My internship at the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) this summer was a most rewarding experience. I was introduced to the reproductive rights movement worldwide and its challenges during the internship. Similarly, I received a firsthand experience on working efficiently in a medium to large organization like CRR. I also learnt a lot about working for social justice, and had the opportunity to work with highly competent advocates of women’s fundamental rights all over the world.

Projects and tasks performed:

During the ten-week internship, I worked eight hours a day and five days a week. As an undergraduate intern, my tasks were subdivided into substantive and administrative tasks. My work throughout the internship consisted equal amounts of substantive and administrative projects. The details of the projects I carried out are as follows.

• Substantive projects:

1) **Fact checking:** I worked on two fact-checking projects during the internship. In fact, for my first project at CRR, I had to check facts for a factsheet on the Lakshmi Dhikta v. Government of Nepal case prepared by former RRASC intern Sweta Adhikari. I also did fact-checking on amicus curiae from the Center on a maternal mortality case in Brazil. I made a systematic list of errors and rectified them. The fact-checking projects were slightly frustrating at first as I had
difficulty accessing some of the sources. Eventually, with some more effort and patience, I completed them.

2) **Fact finding:** One of my primary projects during the internship was a fact finding project for a maternal mortality report on the Philippines for Advocate Melissa Upreti, the Center’s legal adviser for Asia. More specifically, the research was focused on unsafe abortion as a cause of maternal mortality in the country. I had to research international NGOs and UN bodies that are funding reproductive health care in the Philippines. Furthermore, the process involved going through their reports, press releases or statements and looking for policy recommendations on unsafe abortion and maternal mortality in the Philippines. The project was quite time consuming and I had to be meticulous with the language used in the various publications. I compiled and systematically arranged recommendations from different organizations and submitted them to Melissa.

3) **Translations:** I also had the opportunity to translate documents from Nepali to English for the Center’s records. I translated and summarized a new court petition filed by the Center and its partners in Nepal demanding access to proper reproductive health services for disabled women and for their reproductive rights.

   One of my bigger projects was doing research and translations for a legal intern’s project on the constitution drafting process in Nepal and inclusion of women’s reproductive rights. The process involved translating draft reports of the various committees in the Constituent Assembly and highlighting mandates on reproductive rights and services. I struggled due to some difficulties with Nepali
legal terms. But, I overcame that with the help of an online dictionary and advocate Melissa Upreti.

4) **Other research**: Aside from the translations and fact-finding, I carried out smaller research projects. For instance, I looked for sources online on reproductive rights in the Philippines for a briefing paper. Another project involved research on submission of periodic state reports to the African Commission for Human and Peoples’ Rights. I also did some research on funding sources for reproductive health care in El Salvador for the Center’s future projects in the country.

Hence, I got to do some scale of research related to different regions.

The skills that were most useful during the internship included excellent communication and research skills. I realized that I had to be particularly thorough and patient when carrying out research projects in order to achieve effective results and complete them on time. Communicating effectively with supervisors, attorneys and other staff members was very important. At times, I faced some difficulty in getting essential technical support. While almost everyone at the Center was extremely supportive, not all were willing to help promptly. In such instances, I realized that being persistent and tactful was highly important. Being clear, precise and organized was also of essence in order to achieve fruitful results.

Aside from tasks and projects, the Center hosted numerous events and activities for interns. Brownbag lunches were always engaging and educational, and were based on a wide range of issues within the reproductive rights movement. Similarly, bi-monthly International Legal Program meetings were equally interesting. Interns were also treated to occasional chitchats on our progress by Jaime Gher, legal fellow for Global advocacy at the Center. Among
all the events, the highlight of the internship for me was our visit to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) session on Liberia. The visit was a nice break from desk work in the office. The session itself exceeded my expectations and was rather fascinating and educational.

While I learned a great deal about the issues and challenges of the reproductive rights movement, I also honed my organizational skills and learned to balance simultaneous projects by carrying out different administrative tasks along with research work. In addition, I learned to work efficiently in a demanding professional setting. Research opportunities during the internship really exposed me to reproductive rights and other social justice issues. However, if I could do anything differently, I would have initiated an independent project instead of simply contributing in part, in order to get more out of the experience.

My academic work prior to the internship helped me more in carrying out research and working on time sensitive projects rather than preparing me with the content itself. However, course materials for Economic Development and Comparative Politics did help me understand the urgency for women’s development and their empowerment in order for all women to be able to exercise their freedom and rights.

In the long run, I wish to work in economic development and also focus on women’s empowerment. The internship helped me understand more about the need for the legality of reproductive rights and health in developing countries, and the interconnection of economic development and sound reproductive health. The internship has encouraged me to delve deeper into health economics as a potential career.

Prior to the internship, I had very little or no idea about reproductive rights. The internship has definitely helped me understand reproductive rights, especially in a legal
framework. I also realized that reproductive rights is not limited to the right to abortion and that it spans a variety of issues related to reproductive health. The internship helped me understand the connection between reproductive rights and other social justice issues, and to identify the different challenges faced by different communities when it comes to reproductive rights. The internship also helped me grasp the concept of maternal mortality as a human rights issue than simply as a development issue. Most importantly, I came to understand reproductive rights as women’s fundamental rights. Therefore, the internship fulfilled my wish to explore the reproductive rights movement and was highly beneficial. In terms of the structure of the internship, I had expected more substantive projects and some field events based on former RRASC interns’ reports. Nevertheless, I tried to make the most of it.

My desire to learn more about reproductive freedom became easier with the help of the supportive staff at the Center. Although the office was fairly big, interns were given personal attention and were encouraged in their projects. I was given proper and continuous feedback from my supervisors. The legal assistants and attorneys really convinced me that I was doing important work and was contributing to the Center.