This summer I interned at Advocates for Youth in Washington, D.C. through the RRASC program. I was assigned to the communications department and was specifically tasked with doing research for the organization. My internship will be extended through the school year and I will be working part-time remotely. Therefore, I will be using present tense on projects I am still working on.

During the summer I worked on two major tasks. The first was blogging for Advocate’s outreach website, Amplify. My three blogs per week were usually on whatever subject I wanted to explore. I tried to discuss some important issues happening in the reproductive justice (RJ) movement that either were not covered by major media outlets or whose connection to the RJ movement were not always inherently clear. I liked having the flexibility to highlight a spectrum of issues. Fellow Advocates bloggers and people who accessed the site read these blogs the most. I noticed most of the feedback I received was not from comments on the blog, but from my co-workers who had read it. Often, the subject of the blog would spur them to learn more about the issue, and sometimes the person would decide to incorporate the subject into their work.

The second major responsibility I had was to research issues within the RJ movement and compile the findings into a fact sheet. The fact sheets I completed covered the reproductive rights of incarcerated youth and women, reproductive rights of young people around the world, and a general overview on issues facing transgender youth. Currently, I am working in partnership with the Latina Institute for Reproductive Rights on a fact sheet investigating the reproductive rights of immigrant communities. Once edited, these fact sheets
are posted online to the Advocates for Youth website as a resource to the public. They are also circulated to partners, educators, and youth activists at various events.

Working on fact sheets comprised about 70% of my time at Advocates, so I certainly honed my research skills. While I’ve had many research-orientated jobs in the past, each experience requires a slightly different process. For example, learning which sources are the most trusted and respected in the reproductive justice world takes time. Another skill I developed was learning who to reach out to at an organization. Although only about 30 people work at Advocates, every person has a specific job and skill set. Throughout my internship I learned who to go to for a question and how to utilize some of the connections various co-workers have.

The final task I had was to help with any other major projects happening in the office. For example, one week we had a large mailing of our 1 in 3 abortion storybooks that required all staff. I enjoyed tasks like these because it enabled me to interact with staff members I might not have encountered and provided a perspective on all the small- and large-scale projects occurring in the office.

My time at Advocates has gone very smoothly with little difficulties. Learning as much as possible about the RJ movement was the most challenging part. Prior to this internship, I possessed little knowledge about reproductive justice issues and how they overlapped with other movements. For my first few weeks there was certainly a large learning curve; however, I did enjoy the challenge of “catching up.” Memorizing all of the commonly used acronyms continues to challenge me. It helped to write down everything I learned in one journal that I could easily reference.
The people I have met have been the highlight of my internship. Everyone I work with has been so welcoming and gone out of their way to help me be successful. Each person is incredibly passionate about youth empowerment and it was certainly infectious. I looked forward to going into the office each day. My fellow interns were also wonderful activists and friends. It was helpful to have people who were also new at Advocates to talk with and bounce ideas off of.

Looking back I wish I had gone to more events around the city - whether a panel, brown bag, or briefing. Every day someone at Advocates would circulate an upcoming event that was related to our work. While I did take advantage of some events, I wish I had attended more. The Advocates staff always encouraged us interns to go to whatever we were interested in, yet I still felt hesitant sometimes to ask to leave the office. The events I did attend were invaluable in connecting what I learned through my research at Advocates to wider activist work.

My academic experiences were partially helpful in preparing me for this internship. Content-wise the majority of my experience was new. My public policy classes helped me to understand the legislative process of many of the issues I worked on. Rigor-wise I felt prepared. The workload could be demanding at times, but was manageable due to the time management skills I have developed while at Smith.

Currently, I would like to change the media landscape by researching and accurately presenting stories that largely remain uncovered. Doing this through my blogs certainly was rewarding and assured me that this is what I am passionate about. Seeing how access to
information shapes policies and public opinion while working at Advocates motivated me to write quality, balanced, and unbiased blogs.

In addition, living in D.C. revealed the importance of personal and professional networks. While I have a love-hate relationship with the city, there is not better place to be if you want access to some of the most forward-thinking organization shaping the RJ movement. I will definitely remember how an experience can be shaped by geography in my future.

Not only did I learn about the RJ movement during my internship, but also how it overlaps with other social justice issues. Much of the research I did was looking at community demographics and the presence (or lack of) reproductive rights. I also learned about the intersection of immigration, incarceration, environmentalism, women’s rights, and technology with reproductive rights through a brownbag series. These weekly lunches gave me a lot of insight as to why the RJ movement is so crucial and affects more aspects of life than many people realize.

For future interns I suggest meeting with at least one person from each department. Throughout the summer I did this and it really gave me a sense of what Advocates does as an organization. When you’re constantly working on your assigned tasks I find I get tunnel vision and can lose sight of where my work fits into the mission of the organization. Having a solid understanding of the breakdown of roles and responsibilities can also aid you when you want to reach out and develop an idea. For example, if I hadn’t met with one of our administrative staff members, I wouldn’t have known that there was an option to partner with the Latina Institute.
I also think it is helpful to connect with interns at other RJ organizations. Throughout the summer I established great relationships with students at many organization through the brown bag series and by attending events hosted by partner organizations such as conferences. While many of Advocate’s partner organizations work on similar issues, I noticed some took very different approaches in their advocacy and education campaigns. It is helpful to compare approaches to figure out which models you think are successful. In addition, by meeting interns from other organizations I was able to have extensive conversations on what our generation is going to do to further advance and protect the reproductive rights of our country and world.

Overall, I am very pleased with how my internship went. I learned a lot about youth activism and reproductive justice. Before I started this internship I was not sure how the RJ movement fit into my career goals. I understood and supported the trajectory and objectives of the movement, but now I am an active advocate and understand how important the RJ movement is to the advancement of society. While there are many NGOs I support, I think I am most aligned with the political beliefs of Advocates for Youth. Advocates never shied away from voicing their opinion on controversial issues, which I appreciate after working at organization that acted at the whim of their donors. The goal of Advocates to be at the forefront of youth activism and continuously challenge the direction of the RJ movement was refreshing.

In addition to the structure and political culture at Advocates, I enjoyed the projects I was assigned. Researching various topics not only informed me, but also allowed me to highlight the information I thought was most relevant to those I work with. The workload was
definitely substantial and challenging. An indicative moment was when I initially met with my supervisor and brought up the 70/30 substantial work clause on the RRASC contract. She immediately laughed and explained that all of my work would be relevant and informative. I truly felt that my contributions to the organization were valued and saw that they would be incorporated into the publications and resources that Advocates shares with the public.