The summer I spent with Ibis Reproductive Health is perhaps the most important summer of my entire life. I learned a lot about the reproductive rights field, but just as crucial, I learned a lot about my own tenacity. The summer was long, yet it flew by. It was difficult, but at the same time so easy. Everyday was different and the same, all at once. Being a RRASC this summer helped me to find who I was again.

At Ibis I was treated as an equal and not simply as an intern. I was given responsibilities that required me to work alongside my colleges and supervisor, as well as ones that required me to work alone. The balance between the two came naturally. One of the first projects I began work on was one of the many acronyms, known to us at Ibis as NWLC, which stands for the National Women’s Law Center. This project strived to establish a better understanding of the policies and practices regarding management of ectopic pregnancy. The project is still in progress, but one of the necessary aspects was recruiting clinicians and administrators to participate in over the phone interviews. Recruitment consisted of mailings to invite clinicians to participate in the study, as well as countless phone calls in order to contact them that way. It wasn’t always easy, but there were so many of us working on the project that we did successfully recruit participants, whose interviews proved to be generally helpful. Also important to note is that our recruitment focused on catholic hospitals, non catholic hospitals and recently merged hospitals, one way or the other. It was a really interesting experience because I have often shied away from responsibilities at other jobs to do with answering phone
calls or especially making them but after a few rounds of calls, it became easier. I worked on this project through my last week at Ibis. Along with another intern I also made mailings to send out to hospitals, as well as complied lists of doctors’ possible email addresses so they we might be able to contact them that way.

My next substantial task was to research the availability of public funding or abortions under the Hyde amendment. I worked on a project known as Hyde II, which subsequently focused on five different states from the previous study, in order to determine how available abortions were to women in and around those states, how restrictions and laws varied, and if indeed Medicaid programs covered abortions if at all. The states I researched were Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. I can’t say that I was necessarily surprised with the information I found. Even in instances of rape, incest, or life endangerment - the instances in which abortion should be covered under Medicaid - they usually aren’t. Other barriers like cost and waiting periods are constantly prohibiting women from obtaining the services that they desire. Hyde II is also an ongoing project, but the goals of the study will be to document the financial and bureaucratic experiences of abortion providers, with ranks varying from physicians to counselors, who work to obtain Medicaid funding for abortions.

I also did substantial database work on a project with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health concentrated on low-income women’s access to contraception after Massachusetts health care reform. The project was of particular interest to me because I have done research papers focusing on the change in health care reform in Massachusetts. My role in this project was to work with interns from MDPH on a spreadsheet tool that outlined the various subsidized health insurance options now
made available through the Commonwealth Connector. Our main source of information was web based research of the different insurance sites. Working independently, some results were similar, but many varied drastically. It was clear in a group meeting for the project, that the websites were interpreted differently, depending on the viewer. There was also a lot of pharmaceutical information on some sites, including drug formularies, which only complicated the process. Although I was required to take an unbiased stance in my research, I knew a little bit more about the topic because I have state subsidized health insurance. Despite my background however, some information was simply really hard to find, and we questioned how those who didn’t know what they were looking for would be able to find answers at all. Our work was eventually complied into a tool that mapped out which insurances covered different types of birth controls and at what cost to the consumer. This project was interesting to me because in my opinion is still shows the lack of access to health care that low income women disproportionately encounter.

One of my final projects with Ibis was focus group discussions and interviews with women concerning their experience with contraception and their interest in over-the-counter access. Along with another intern at Ibis, we flyered around the greater Boston area with information about our proposed focus group. The flyering however did not seem to yield as much interest as our ad posted on Craig’s List which asked, “How do you feel about birth control?” We received a lot of feedback and interest, and my role was to keep track of the potential participants, as well as to screen them in order to determine if they were eligible for the study. If they were, they would receive $25 for participating. Those who could not make the date of our focus groups were offered the opportunity to do in-depth interviews with my supervisor. I then began to transcribe both
the focus group discussions, which we recorded with consent of the participants, as well as the over the phone interviews.

The focus groups themselves were very interesting because it was clear that a lot of women had a lot to say about their experiences with birth control. I remember once participant exclaiming, “Ain’t no sex with forty dollars,” referring to her high co payment that she had with insurance. The groups of women were diverse both ethnically and age wise, but they followed the same consensus, that being that birth control was overall too expensive, forcing them to resort to condoms or no protection at all. Along with the interviews, most women seemed open to the idea of possibly being able to purchase birth control over-the-counter without a prescription, similar to the way Plan B is dispensed. They also seemed interested in the idea that some online sites have begun to offer birth control for sale over the internet. Despite the varying opinions of support or dissent, the cost seemed to be of the most alarming concern for the participants.

