Elissa Lopes  
Class Action, Hadley, MA  
RRASC 2008 Final Report

While interning at Class Action I had the opportunity to experience the interaction between the community and the organization, make connections with other people in this field, learn how a non-profit organization works, and make connections with people I otherwise never would have known. I had the opportunity to participate in the work done in and out of the office, getting to know the type of work that each staff member does on a day-to-day basis. Also, I was lucky enough to work with a group of people who were interested in having me contribute some of my own personal skills and talents to their mission.

Class Action had weekly staff meetings that I, and my two other intern friends, were actually included in. At first, I was almost intimidated by these meetings because I had never been a part of one before. After a few times around, and after learning how everything worked, I started to anticipate the meetings a day or two before. All the interns were asked to contribute to the meeting, either by sharing what work they did or proposing new ideas, or whatever felt appropriate for the time.

One of the biggest contributions I felt I made, with the help of the two other summer interns, was my online networking presentation. Mostly everyone at Class Action agreed that the organization should integrate Facebook and maybe Myspace into how they make their connections. They had made accounts on these sites, but didn’t know where to go from there, and also, their Facebook account had been
deleted, and they didn’t know why. After spending a few days repairing and updating everything going on with those accounts, I was asked to prepare a presentation to help everyone in the office familiarize themselves with these networking sites. My presentation included a detailed how-to section, a “what not to do” section, how Class Action could make these sites work for them, and I also included some of the fun features they could use individually if they had accounts. Not only did my presentation educate the organization, it also actually encouraged a few of them to go get their own accounts! That felt like my own little personal bonus after all the work that went into the presentation.

The Class Action Newsletter is printed and sent out seasonally, and I was asked to contribute some of my journalistic skills to their Fall 2008 edition. Dana Gillette, who is in charge of the newsletters, asked me to do an article on a seminar/training they were holding for a program called Women Building Bridges for Economic Justice. Felice Yeskel, who is one of the founders of Class Action was putting on this seminar. I was lucky enough to be able to actually attend this event. I took pictures, interviewed some of the people involved, and took notes on the event in general. They also publish an Enews, which is featured on their website, and I contributed to that as well. I did hours of research, looking for articles, books, videos, and any online media source I could find that was related to the issues surrounding class and classism in our country.

About halfway through the summer, Class Action celebrated their 4th birthday. They put on a big cookout, birthday bash, where anyone involved with Class Action, or anyone interested in getting involved was
invited. Part of my job was “party planning”, which involved a lot of phone calls, decorating, and well, a whole lot of planning. It paid off in the end, though, because there was a great turnout and the other interns and I got to make a lot of connections with people involved in this field of work.

As a whole, my summer internship was made up of a whole lot of positive experiences and a very small amount of negative experiences. The biggest difficulty that I had was adjusting to the new work environment, since previous to this summer I had never worked in an office setting before. Of course there were times every now and then where I got frustrated with the work that I was doing; for instance, when I was doing research for the Enews. While doing that research, I realized just how big of a task I had taken on in trying to find media online having to do with classism. And there were a few days where I would research for hours at a time and come back empty handed. After a while of trial and error, my hard work was finally rewarded with results!

As I said already, the positives far outweighed the negatives. One of the highlights of my summer was the fact that there were two other interns (from a different program) going through basically the same experience as I was. It was just plain luck that all three of us got along from day one, but it made the whole experience a little less intimidating knowing I wasn’t alone in everything I was going through. Also, my supervisor, Sarah, was the type of person I felt I could go to if I needed help with anything. She also wasn’t afraid to joke around with the other interns and myself every now and then, so it made the office feel a little more familiar for me.
The mission of Class Action helped to educate me more on issues surrounding the Social Justice movement. Although their focus is mainly on social class and classism, they are also involved in many other areas of Social Justice as well. The issues surrounding classism are areas that are more well known like racism, sexism, and ageism. They just help people to realize that class is another aspect of all of those things.

When I was first accepted to intern at Class Action, I wasn’t really sure what to expect. I had been to their website to familiarize myself more with the organization and their mission, values and goals. But, that was really the only exposure I had before the beginning of my summer internship. For the first few weeks, if I was asked what the organization was all about, it was hard for me to describe it to people. Unless they were familiar with classism already, it is more complex then it seems. My actual experience at Class Action was more valuable than I originally expected it to be. I learned a lot more than I expected, I experienced a lot of once in a lifetime things, and made connections with more people than I originally expected to.

After experiencing what I have experienced now, and having the knowledge that I have now, I wouldn’t have done much different. I asked a lot of questions and did a lot of research, so my span of knowledge on the issues of classism grew. I integrated some of my own talents, skills and interests into doing the job. For instance, I took my old hobby, photography, and used it to help the organization. Also, my experience with writing and journalism contributed to Class Action’s Enews and Newsletter. One thing that I may have changed was that I didn’t have a specific area of focus while in the office. One of the other girls chose to focus on the Race/Class Intersections program, run by
Rhonda Soto. She spent the majority of her days doing work in that area specifically, and she walked away with a very broad knowledge in that area alone. She also gained experience in the organization as a whole as well.

Working at Class Action has helped me to realize that this is the kind of work that I can see myself doing. After completing my internship, I was offered a part-time position with the organization, so I can continue gaining valuable experience in the field of Social Justice. This experience also helped me to narrow down the areas that I would like to work in once I am actually in the work field. Classism is one of the most difficult things I have ever had to define or explain, and that showed me just how difficult it can be working on an issue that is so unrecognized in our society. Yet, it inspired me to keep working towards the issues that are close to my heart and showed me that with enough passion, effort and determination, one person really can make an impact in the world.