, and reproductive justice and how they intersect – having just learned the difference between a reproductive rights versus a reproductive justice framework this semester, it was all a little overwhelming! Working with Causes in
Common conference definitely helped with my understanding; I was encouraged to read all the material I was copying for the conference participants, and the briefing book on reproductive justice PEP provided me when I arrived was great as well.

When I was first assigned to PEP, I was a little surprised, since I had expressed a strong interest in LGBT issues, which is not their specialization. However, everyone at PEP was interested in incorporating queer issues into their work, and also set up an arrangement so I could work at the Center as well. Working at both organizations has given me a new perspective on how reproductive justice applies to everyone, not just young or straight or female-bodied people, so I’m really glad that I was assigned to PEP and got to learn about so many sides of repro justice. It’s definitely shown me how to merge my interest in reproductive rights and queer activism together in a meaningful and productive way.

The two skills I used the most in my work were graphic design and researching. Graphic design was a skill that I used nearly every day at PEP, and I did a lot of online research at the Center, from looking up tourist attractions in New Orleans to finding articles about assisted genetic and reproductive technologies for the Causes in Common website.

The three most important skills that I developed throughout this internship were my ability to work independently, my attention to detail, and my knowledge about repro justice issues. At both my organizations, I wasn’t treated like a typical intern; my supervisors gave me tasks but let me go my own way about how I wanted to accomplish them. This really helped me with my self-motivation, and my ability to objectively assess the quality of the work I was bringing to the table. And everyone I worked with was
absolutely helpful and forthcoming whenever I had a question about reproductive justice issues, and encouraged me to read material that they thought would be informative.

My academic background is primarily in women’s and queer studies, which gave me a good basis to start this internship with – but they didn’t really teach me how to apply it in a real world environment. However, what I did this summer, and all the new frameworks I’ve learned to think about reproductive justice with, has definitely given me a very different education that I couldn’t have gotten in the classroom. I’m excited to take what I’ve learned here and apply it to my classes this semester. Since both my organizations were also politically involved, I’ve gotten a pretty unique viewpoint on the intersections between politics and reproductive justice, which I know will be a great perspective to take back to the classes in my Government minor.

When I decided to major in queer studies, I really had no idea what to expect as far as possible career choices. I took that “follow your heart” advice on picking a major pretty literally! So it’s been great to see that you can have a rewarding (and paid!) career in this field in any number of areas from policy-making to web design. And it’s definitely allayed some of my parent’s fears about my employment status post-graduation, which is always a good thing. When I took this RRASC internship, I knew I was going to have a blast living in the greatest city in the world doing an internship in a field I really cared about, but I had no idea just how much I would learn. So I’d say it’s exceeded my expectations of how cool a career in repro justice would be!

Working for both PEP and the Center has been a great experience. They’re two very different work environments – PEP being a very small staff, while the Center occupies its own building and employs over 100 people. They have different focuses –
PEP is more centered more on reproductive rights and their impact on young women, whereas the Center is more concentrated on LGBT rights. However, both organizations really respect and are inclusive of all aspects of the reproductive justice movement; it was great to work in two very queer and choice positive environments. And what I was doing for each organization was different – more graphic design for PEP, and more research for the Center – so I never got drained from doing one thing all the time.

So for all the potential future interns – first, congratulations (and thanks!) for reading all the way through my report. But seriously, this has been a great experience that I would absolutely recommend to anyone with an interest in reproductive justice. If you’re not interested in learning from professionals in the field, attending workshops and conferences, and living in an awesome city all while doing more meaningful and productive work than most internships can offer, this is probably not the internship for you. But if any of the above sound appealing, and if you want to make a difference this summer while also making a living, I highly encourage y’all to apply for next year!