Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps (RRASC) Intern Final Report

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This past summer, I interned with Young People For, a leadership development organization that aims to identify and engage youth around the country. One of the main focuses of Young People For is their fellowship program, a leadership development program comprised of 150 students who participate in regional trainings, mentorship programs and the National Summit. There are four regional trainings throughout the United States: San Francisco, CA at the University of California Berkeley, Houston, TX at the University of Houston, Chicago, IL at Roosevelt University and New York City, NY at Pace University. Throughout the summer, youth attend one of these trainings and learn strategies and tactics to create meaningful, lasting social change in their own communities. Through the mentorship program, students are able to engage with progressive leaders and further develop their own leadership skills. Finally, the youth come together in January for the National Summit in D.C., through which they are able to learn from one another and continue to develop their leadership skills. Even after the fellowship program ends, the youth have the continued support of the Young People For office in D.C., as well as the larger network of Young People For alumni.

Throughout the summer, as a member of the Young People For Staff, I had many wonderful experiences. As part of the Young People For Team, I worked closely with five individuals. However, as the Fellowship Associate Intern, my main focus for the summer was the fellowship program. My main supervisor, Andrew, was one of the Fellowship Associates for Young People For. In addition to Andrew, I also worked very closely with Vidushani, Andrew’s co-worker and the other Young People For Fellowship Associate. As Fellowship Associates, their main focus for the summer was to ensure that the regional trainings were successful. In addition to the fellowship associates, I also had the privilege of working with many other incredible members of the Young People For Team, including Laura, Gabriela, and Chagan. As the Young People For Fellowship Program Manager, Laura oversaw the entire fellowship program and
supervised the rest of the staff, making sure that each person understood and followed through on his or her individual and group responsibilities. As Young People For Advocacy Associate, Gabriela was not being as directly involved in the Fellowship Program as Laura, Andrew, and Vidushani. While she still attended the regional trainings and did a lot of work to prepare, she also did a lot of work this summer on outreach while also maintaining the Young People For website. As Alumni Program Coordinator, Chagan worked to create and maintain strong relationships between current and past Young People For fellows in order to create a strong network of alumni. When I was not working with Andrew or Vidushani, I was helping the other members of the team with different tasks and projects.

At the start of the summer, I worked with Andrew and Vidushani to determine which tasks and projects I was most interested in being involved in this summer. While I wanted flexibility with the internship, allowing for areas of potential growth and self-improvement, I also wanted to serve the team and the organization in whatever way possible. The tasks and projects can easily be broken up into two categories. First, there were many tasks that I completed throughout the summer that I would consider logistical internship responsibilities. Specifically, in my experience at Young People For, these tasks included things like updating the travel document with the fellows’ travel plans, calling and emailing fellows to ask about their travel plans for regional trainings, creating check requests and invoices for their travel, and more. While this work was not the most exciting, I think that it was still beneficial in that it provided me with an opportunity to better understand the work that non-profit organizations do and how important each individual is in ensuring that the organization is ultimately successful. Since many non-profit organizations lack an excess of financial support, non-profit employees often have many responsibilities that should be allocated to a much larger staff. Therefore, many non-profit organizations actually rely on their interns to help lighten the load for employees. While many of the logistical responsibilities could get quite monotonous, I still felt involved in the work that the organization was doing. In addition, I also felt like a member of the Young People For Team and that the Young People For Staff members actually appreciated the work that I was doing.

In addition to the logistical internship responsibilities, I also got to work on other side projects throughout the summer. For example, in addition to my logistical responsibilities, I worked on updating a “conference map” document. In order for the fellowship program to continue running, the Young People For staff needs to make sure that they are doing outreach throughout the year so that young people know about the program. The conference map has the demographics of the current and past fellowship classes, as well as different conferences that staff can attend in order to recruit future youth to the program. Throughout the summer, I researched different programs and conferences throughout the country in an effort to find out how future fellowship classes can be diverse (based on location, interests, experiences, etc.). Through this project, I felt like I was given an opportunity to do more substantial work for the organization and work to further improve it. In addition, I was also able to work on updating Young People For’s Resource Library. Earlier this summer, I met with Vidushani, one of the Fellowship Associates, and she showed me the resource library that Young People For gives all of
the fellows access to. The library has resources related to five main aspects of the Young People For Fellowship Program is meant to help fellows develop: Allyship and Intersectionality, Communications and Public Leadership, Planning and Management, Relationship Building and Developing New Leaders, and Self-Care and Sustainability. First, I was able to go to through all the current resources and see if they were all still relevant and useful. Since the library has not been updated in a while, I was able to go through and clean out some of the resources. Once I finished, I spent time looking for new resources that could be added to the library. For me, this was really great because I felt like, through this resource library, I was able to contribute to a part of Young People For’s development. Further, through my work on the resource library, a part of me will be left with the organization once I leave.

In benefiting from the experience of working at Young People For, I also benefited tremendously from the experience of living in Washington, D.C. Washington is a really exciting city to live in and there’s a lot for young people to do. During my eighth week at Young People For, I spent the first three days outside of the office. For the first two days, I got to be a part of Transgender Lobby Day. On Monday, I went to an event hosted by different organizations focused on transgender equality, including the Trans People of Color Coalition, the National Center for Transgender Equality, and the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, among others. The day started off with a brief introduction about the work that each organization does, followed by an explanation of the logistics for the two days. After, there were different break out session in which moderators facilitated discussions about Trans issues and the ways in which policy could be used as a tool for social change. During the second day, the morning was spent preparing everyone to talk with their legislators about the importance of passing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and the Student Non-Discrimination Act. We were encouraged to share personal stories, which could be used to show Senators and Representatives that their respective constituencies truly care about the passing of both bills. Finally, the afternoon was spent at the Capitol. We were grouped by home states and were given the times in which we were supposed to meet with our Senators and Representatives. Having never lobbied before, I was very nervous, yet excited. Not only did I get to experience something entirely new, but I also gained a better understanding of how important it is to make one’s voice heard to legislators. On the third day, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to attend the Make Progress National Summit. At the Summit, participants were able to hear many notable progressive politicians speak, including Elizabeth Warren, Nancy Pelosi, and Joe Biden. In addition to hearing speeches about topics like the student debt crisis and economic justice, I also had an opportunity to attend different workshops focused on developing leadership and advocacy skills. Further, I also utilized the time spent at the conference as an opportunity to meet other progressive young people from around the country and hear about the amazing work that they’re doing in their own communities.

Overall, I think that this was a tremendous learning experience for me. Prior to this summer, I had never lived on my own, lived in a city, or worked in an office. However, through this summer, I now have a better understanding of self and a much better idea of the career path that I plan to take once graduating from UMass. As a
rising senior, I wanted to use this internship as an opportunity to explore a different field and see if it could be a potential fit. While I did enjoy the experience and gained a lot from it, I now know (or rather, am more assured) that I want to enter the field of teaching. Last summer, I worked at a summer program for high school students and served as a resident assistant and teaching assistant. Throughout the summer, I felt excited about the work I was doing and never felt as if the job actually constituted real work. However, this summer, I did not get the same rush of excitement. Instead, I felt rather stifled by the work environment. Also, as I was working in an office, I felt really disconnected from the work that I was doing and the people the work was actually helping. From an introspective lens, I now know that working full time in an office is not conducive to my learning, productivity, or overall happiness. In countless ways, I am so eternally grateful to have had this experience and to now have a better understanding of where to proceed with my life as a graduate and move forward.

More information on the RRASC internship program: clpp.hampshire.edu/RRASC