My internship at Political Research Associates (PRA) in Somerville, Massachusetts was formative for me because I had the opportunity to hold a full-time internship at a social justice organization. PRA is a left-wing think tank that compiles reports on right-wing organizations, activities, and movements. This year their work has focused on the Christian Right's spread of evangelical American homophobia in Africa, developing a 40-year Roe v. Wade anniversary edition of their Defending Reproductive Justice activist resource kit (ARK), and profiling key players in anti-choice and homophobic movements in their quarterly publication The Public Eye. PRA is a very small organization that has only a handful of people working in the office on any given day, although my intern cohort had ten interns at one point. The amount of research and quality of materials they are able to produce is very impressive for an organization of their size.

In my role as the Reproductive Justice Intern, I did a mix of research and outreach tasks. In my second week I started working on a collaborative long-term project with the communications intern, Erin. This long-term project was to make a 12-page pamphlet version of Defending Reproductive Justice, the ARK that PRA revised this year. We noticed that the ARK was full of top-quality research and scholarship, but was pretty dense for emerging activists who may be new to RJ and need a primer before delving into
the full ARK. We wanted the pamphlet to be targeted at college students who are interested in RJ activism or advanced high school students. The pamphlet includes: an RJ timeline, glossary of key terms, a fact sheet, infographics, an Argument and Response section, and tips for effective advocacy. We intended for it to primarily be distributed digitally on PRA’s website but designed it in a way that each page could stand alone in case someone wanted to print out just a single page.

In addition to my long-term project I worked on other day-to-day tasks throughout the summer. I spent about a week updating and developing an RJ bibliography to supplement the ARK. There was an existing bibliography of primary anti-choice sources and secondary critiques of them that I updated by writing short descriptions of each piece. Then I crowdsourced and researched newer titles to add to the bibliography. The bibliography was intended to be useful to academics reading the ARK. Occasionally, I wrote a couple posts for PRA’s Eyes Right blog and created a PRA-affiliated Twitter (@Chelsea_Roesch) to keep up with RJ news and debates. Sometimes, as a way to get off the computer for a while, I offered to do small tasks like stuff envelopes for the development office or sort right-wing mail that PRA subscribes to. As the summer issue of The Public Eye was in development, I spent a significant chunk of time fact-checking editorials and profiles prior to publication. I also compiled mini-reports for the Program Coordinator and Executive Director based on topics they needed some exploratory research on (ex. Homophobia in Russia and Eastern Europe, sifting and analyzing reports by allied organizations). I was also invited to sit in on conference calls with organizations who do similar work (such as Feminist Majority Foundation) as well as PRA’s research team meetings. In the staff meetings I was able to get a clearer sense of
the inner workings of a non-profit and how decisions on which leads to research were made.

All my tasks required critical reading and a significant amount of writing, which were primarily done alone. This was difficult for me, even though my academic work consists of researching and writing, because I spent a majority of my time quietly working on tasks on a computer and was entirely responsible for structuring my own time. This may not seem like a big deal, but without prior internship or office experience, there was a big learning curve for me. I generally received tasks without hard deadlines and worked independently. As a result, I found myself multitasking but not completing projects fully. For my long-term project, I made a work schedule and list of deadlines to hold myself to. My supervisor worked with me to create a work plan so I had a sense of the things she needed finished. Developing a structure for work helped a lot in overcoming those problems. A logistical problem I faced all summer was based on where I was living. PRA is located in Somerville, which is not necessarily close to Boston proper. My apartment was in Allston (a neighborhood of mostly college students from Boston University) and I had to take a bus, a train and another bus to get to PRA which took about an hour each way. When looking for housing for this internship, find a location near Davis Square, off the Red Line, or in Cambridge to avoid a serious transportation hassle.

The highlights of my internship were times when I collaborated with other interns or staff on projects or in meetings. My intern cohort outnumbered the staff so the Program Coordinator (Becca Suldan) devised brown bag lunches for us on Tuesdays based on what we were interested in to give us a better sense of PRA's work. For
example, we watched and discussed *God Loves Uganda* (a documentary to be released in October 2013 starring researcher Kapya Kaoma), screened *Left Behind*, met PRA founder Chip Berlet, had a resume and fact-checking workshop with the former Communications Director (Alex DiBranco), had a lesson on the history of LGBT rights/queer liberation activism from Rebecca, and discussed the SCOTUS rulings on Prop 8 and the Voting Rights Act with the Executive Director (Tarso Ramos). Working on the RJ ARK pamphlet with Erin was another highlight because we got to see our brainchild grow into a fully-formed pamphlet ready for publication by the time I left. I also participated in building a positive intern culture in the office. In the first weeks, most people ate lunch silently at their desks so Erin and I gathered people to have lunch together every day – even hosting a potluck once. We also started a “coffee club” and bought nice coffee and creamer with funds donated by the coffee drinkers in the office. Foodie Tuesday was another weekly activity we planned. Most interns weren't from the Boston area so on Tuesday nights after work we went to a restaurant in a different neighborhood each week.

If I had the chance to re-do my internship, I would have been more proactive about asking clarifying questions and checking in with my supervisors when I was unsure of how to move forward on a task. I didn't know what to expect from this internship, so I arrived expecting that I would be given all the tasks I needed to do. Instead, this internship required a good deal of initiative and self-guided interest. This was the summer before my Division III and I could have spent time at PRA doing more research for it that would have supported the research on RJ and gender violence they were already doing. One of the most important things I would have re-done would be to live closer to PRA's office so I didn't spend so much time commuting.
This internship is well-suited for a person who is organized, politically savvy, and able to structure their time well. PRA wants your internship to be a mutually beneficial relationship, meaning you spend time supporting their research and they make sure you leave the summer with materials to show for your time at PRA. They are very intentional about this and give you plenty of time to work on your own interests. The organization's activism is rooted in research and is slower paced given the nature of the field. In other words, this is not necessarily going to be an outreach-oriented position. My background is in student organizing and I didn't engage that skill very much this summer.

Overall, my experience at PRA was positive and I learned a lot about how a non-profit think tank operates. It gave me a clear sense of what I want from a career after college and what working at a social justice organization entails. My supervisors were open to honestly assessing my strengths and weaknesses at the beginning and end of the summer. I expect to maintain a relationship with PRA and have made professional connections with my intern cohort and the staff which I really value. At PRA you will get as much from the internship as you put into it. It may seem simplistic but the best thing you can do is start your summer with a set of goals (both related to PRA's work and your own) and make a plan to achieve them.