This summer, RRASC placed me to intern with the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health. Although I was very excited to be working with them around issues of reproductive justice and health in the Latina community, I was slightly apprehensive at first. I had been hoping to be placed with Advocates for Youth because of their work around providing comprehensive sex education, but reproductive justice on a policy level was also something I was interested in. Whatever expectations I had at the beginning, my experience definitely exceeded them. I could not have asked for a more welcoming office environment, and during the entire time I was at NLIRH, I felt like a respected member of the staff. I definitely learned a lot during my 10 weeks of interni

g, not only from the actual work that I was doing, but also from getting to know my coworkers, and the conversations we all had. I feel more confident in many new skills that I feel will be very useful for working in the field of reproductive justice, and I made many valuable connections whom I have learned from and will definitely be able to use in the future.

From the very start, I felt welcomed in the office. Diana, who was my official supervisor, showed me around the office and introduced me to everyone. My official title was the Community Mobilization (CM) intern, meaning I would be working with the CM team. The CM team consisted of Diana, Angy, Karina, and myself. Diana informed me that although she would be signing the paperwork, I would primarily be working with Karina and assisting in helping to plan the Latina Week of Action, an annual week of activism events that the organization has organized for the last 5 years. I mentioned that I have a lot of experience with planning events and doing outreach, and many years of research experience, which Karina was very excited about. During the first week, we did not do very much planning for the Week of Action, but in the following weeks, planning for the Week of Action dominated most of my days. Right from the start, my research skills were utilized to compile many different lists of the different laws in place
in each state and county regarding protests and demonstrations. During every Week of Action, our different groups around the country stage protests and demonstrations, and because many of our activists are undocumented, getting arrested is a very real concern. I also mentioned to Karina that I would be interested in doing curriculum work, and so in any moments that were not spent on the Week of Action or things that needed to be done around the office were spent working on the Latinas Organizing for Leadership and Advocacy (LOLA) curriculum. Working on the LOLA curriculum meant revising PowerPoint presentations, reorganizing files, taking stock of the resources we have, updating power points to a new format, and adding updates to the curriculum. I helped to create a “debunking abortion myths” section that would be used in an abortion access workshop, and also a fact sheet with statistics on racism against Latinos in the United States. It was really enjoyable to get to see what goes into planning workshops and conferences, and although I didn’t get to plan my own workshops or make up any sessions, I felt like I was given an important responsibility to help update the current workshops and to add content to them. While updating the power points to a new format was not particularly exciting, it was really interesting to look at how concepts such as advocacy and lobbying were explained to women who were unfamiliar with them.

Planning for the Week of Action, as I mentioned before, dominated most of the summer. There were weekly team meetings conducted throughout the summer with the leaders of each office. Each of our groups is called a LAN (Latina Advocacy Network), so we would have a group phone conference with the Florida LAN, Texas LAN, and Virginia LAN. The meetings were conducted entirely in Spanish, and we would talk about what we wanted the theme of this year to be, what the goals of each LAN were, what events they wanted to host, which issues to focus on, etc. During the meeting where each group decided which types they wanted to do, I was put in charge of taking minutes. I was initially hesitant to do so because I am not completely confident in my Spanish, but I ended up being able to easily understand what everyone was saying. One of my biggest responsibilities for helping to plan the Week of Action was somewhat of a managerial position; I had to constantly call and email to check in with each of our LANs and our two sister organizations, California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) and the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights to see which events they were planning on doing, the times and dates, details, whether the events were public, whether press could be there, etc. Originally, they were supposed to fill out a google form, and I would create a google calendar, but because no one did it by our proposed deadline, it was very difficult to do so. The google calendar actually didn’t get done until the week before the Week of Action, which was very last minute and frustrating on my part. It wasn’t anyone’s fault; the weeks leading up to the Week of Action are very busy, but I was worried that I wouldn’t have a complete calendar to send to our DC office for our press release. Another one of my tasks for the Week of Action was to set up appointments with different legislators in the Texas Rio Grande Valley. At first, I thought it would be simple, given the fact that legislators are elected by their constituents and are supposed to be responsive to them. Yet this seemingly simple task took a frustratingly long 3-4 weeks to complete, and I wasn’t even
able to make appointments with all 4 of the congressmen that we wanted to see. I have never had to be so persistent in my life; I began by emailing daily, and then I progressed to daily emails and phone calls to the very unresponsive and uncooperative offices. These were the offices of conservative politicians who did not agree with us on the matters we wanted to meet with them about, and so they hid. The one congressman I couldn’t get an appointment with was the most frustrating. Every time I called, I was informed that I had to call his scheduler, and so, of course I did, but she was never in the office. One day, the week before our Week of Action, I was informed that she would be out of the office until the following Monday, and could I please send her an email? Frustrated, I did so, only to have her tell me that she was not actually in charge of the congressman’s schedule. Our group ended up holding a vigil and demonstration in front of his office instead of having an actual visit in order to get the message across about the humanitarian crisis at the border, but it was still upsetting to me. I felt like I had failed, even though Diana assured me that I had done all I could to secure an appointment, and that sometimes, this was what happened. Another frustrating aspect of trying to get an appointment with the congressmen was that in each case, I was told that the congressman was too busy, and that our group would have to meet with their field representative or chief of staff. On the bright side of all of these frustrations, I’m now extremely skilled at writing professional emails and making professional phone calls, which I know will be extremely useful in any job I may have in the future.

