Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps (RRASC) Intern Final Report

SOFIA PICATOSTE
Hampshire College

Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights
http://www.colorlatina.org/
Denver, CO

This summer, I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to be a RRASC intern with a truly amazing organization called COLOR, or Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights. COLOR is a small nonprofit RJ organization, as well as the only RJ organization in the state of Colorado. I’m so thankful for being able to go to Denver, a city completely new to me, and getting to work with COLOR’s awesome team for the two and a half months I was there. I feel I learned an incredible amount of valuable lessons and skills while interning with COLOR, through both positive and challenging experiences.

I began my internship on the second of June, and was both nervous and excited to start. During that first week, after attending events and meeting so many new faces, I was assigned the responsibilities and projects that I would be working on as a communications and social media intern. A huge aspect of my job was to post daily on all of COLOR’s social media platforms. I also took pictures and videos at all events I attended.

I provided support with communications and social media on the many campaigns COLOR is involved in. One example is COLOR’s youth focused comprehensive sex education campaign called I Got This (or Lo Tengo Bajo) where I provided social media support by posting on the I Got This pages. I also did communications and social media work for our Youth Advisory Council, now called COLORado1in3, who are involved in the 1 in 3 campaign that focuses on fighting against stigma around abortion. I often worked closely with one of COLOR’s community organizer’s Amber Garcia, where I provided support by contacting volunteers that include youth members of COLORado1in3. Other projects/events I was involved in include Denver Pride, COLOR’s monthly Cafecitos, No 67 Campaign, Arroba, Parson’s Project, and Latina Week of Action with one of COLOR’s main RJ partners National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH). In terms of policy, I provided social media and communication support when the Hobby Lobby decision was announced, as
well as the response bill COLOR is involved in called the Protect Women’s Health from Corporate Interference Act (also known as the “Not My Boss’ Business Act”). I attended a meeting with COLOR, partner organizations, and legislators involved in the bill and did social media work.

Another aspect of my internship was providing writing and editing support for Ryann, our Communications Director, and Cristina Aguilar, our E.D. for press releases, speeches, etc. Also, I was always taking notes. I would take very detailed notes during meetings, conferences, and certain events. I’d provide thorough notes, then pull out the takeaways/actions for next steps, and then circulate the document with staff. Co-workers said my support with note taking/stating COLOR’s next steps/actions was incredibly helpful. Thus, I always provided feedback from events/meetings I attended.

Along with working on campaigns and projects for COLOR as well as attending/working events, I was assigned to work on COLOR’s communications draft plan and annual communications calendar. I created an online doc to make the annual calendar accessible for all staff, and creating docs to help organize for COLOR’s weekly Organizer/Communication meetings. I assisted on providing edits and updating these documents as I worked closely with COLOR’s communications director, Ryann.

One aspect that had a huge influence throughout my internship was COLOR’s staff transition. During my stay with the organization, staff were required to get together and meet with COLOR’s hired transition consultant. Looking back, I’m glad I was interning during this process because of how much I learned about non-profit work and the inner workings of COLOR. It provided space to see how an RJ organization sticks to its mission while coming up against many obstacles such as having enough funding or being understaffed. I gained admiration for COLOR and everyone in the organization! Although the transition presented challenges, it also was endearing and exciting to see how COLOR is going through change. It definitely inspired me for the kind of work I want to become involved in for my own career path that could involve writing and communications work for another social justice organization.

It was always interesting when working with certain partner organizations. Some of these partner organizations are well known health care organizations that focus on providing reproductive health care as well as sex education. These organizations also claim to be RJ organizations, but are clearly far from that and ignore the reproductive justice work and RJ movement that women of color started decades ago and RJ work that continues today. It provided perspective to work with COLOR and these partner organizations and gaining an understanding of what it means to have to navigate around them in order to focus on the RJ work COLOR does. I think it is such an incredible skill to be able to meet people and organizations where they are and be able to be successful while also not jeopardizing your own mission and values. I’ve seen this skill in all of COLOR’s staff members, from working with partner organizations to tabling an event. I was able to work on this skill for myself as well, and it is one I strive to continue to work on.

Along with learning skills of working with multiple organizations, I also realized how my studies at Hampshire greatly influenced my learning process and assisted me in feeling confident as an intern. My concentration at Hampshire is journalism, media
studies, and race and gender studies, so I was nervous to work at an RJ organization when I don’t solely study women’s health or public health policy. However, I knew I had studied RJ in some of my critical race theory classes, and how RJ began as a movement by and for women of color that moves away from the pro-choice/pro-life paradigm, and encompasses capturing the difficulties multiple systems of oppression present against women of color who are trying to access reproductive health care. I've also studied some public policy in a few of my courses at Hampshire. Having this background and also just reading on my own time about RJ and attending CLPP’s annual conferences gave me some confidence in my ability to intern at an RJ organization. In the end, I learned a lot about RJ work and more specifically about the work COLOR does for Latina reproductive health care, and the Latino community in Denver. COLOR fights for Latinas to have access to reproductive health care regardless of where they work, their income, or immigration status, and its been inspiring and an amazing learning process to see how COLOR as an RJ organization does advocacy work for the community, versus reading about RJ work in an academic setting.

It has been a fulfilling learning process throughout my entire internship with COLOR and there are definitely rewarding experiences worth highlighting. One example was working at Denver Pride, which was during the beginning of my internship. Pride was so much fun, and definitely a rewarding experience to get to work with some of COLOR’s dedicated youth volunteers. It was fulfilling to get to talk to people about all of the different work COLOR does, with advocating for reproductive health care access to comprehensive youth sex education work. To see people get excited about the work COLOR does and becoming interested in about learning more or getting involved was always rewarding. Another memorable experience is the No on 67 Campaign Rally Kick-Off that was towards the end of my internship. All staff attended, and it’s always fun to go to an event where COLOR’s staff comes together. It’s also been awesome to hear COLOR’s ED Cristina Aguilar give speeches at certain events like the No 67 rally. It’s inspiring to hear Cristina talk about COLOR and the work COLOR does, along with discussing a certain policy or pivotal moment taking place, and how COLOR’s work applies to it as an RJ organization.

Overall, my internship with COLOR was positive in terms of it being an incredible RJ learning experience. It’s been amazing to see COLOR fight for Latina reproductive autonomy, and it’s been incredibly rewarding to have been a part of it. For future RRASC interns, I would suggest to be ready to take on this amazing opportunity with full force, and trust yourself that you can do it!

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