

Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice

This summer, I completed my RRASC Internship at the Center on Reproductive Rights and Justice (CRRJ) at UC Berkeley School of Law. CRRJ is a multidisciplinary research center dedicated to reproductive justice. CRRJ is especially committed to “bridging the academic-advocate divide” to find policy solutions to various issues in reproductive justice, including halting the criminalization self-induced abortion, overturning *Harris v. McRae*, and abolishing welfare family caps. As a Summer Intern, I was able to learn about each of these issues through various projects. I worked primarily on the Reproductive Justice Virtual Library, and particularly, on the [newly released library wing](#) dedicated to research and articles on *Harris v. McRae*. I also provided research assistance on CRRJ’s non-partisan policy analysis, “[Bringing Families out of ‘Cap’ tivity: the Path Toward Abolishing Welfare Family Caps.](#)” Outside of these two major projects, I completed several other assignments involving research and press releases. Overall, interning at CRRJ was a fantastic opportunity where I got to employ skills I had gained from previous academic and activist experiences, and where I was able to further hone these skills in a new environment.

Reproductive Justice Virtual Library

The Reproductive Justice Virtual Library is an online searchable catalog of resources related to reproductive justice. As part of CRRJ’s mission to bridge to academic-advocate divide, these resources include work by advocates, non-profits, social scientists, and legal scholars. The collection also aims to be accessible to anyone—not just academics. Part of cultivating this accessibility is writing detailed and easy-to-understand annotations for each article.

My assignment was related to the recently released library wing dedicated to *Harris v. McRae*. *Harris v. McRae* was a court case, which determined that it was constitutional for Medicare to deny health care coverage for abortion care. This decision, which has resulted in the

Hyde Amendment, has left those with unintended pregnancies in dire situations. Women who are on Medicare and become pregnant still require abortions, and denying abortion care coverage means that women often have to go into even further poverty in order to obtain an abortion. This ruling especially affects women of color, women in poverty, immigrant women, and any civil servants who receive Medicare.

In line with CRRJ's strategic initiative to overturn *Harris v. McRae*, I was responsible, along with another intern, for editing some annotations and writing new ones for various articles. These annotations went through various stages. The other intern and I often struggled to make certain annotations accessible, especially legal articles. With help from our supervisors, we were able to make succinct and comprehensible annotations for each article. We were also responsible for making decisions about which new articles and resources to include. While writing annotations was a new experience for me, I had prior editing experience from editing undergraduate academic journals and from working as a newspaper editor. I was excited to employ these skills in a new context, and it certainly helped with the process. Moreover, I learned a lot about different legal strategies for overturning *Harris v. McRae*. My philosophy background helped considerably with understanding legal literature, and I became increasingly interested in philosophy of law.

In addition to editing and writing annotations, I also learned how to use Zotero. Zotero is a citation management software, and it is often used by academics to keep track of annotations (and by me when I write long philosophy papers!). In this context, I was uploading articles and annotations to the system via Zotero, which was an altogether new experience for me. While I was able to understand it quickly, there were some hiccups with the system that were beyond my control and CRRJ's control. So, I uploaded each article along with the annotation and sent along reports to the programmers who eventually fixed the coding. This particular project showed me

how important it is to learn how to navigate institutional systems. Even though the project is under CRRJ's domain, CRRJ collaborates with other organizations, past interns, and programmers within the UC Berkeley system in order to make the RJVL possible.

Welfare Caps Issue Brief

This summer, the Center released a non-partisan policy analysis on Welfare Family Caps. Welfare Family Caps, in varying degrees, prohibit families on welfare with more than one child from receiving additional cash aid from the state. This policy was introduced along with so-called "welfare reform" which sought to disincentive families in poverty from having children. In addition to being empirically unsound and unsuccessful in its goals to "disincentive" having children, the policy has had racist, sexist, and classist implications. It is CRRJ's intention to help abolish these laws across the U.S., and indeed, it has already helped to do so in California, which abolished its Welfare Family Caps policy this summer. The report details the history of family welfare caps, and it elaborates upon the states that have abolished the law and the states that have attempted to do so unsuccessfully. It is the Center's hope that this policy analysis will be useful to other activists and academics that seek to work towards the abolition of these laws across the U.S.

When another intern and I started working on the report, most of it the report had already been written. There was, however, considerable editing, restructuring, and reformatting work to be done, particularly in one section dedicated to California's recent repeal. I spent a significant amount of time reading and re-reading the brief and editing it for concision, clarity, and comprehensibility. Most of my work involved editing, which again, made me grateful for my extensive background in editing. I also helped with research assistance by double and triple-checking citations. Additionally, I was assigned with the task of creating a map that would detail the states that have and have not repealed the law, and what sort of cap each state employs. I had

little to no graphic design experience prior to this assignment. There is a website that helps with creating maps, but I still had to do considerable work in order to include all of the necessary information in a way that was easy-to-read and aesthetically pleasing, and I only had a very basic photo program to work with. This was time-consuming, but incredibly rewarding, and I was happy to have picked up a new skill. One of my supervisors explained to me how working for a non-profit often makes people into a jack-of-all-trades. This experience showed me how valuable this versatility and flexibility can be to organizations and to one's own development as an activist.

Others Projects

In addition to these two major projects, I also worked on press releases for the Purvi Patel case and for the Whole Women's Health case. For each case, I wrote or contributed to press releases for each potential outcome. It was important in these statements to communicate CRRJ's commitment to reproductive justice. I also tied CRRJ's work to each potential outcome, especially in the Purvi Patel case since CRRJ coordinates the Self Induced Abortion Legal Team. In this project, I also applied my previous editing and writing skills. It was also exciting to be among others working in reproductive justice during these court cases.

Finally, I worked with my supervisors to consolidate the way in which CRRJ collects and organizes research completed by their legal interns. Brainstorming the best way to organize Excel documents was challenging and required problem-solving skills as well as putting myself in the shoes of both researchers and supervisors to see which set-up would be best for everyone.

Reflections

Overall, this internship was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot about reproductive justice, and especially about self-induced abortion and how important it is to make self-induced abortion safe and accessible for those who don't feel comfortable having abortions in a

traditional medical environment. I was exposed to organizations like Women on Waves and Women on Web who make abortion pills and medical abortions available to those in countries that ban abortions, and I learned about how the law can even affect women in the U.S. who attempt to self-induce abortion. While I had previous organizing experience from my campus and from women's & gender studies classes, this was entirely new to me. Integrating issues related to self-induced abortion into my larger social justice framework revolutionized my understanding of reproductive justice issues. Furthermore, this internship allowed me to work much more closely with the laws and policies that affect real people. While I am, as a philosophy major, most comfortable working at the abstract and theoretical level, CRRJ allowed me to apply my analytical skills to concrete issues. I especially enjoyed working on the RJVL for this reason.

I am grateful to have had such an incredible work environment. My only difficulty was that much of my work was remote, and so it was sometimes difficult to be as productive as I might have been in a more traditional office environment. However, my colleagues and I worked around this by meeting up to do work together. We all found this helpful.

Despite this, the internship was excellent. I had the opportunity to work with three other brilliant interns with a variety of backgrounds, and it was an honor to collaborate with them as well as our supervisors and other CRRJ staff. CRRJ has done incredible work, and will continue to do so, and its mission to bridge the theory-practice gap is closely aligned to my own goals as an aspiring academic. I hope to take this experience and continue to connect my academic work to reproductive justice as I look to pursuing a career in academia.