Though ten weeks was a long stint as Ibis, I did not see any of the projects I worked on necessarily wrap in my time there. I will be sure to check up on them on the Ibis website, but it will not be the same as being there to see the end of something. It is a little sad to think about, but I do realize that I contributed in helpful ways during the process, and that is reassuring. I definitely put my basic word processing skills to good use. I had my own work space, and spend a lot of time typing as I sorted through information, as well as updated databases. I also found it really interesting learning how to transcribe recorded interviews by using a pedal. Once I got the swing of it, it became very easy.
One skill I think I improved on was making phone calls during recruitment phases. I initially thought that it would be very awkward, but it seemed less so when I said my name and where I was calling from. I felt like that made my calls legitimate, and it gave me confidence as well as the feeling that I knew, somehow, what I was doing. During my recruitment for the focus groups, one participant complimented me by saying I was very easy to talk to, and even asked if I wanted a job where she worked! I was very flattered because when I started at Ibis I always felt so foolish making phone calls, but that changed for me significantly.

Although I took into consideration the RRASC reports from the previous year, I figured that commuting to work everyday would not be as hard as it sometimes was. I think that was my only draw back. I was so grateful when I was chosen as an intern for Ibis Reproductive Health because I would not have been able to accept a placement anywhere outside of the Boston area due to financial restrictions. Ibis, located in Cambridge, was only a commuter rail ride and a few subway stops from my home on the North Shore. I would have loved to live in the city during my internship, and perhaps I would have experienced even more that way. I do however feel that I got a lot out of my internship, and do not regret commuting to and from work everyday. Everybody gets tired and frustrated sometimes, and when I began to recognize some of the same faces on the trains, or in line at Dunkin’ Donuts, I realized I definitely was not alone. I was also lucky enough to have an amazing supervisor who understood that trains run late, or sometimes not at all, but I always made it into work. I felt really accomplished at the end of my internship, knowing that I was strong enough to have that work ethic, day in and day out.
One of the highlights of my internship experience was being able to participate in a staff retreat. When I started at Ibis, my supervisor had mentioned the Myers-Briggs personality test, and how pretty much everyone in the office had done it in order to determine their ‘type’. For our retreat, we carpooled out to a beautiful botanic garden near Worcester, and spent the day doing team building activities based on our types. There was an actual test that we did before the retreat, and moderator who led the retreat was an expert in Myers-Briggs. It was interesting to see how different we were from each other, and also how different we were from what types we perceived ourselves to be. It was a really good experience to get to see everyone outside of the office, relating to each other on different levels. That day, we also got professional headshots done, as well as candid photos of us working in groups. It was great seeing a slide show the following week of all the photos from our retreat.

Another highlight of my internship was the dinner I helped to organize for the RRASC interns in the area. I cannot, however take too much credit for it because Marlene and her wonderful husband did most of the work by having us all at her lovely home. It was a truly great night, not only for the RRASC interns, but also for our supervisors and colleagues from our various organizations. I wish I had been able to take pictures!

I have a strong background in Women’s Studies and reproductive rights and justice, but I do not think that any amount of classroom work could have given me this kind of experience. Not only was working at Ibis hands on, but the work I contributed there will show tangible results in the future. Ibis is a wonderful organization, and at the end of my internship, it seemed too soon. Interning at Ibis has opened up an entirely new
world of possibilities for me. I knew about organizations that advocated reproductive rights, but I never imagined I could be a part of one myself. I was so unsure, and still am to some extent, as to what I will do with my double major in History and Women’s Studies, but I feel like interning at Ibis opened my eyes to the world of research, and a world that I could definitely see myself a part of in the future. I do plan on going to grad school, hopefully without a year off in between, but I know if I did take a year off that I would want to do work with research.

I do not think I could have asked for a better internship. I really feel like RRASC put a lot of effort into placing me with an organization that I would not only be a great match with, but also that I would feel comfortable at. I feel really lucky to have been chosen to be a RRASC intern, and I know that the organization itself, as well as all of the host organizations associated with the program are committed to social justice. While I was with Ibis, we discussed what really defined Ibis as an organization. I know that definitions change over time, but my impression of Ibis is that it is truly an organization that works to ensure the autonomy of not only women, but of people.

My ten week internship was an amazing experience that I will never forget. My only advice for future interns is to appreciate every moment, and realize that they are truly blessed to be part of such a spectacular program. Being involved in the Civil Liberties and Public Policy program, as well as the annual conference, and this summer as a RRASC has only helped to reaffirm my beliefs in working in the field of social justice and reproductive rights, but also, my belief in myself. Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity, one I will not forget.