Generations Ahead (GA) was originally a program called Gender, Justice & Human Genetics under Center for Genetics and Society. In January 2008, they had spun off and became their own organization. Generations Ahead is working to increase awareness among social justice organizations and leaders of the social and ethical challenges posed by reproductive and genetic technologies. Their work organizes existing organizations and movements into cross-movement alliances to create intersectional and collective values to inform shared policy, advocacy and campaigns.

During my internship at GA, I worked on three main projects: surrogacy in India, prenatal testing in Down Syndrome, and LGBTQI movement mapping. In addition to the main projects, I worked on data reorganizing for racial justice organizations, and administrative work on foundations.

My first project on surrogacy in India required me to research on the topic of reproductive tourism and details of surrogacy. I wrote an overview of this booming industry in India by answering questions such as, why foreigners choose to go to India, why Indian women choose to become surrogates, the requirements and process that surrogates need to go through and the hardships that they face, the ethics and regulation in surrogacy in India. The information will aid in a presentation discussing reproductive tourism at an Asian Pacific Islander conference.

For my second project, I worked on information about prenatal testing in Down Syndrome. I compiled a list of facts that cover information and guidelines, the history of
prenatal testing, the tests available, and the incidence and population. The work will be used as background information to further the discussion and dialogue between organizations in terms of the disability program.

My third project on LGBTQI gave me the most flexibility in the area of research I wanted to focus on. I decided to look for the past and recent researches on the genetic predisposition of homosexuality. Information was gathered around the gay gene, gay brain, and the newest research on birth order. After writing summaries of the most cited studies and critiques, I researched six of the most prominent LGBTQI organizations to look at their trends in the movement. This work is used for background material to map out the future direction of the LGBTQI program.

During this internship, the skills that I used the most were researching, summarizing, and quickly reading important information. All of the projects I was given required me to read many newspaper articles, scholarly journals, books, and contact people who are knowledgeable in the field of research. Because of the amount of material and information available, I needed to find the most relevant articles and spot out the most important points. I then would need to summarize the material. During the process of the projects, I had to be very flexible because many of the original questions cannot be answered, but as new information surfaces, the direction of the project changes as well. I found it very important to be flexible and open-minded to the project direction in addition to the information being researched on. Values and perspectives often differ and therefore, require a very open perspective to simply absorb all the materials.
Though I enjoyed learning all the new material and issues around biotechnology, I also had difficulties along the way. One of my biggest struggles during the internship was concentration. Often, I was struck with so much information, materials, and available journals that I didn’t know where to start or how to find the important parts. As a result, I would read one article, but stop halfway to read another interesting article. This ended up with too much information that I could not keep track of, and caused confusion in sources and cited materials. It was also very hard to concentrate for 8 hours reading and writing about the issues of one project. As I became aware of my lack of concentration over long hours, I began to change my working habits during the day. Instead of reading many different articles in detail, I read all the headings and saved the ones I found most relevant. I then, would skim through them and after I was done, I would start skimming a different article. Highlighting the points also helped me when I needed to summarize. I also started to give myself 15 minute breaks every hour or hour and a half. During the 15 minutes, I would walk around, eat, email, or anything that gives me time away from reading the materials of the project. These methods helped me with concentration as I worked on my projects.

I had many highlights during this internship. One of my favorite activities during work was our weekly staff poker game. At least one day out of the week, most of the staff would get together and play a card game of poker for about 10-15 minutes. It was a fun team bonding time and it gave us a chance to sit and talk to each other. Another highlight of the internship are the different events and talks I attended. For several weeks, there were luncheons where speakers would come and talk about their work and current social justice issues. Speakers came to talk about abortion, transgender issues, and Latina
community issues. I also was able to attend several conferences that talked about issues around abortion and disabilities. I found these conferences and luncheon talks to be very beneficial because people who are knowledgeable in their fields talk about their perspectives and dialogues began to happen.

Three characteristics that I’ve developed during this internship are flexibility, curiosity, and open-mindedness. I had to be very flexible in the project that I am doing because even though we were given a tentative outline of projects we’ll be working on, plans change and the needs of staff shift. I needed to be able to take on projects that differ from the tentative schedule and be able to learn from the work. Curiosity and questioning were very important. As I am new to this field of work, I have many things that I do not know. It was important for me to not be afraid to ask questions. Because I am a science major, I often find myself agreeing with new regulations and technology that could lead to social injustices. It was important for me to take a step back and use an objective lens to read into the situation.

If I were to do this internship again, I would choose to interact more with the staff and try to have lunches with them. Since everyone’s work is done individually, there isn’t much occasion for interaction, and everyone has different schedules so lunch would often be eaten alone or while working. If I did it again, I would make an effort to have lunch with the staff because when I do have lunch or when I interact with the staff I learn a lot from them, either in terms of social justice issues or in terms of life experiences.

As a neuroscience major, I was able to easily grasp the science part of new biotechnology. It was easy for me to understand why research is being done on these
issues, the technology being used and developed, and some of the scientific terms that were used. My background in science helped prepare me in that aspect, but because of that, I was also always in a dilemma when it comes to reading about the ethics behind biotechnology.

Before this internship, I was very lost in my goals in terms of career choice. I thought I had wanted to go to medical school, but I wasn’t certain. I thought I might want to work in a non-profit organization instead. After this internship, I realized that I am still very interested in healthcare and working directly with people. Although I really enjoyed learning about social justice issues, I realized that I cannot work in a research setting where I cannot see the direct results of my work. This internship made me confirm my goal in a healthcare career. I enjoy interaction with the people I am working with and the people I am working for. During this summer, I looked up a lot of information about the Peace Corps. Before this internship, I was playing with the idea of the Peace Corps, but now I am really considering it because of the direct contact with locals and being able to help them and see results immediately.

Generations Ahead is a great organization and I believe their work is very important in building dialogue and adding different perspectives to biotechnology. Often social justice organizations are very liberal and are only able to see one side to issues such as abortion (ie. Fully supporting abortion in all circumstances). While GA fully supports abortion, GA wants other organizations to become aware of the potential misuse of abortion to promote eugenics as more and more genetic tests could be used to test for birth defects or neurodegenerative diseases. I enjoyed working at Generations Ahead and I really respect the work and commitment the staff puts into GA’s mission.
This summer has opened a lot of new perspectives and social justice policy issues for me. Coming into this internship, I had very minimal knowledge of issues surrounding reproductive justice or social justice in general. This summer was information overload and I was a sponge absorbing all the information that was out there. Social justice issues – to me – are still very complex and I still can’t see right or wrong. Like Generations Ahead, I believe that dialogue building is essential for social justice policies to come to a middle ground.

For potential future interns, I suggest that you take advantage of talking with the staff. Everyone in the office is very knowledgeable not only in social justice issues, policy and politics, but also can be good mentors for life and career choices. Just be a sponge and start absorbing information from the first day of work.