There were many more positive aspects to my internship than negative ones. Many of the highlights included being able to see exactly how much work goes into executing events successfully, and being part of the process. I have never been part of planning this type of event on such a large scale, and while it was very stressful at times, it was also highly enjoyable for me. Because the goal of the Week of Action is to further the reproductive rights of the Latina community, it made all of the stress and the worry worth it. Another highlight was just being in an environment with so many powerful Latina women. As a young Latina feminist, most of the mainstream feminist movement is not composed of women who have had my experience, or who understand what it is like to be Latina in America, and so I really enjoyed being in the type of environment that allowed me to work for justice in my community and feel very proud to be who I am. I definitely developed my research skills further with all of the research I had to do; it was all very interesting research and I’m definitely even better at finding information quickly than I was before. Another highlight of my internship was seeing how successful our Week of Action was, and realizing that I helped to make it happen. I had never really envisioned myself as part of a political struggle before, not one that was organized anyway. During our recap of the Week of Action, it felt so empowering to hear what a success all of our events had been. I couldn’t believe that I made something so incredible happen, and it made me realize the kind of potential that I have. I feel like this internship really helped me realize that I don’t only want to do work with people on issues of reproductive justice; I also want to work to change the issues in my community on a systemic and political level. The only real negative part of my internship was when, on occasion, I had to do tedious work, like replacing inserts in
binders, or going through the storage room. It also could get lonely sometimes if there was nobody present in my section of the office. Diana was often busy with meetings or phone calls, and sometimes Karina and/or Angy would be out, so it would be a very quiet day. There were also moments when I had finished all of my work and had nothing else to do, so I would end up not doing anything for a bit until something else came up. These moments were few and far between though, and for the most part, I did what I felt was very productive work.

I definitely learned a lot during my time at NLIRH: I learned to think critically about reproductive justice as not just its own issue, but as an intersectional issue that encompasses immigrant rights, queer liberation, and more. I learned about all of the work that goes into community organizing, and how to apply all of the concepts I had learned in the classroom to real life. It is one thing to learn about the struggle for reproductive rights, but to actually be working in the struggle for reproductive rights is an entirely different experience. I’m grateful for taking the classes that I did though, because when I came into this internship, I was already familiar with the framework embodied by NLIRH. Overall, I had a wonderful experience at NLIRH. I know that I’ll remember everything that I’ve learned here and apply all of my new knowledge to my future pursuits and goals. While I still care deeply about advocating for comprehensive sex education in schools, I’ve been inspired to one day work at the policy-level in order to enact some sort of systemic change in the way the government treats issues of women’s health.

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