Standing in front of Amnesty International’s (AI) Office early on a hot May morning, struggling to keep from fidgeting with everything at hand’s reach, I was nervous, to say the least. An unreasonable part of me expected to be quizzed about my knowledge on every human rights issue out there in addition to all of Amnesty’s goals and missions. Taking a deep breath, I put a slightly nervous smile on my face and walked in. Now, a few months after that first day, I laugh at the nervous wreck I was, and I’m thankful to have had the opportunity to work with the most supportive, understanding, and intelligent people and supervisors I have ever met.

After a week of out-of-office human rights training, and another week of settling in and getting used to a nine-to-five schedule, things ramped up for my fellow interns and I. The Identity and Discrimination Unit, which I worked with, was focused on two campaigns during my internship: the “My Body My Right” Campaign, which focused on reproductive rights, and the “I Welcome” Campaign, which focused on refugee and migrants rights. Intern tasks were split into two parts: long-term projects and short-term tasks. This structure is designed to ensure that interns are constantly growing and learning by doing, while being able to shift gears quickly when something that needed immediate attention arose. I had two long-term projects: one was a research document on successful and failed message frames in human rights—with special emphasis on reproductive rights and refugee rights; the second was producing sexual and reproductive rights one-pagers for each US state in which Amnesty had a Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR) trainer. Short-term projects—which were the bulk of the work—varied.
The first week, we collaborated with AI Poland to help with an initiative to bring global attention to a bill in the Polish Parliament that will greatly limit abortion access. The project required us, the three interns in the Identity and Discrimination Unit, to roam the streets of Washington, DC and take pictures of ourselves and other people in front of national monuments holding signs urging the Polish Parliament to support abortion access. Another short-term project we worked on was regarding the Helms Amendment. Amnesty, along with other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), protested at the United States of Women conference because the Helms Amendment was not on the agenda. However, not every project at Amnesty involved the outdoors; we evaluated State Department funding bills to check for any funding that would support human rights violations; we speculated the White House’s Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and inspected the details of the strategy; we made phone calls to Congressional Offices asking them to sign on a Dear Colleague Letter urging the President to designate Temporary Protected Status for the Northern Triangle of South America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras), and the signatures on the letter more than doubled; we wrote reproductive rights newsletters and refugees newsletters; producing fact sheets about refugees from a gendered lens; producing quick resource sheets about abuse, sexual harassment, and other issues on the national and state level; creating databases encompassing Representatives and Senators’ contact information, important committees they are assigned, and their stance on human rights issues; being present when the Supreme Court struck down TRAP [Targeted Regulations of Abortion Provider] laws; and that’s just a few of the projects that I can recall.

Going a bit into detail about the projects I found to be most rewarding, I would have to address the three days we spent calling numerous Congressional offices asking for signatures on the previously mentioned Dear Colleague Letter to the President. First off, I would like to state that it was incredibly tedious and I had to drink copious amounts of water
to keep my mouth from drying due to all the talking and rejection. However, it was incredibly rewarding to see the number of signatures rise every day. The other interns in my office, Tala and Sonya, and I checked the names everyday figuring out which ones each one of us called. While calling, we were building the spreadsheet of Congressional contacts, committee assignments, and positions. Every time I think about the fact that I contributed to a database that will be expanded upon and used every time Amnesty contacts members of Congress regarding refugees and immigration, I smile a little. Contributing to something bigger and that its use outlives my presence at Amnesty is what working with NGOs and public service is all about to me.

This is how I evaluate many of the projects I worked on at AI. Amnesty SRR young trainers all over the United States will use the SRR state law one-pagers. To further expand on the SRR trainers program, the program is in its first year and essentially, young activists all over the United States apply to become Amnesty SRR trainers. Those who are accepted into the program receive training and attend Amnesty Conferences, then they take that knowledge to their communities to facilitate SRR workshops. I had the honour of communicating with the activists, preparing a sample work plan, providing tips on building partnerships and coalitions, and producing a sample timeline. Providing that support allowed me to organize my thoughts and articulate how to start a workshop and movement from the ground with the help of local NGOs. In fact, I carried these ideas with me after my internship and started an SRR workshop at my university in Texas.

Moreover, Amnesty taught me organized discipline. Up until May 2016, the vast majority of my activism work was free form, meaning that I had the freedom to shape my schedule and determine how I wanted to do things. Amnesty taught me how to work in an office, I learned that after three hours of sitting down in the same space, I get bored and need
to take a walk before I can be productive again. I learned that I like changing spaces every few weeks, so I may work from the shared cubicle for a while, then move to the lounge, and so on. But, I also learned that I enjoy deskwork just as much as I enjoy grassroots activism. I liked going through funding bills, and looking at long psychology research about message framing. I learned that what I want to do within non-profits may not be what I always thought I wanted.

In addition to projects and tasks, Amnesty allowed its interns the freedom to attend any events that they find interesting around the city. One of the most eye-opening events I attended was held at the Human Rights Council and it highlighted LGBT Refugees, an intersectional identity that is often not considered. Another event that stuck with me was the Girl Up Conference, which is organized by the United Nations Foundation. At that conference, I had the honour of meeting my role models, Kate Gilmore, the Deputy High Commissioner on Human Rights. Another sweet moment was meeting a former RRASC at a Fighting Misogynoir workshop, and meeting later to talk about our experiences and growth. Attending the various events around Washington, D.C. opened me up to different perspectives and ideas, built my connection network, and allowed me to grow as a person.

However, the highlight event of DC was something that I could not have done outside of Washington, D.C., which was standing in front of the Supreme Court when the decision on *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* came out in favour of Whole Woman’s Health. Sharing that moment with so many other reproductive justice activist groups is something I will always cherish. Seeing anti-choice protesters leave defeated is an image that never fails to better my day.

Moving to skills I used and experiences that came in handy during my internship. The main skills I employed were research. My experience with Model UN before my internship
gave me a base knowledge for comprehending legal text, and that was incredibly valuable. Every research-based class I ever took made me more efficient at finding information necessary to produce the material I needed to produce.

However, I also faced some difficulties. I go to an in-state public university in Texas, and although it is an excellent university and I learned a lot and gained a lot by going to my school, I felt intimidated upon learning that the other two interns in my unit attend Harvard University. They were incredibly sweet and I ended up becoming good friends with them. However, in the beginning, I felt the need to prove my intelligence. Another issue I faced, especially in the beginning, was loneliness. I did not know anyone in D.C., and being a very social person, it frustrated me that I did not have good friends I could call to hang out with after work every day. Of course, as time went on, I became friends not only with the people in my unit, but with majority of interns in the office. However, the hardest thing about my internship at Amnesty International was leaving Amnesty International. It was extremely challenging to be pulled away from all the activism work I was doing and leave all the political conversations I enjoyed, to go back to Texas, a highly conservative state. But, life moves on, and when I came back, I was stronger with the knowledge that I am not the only one out there calling for reproductive justice and human rights.

If I were to have a do-over of my internship, I would change one thing. I would start looking for and attending after work events from day one. It took me a while to get acclimated, and I would have experienced more if I opened up earlier. Nevertheless, I hold dear memories from every day I spent at Amnesty and I look forward to going back there one day, hopefully as an employee.

Being a RRASC intern changed my life. It taught me more about my own intersectionality and reproductive justice. It allowed me to work for one of my favourite
NGOs. Being a RRASC intern at Amnesty not only opened so many doors for me professionally; it also made me a better person and a better activist.