Being a women and gender studies and environmental studies major my experience working as a RRASC intern at NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado was exactly the type of work that I wanted to do this summer. The work I was doing and the personalities and dedication of the people who work there was truly inspiring. I’m very grateful to have had the opportunity to work at a politically charged and active organization because it is so different from reading academic articles, case studies and historical accounts of movements and the work of nonprofit organizations. It was surreal to be working there after reading and studying about the women's rights movement. It was also satisfying to be able to use some books and articles I had read for classes, as well as materials from CLPP’s Reproductive Justice Conferences I attended in 2010 and 2011 as resources in the research I was doing. I felt instantly welcomed to be at Pro-Choice Colorado and it was really refreshing to be around people who are so dedicated to reproductive rights and justice issues (and like talking about it, all the time!). I think my academic background allowed me to productively contribute to the work that NARAL does. Working at Pro-Choice Colorado helped to shed some light and realize the value of the work that I’ve done as a women and gender studies major. Although I have known for some time that I would like to work in the nonprofit sector doing work that relates to what I study in school, being able to actually do that this summer was more rewarding and educational than I had could have imagined.

Working at NARAL Pro-Choice Colorado really gave me some insight into the more political aspects of the issues in the reproductive justice and women’s rights movements. I
have a much better understanding of how government systems function than I did before the 
start of this summer, and working at NARAL I was able to witness in many ways how the 
reproductive justice community and movement, and the nonprofit community of Denver 
interact with each other and with the state and federal government. I learned a lot of 
background information about the reproductive rights movements, and about the inner 
workings of a nonprofit organization. Attending the c3 and c4 board meetings, c3 round-table 
meetings and a slew of coalition meetings and events gave me a measurement of how 
important networking and organizational skills are; and gave me some insight into how 
intricate and complicated the work of each person is at the organization. Witnessing a board 
meeting carried out, and the formalities of having a board of directors was astonishing. After 
working in the NARAL CO office for 2 months without understanding the role of the board 
and then attending the meeting in my 8th week of work, I was able to understand how many 
different people do different things to keep the organization up and running. Working on “the 
inside” made tabling and attending events as a NARAL representative very interesting. I see 
the value and perhaps the curse of name recognition, and petitioning made me better 
understand the magnitude of people who are dedicated to reproductive justice, and also the 
number of people who don’t see the effects or their own role in the reproductive justice 
movement.

My primary summer goal was to organize a workshop for staff to discuss and 
introduce concepts of reproductive justice and environmental justice, and how ideals of both 
movements can be incorporated into the work that NARAL does. Being able to delve into 
reproductive justice in creating the workshop issues of the environment and reproductive 
rights in a productive way outside of writing a paper was something I was very excited to do. 
Because I had so much freedom in what and how I could present the workshop, I spent the
majority of my time gathering information and resources that I couldn’t manage to fit
together. I realized how broad reproductive justice is, and spent time trying to understand a
little bit of everything. In the end I think I was able to bring it all together, but my initial
distraction by the vastness of reproductive justice slowed down the process. I met with my
supervisor Jen a few times to talk about what information I should present, yet without setting
strict deadlines for myself, I completed the workshop the 8th week of my internship and
presented it on the 10th week. It was difficult for me to work with such an open schedule and
broad expectations because I couldn’t stay focused on one topic at a time. In retrospect I
think the creation of the workshop and its presentation could have been done by the 5th week
of my working at NARAL. All in all, presenting the Reproductive Justice workshop to the
staff and to the Policy Advisory Committee was a really rewarding experience. I am proud of
the work that I did toward creating and facilitating the workshop and am excited to measure
how transferable it is. I know that the information that was shared with the staff and the Policy
Advisory Committee (PAC) will help to broaden Pro-Choice Colorado’s views and actions
when it comes to reproductive issues happening in the state.

In my research of reproductive and environmental justice issues in Colorado (for the
RJ Workshop) I was able to sharpen my networking skills. Being in such a small community
of nonprofit organizations, keeping in touch with people and being involved in other
organizations’ events was very important. There was certainly solidarity among the people
who worked in the nonprofit sector, no matter what the issues and goals of their specific
organization. At the few events that I attended this summer as a NARAL representative, I met
people from different nonprofit organizations who were vital to my research.

My second summer goal was to help organize a policymaker boot camp. NARAL
received a grant from NIRH (National Institute for Reproductive Health) to host a day long
conference for state and municipal legislators to attend in order to learn more about choice issues and how they relate to certain pieces of legislation, as well as the language of these bills. Many other choice organization around the country have already done this type of workshop and on October 28th, 2011 NARAL will host the Policy Maker Boot Camp for Colorado. The work I did towards this project involved researching voting records and inviting pro-choice legislators. I also spent a lot of time researching different locations where NARAL could hold the event and learned the basics of party planning and Microsoft Excel.

When I was not working on either of these projects, tabling on the weekends was a productive use of my hours away from a computer. The other intern, Hannah, and I would spend a few hours a day calling volunteers and preparing tabling information and materials. The most memorable tabling experience this summer was at the Denver Pride Fest. The preparation that went into this event was immense compared to other festivals that summer. We distributed over 1,000 condoms in the two days of tabling and marching in the parade. We gathered about 750 signatures for NARAL's Title X petition. We collected signatures in support of Title X, which provides government funding for birth control and family planning resources for low-income women. It was great to see so much positive energy at the pride parade, and marching with NARAL in purple tutus that we had made Friday morning was a lot fun.

Working at Pro-Choice Colorado I learned a lot about my personal work style and environmental preferences. This summer I struggled to stay focused on the work that I was doing, and create deadlines for myself. The culture of the NARAL Colorado office is centered on everyone working on their own projects, and then reporting on them or asking for help at the weekly staff meetings. There were many days where I would begin doing research on one topic and by the end of the day I’d be reading an article on something minutely related
to the original topic. Because I wasn't disciplined in creating a time schedule for myself, I think my productivity was lower than it could have been.

My suggestion to future interns would be to not limit yourself! At the start of my internship I was unclear about my role in the organization, I thought that because of my position as an intern my input would not be valued. I slowly realized how wrong that was, and in retrospect I wish I had taken more initiative on the things that I was assigned. I was often too concerned with what was expected of me and the work that I was assigned to think about going above and beyond what was expected of me, making each project my own. There were some days at NARAL that I found myself idling away all day, but I found that the reason I was not being given work was not because there was no work to be done, but because everyone was so focused on their own projects, that mine were at times forgotten. If I had taken more initiative in coming up with my own work, I would have kept busy and surely would have done my supervisor a favor. The work I did at NARAL was rewarding, and being in a new place with great people allowed me to learn a lot about myself and what kind of work I want to do in the future.