During my summer working for the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health (NLIRH) I experienced many things for the first time. It was my first time living away from my family outside of college, my first nine to five, and my first time working with a group dedicated to addressing the needs of the Latina community. While it was an amazing, transforming experience I cannot say it was positive 100% of the time. There were definitely times where I felt like I pushed myself beyond my limits, times when I felt like I was not getting the results I wanted and felt defeated. However, more often than not I felt appreciated; I felt valued for who I was and like no one else could do the work I was doing. I learned new skills, I learned new things about myself, and gained a valuable understanding of working in communications and outreach.

When I arrived at the office on the first day of my internship I met Stephanie, who showed me around the office and told me a little about the goals and interests of NLIRH. Later that day I would meet Liz, Karina, and Angy, who made up the community mobilization team I would be primarily working with during my summer. When Karina arrived she asked me about my interests and skills. I had the opportunity to look over their website and blog that morning so I brought up skills I thought would be relevant. I told her that I wrote for a political blog at Hampshire, that I knew how to use Photoshop and InDesign, and that I can make videos. I also talked about how I am a creative person in general. From my first day to the last, my creative
skills were valued and frequently utilized. A huge portion of my assignments were things I had talked about on that first day. I wrote blogs almost every week, I became the go-to person in the office for flyers and other graphic design projects, and I got to make a video.

Latina Week of Action was our biggest project and I arrived just in time to start preparing for it. During one of my first weeks, Karina and I came up with a schedule for our Latina Week of Action plans. We scheduled when we would send out mass emails to the activists we hoped would participate in Latina Week of Action, what resources we were providing to our activists and when they would be available, and other dates, such as when the final cut of the video needed to be done. We had a big calendar on the wall of the office and I designed a PDF version to send to our activists with copies in English and Spanish, as well as making a Google calendar for the community mobilization team. Once Latina Week of Action was around a month away, I started designing and posting countdown images that would have a photo from someone in the NLIRH’s network next to a short reminder of what NLIRH was up to that day. There were posts at least once a week in both English and Spanish versions. One post I wrote reminded our activists that that evening we would be hosting an E-LOLA offering training in legislative advocacy. The E-LOLA was a good idea that did not really pan out. We offered to host four E-LOLAs. There would be trainings offered in both English and Spanish on legislative advocacy and talking points for meetings with elected officials. We had made a Google doc that we sent to our activists listing the ways we were asking them to take action and telling them what resources we would be providing, such as the E-LOLAs, petitions, blog support and more. During the week of the first set of E-LOLAs, Karina was out of the office and Liz was not as involved in planning the E-LOLA, so I was put in charge of facilitating. I was really nervous because I had no experience facilitating anything like that, and I felt like everything I had learned about the
logistics of legislative advocacy had come from my time at NLIRH. Because I was worried, I made an agenda that I sent to some other staff members from the D.C. office that would be on the call. But even though people had respond saying they would be participating, no one but myself and the two D.C. staff members got on the call. We ended up cancelling all the E-LOLAs. After the first one, we learned to call all of the activists to see if they would be participating in that night’s E-LOLA and we cancelled every one because of how many people were unavailable.

The E-LOLAs were one of a very small number of times when it really felt like the work I was doing was not getting any results. I had a big role in all the communications with our activists. I was sending e-mails every week and I was making phone calls almost as often, and for a really long period of time I was getting little to no response. Initially that type of communication was not something I was very used to; I would have my supervisors check every little detail before sending an e-mail and I would ask if there was a script I should follow before making a series of calls. By the end of my internship I had my own voice and style in my e-mails and while I was still following a script when I made calls, it was a script I had written to be consistent. While phone calls and emails are still not my favorite task, I am grateful that I have become more comfortable doing those things because of this practice. It was hard when I was not getting responses after multiple forms of contact, but when Latina Week of Action was getting really close people started to get back to me and let me know the information I sent them had arrived.

A very small part of my time at NLIRH was spent doing boring or busy work. I occasionally did things like organizing the storage room or data entry. I usually did that kind of work when people were out of the office. One of the biggest challenges was figuring out what to
do when one or both of my supervisors were out of the office. Karina and Liz do a lot of field work, so there were a few times when they were both out for most of or the entire week. When they went away Karina would give me a list of tasks by date and I would always finish my assignments before the end of the work day. Sometimes I would even finish a whole other day’s worth of assignments in one day. When that happened it was hard to figure out what to do. I would contact Karina and sometime she would have some other tasks, but sometimes she would tell me to just ask around the office. I found myself not knowing how to spend my time in the most productive way on many of those days, and during my exit interview I suggested that for future interns it would be nice to always have a list of nonessential tasks that could be picked up at any time. With such a list, interns would always be able to know what they could be doing, even when supervisors are not in the office.

Something that I could pretty much always do was keep the Facebook page active. In my time at NLIRH, I wrote a lot of the Facebook statuses and uploaded hundreds of photos. I was given room to be creative with the Facebook posts. During my last week I wrote captions for a small selection of photos from the Latina Week of Action albums and shared a different photo daily. A lot of the times when I was sharing something on the Facebook page it was content I produced. I posted all of my own blogs and I got to choose which section of text to share, though Karina would always tell me what her favorite parts were and I usually used those. I was also in charge of sharing and posting all of the images I designed for NLIRH. I also had too many graphic design projects to count – I made the countdown images, flyers, calendars, and signs for people to pose with in solidarity with our campaigns. I was probably working on some project with Photoshop every week I was there. I got a huge amount of practice and now I feel more
comfortable with those tools and my interests in graphic design has grown immensely. I also feel like my blog skills got exercised and improved quite a bit during my time at NLIRH.

In the beginning, it was a bit daunting to see how many things needed to be done and sometimes in the midst of busy days, it got overwhelming. It was my first time ever working a nine to five and that was sometimes really rough. I learned a lot about myself and what I am capable of. I also learned what to look out for to let me know when I’m pushing myself too hard. My experience with NLIRH has shed a little light on some potential goals for outside of college. I would really love to be able to do freelance media work like video and graphic design at least part of the time, but there’s definitely a lot to learn and practice before then.

The work experience was overall very good, and it would not have been as positive without the friendly, enthusiastic staff members of NLIRH. Every lunch we had as a staff was fun and memorable and I will never forget the relationships I built and the great conversations I had with the community mobilization team. Yes, it was great that my skills and interests were valued, but the fact that I was valued as a person and friend was what really made the difference. I would recommend an internship at NLIRH to any future RRASC. My advice is that although there are benefits to being a self-driven, independent worker, there is just as much to gain from asking questions and putting yourself out there. The staff there will not treat you like you are just an intern or an inferior, and to look at them as just superiors would be missing out. They are co-workers who want to know what you bring to the table and want to help you accomplish your goals. They will check in with you about what your work plans are for the week as well as asking how your weekends are. It is a great institution with a great staff and any intern would be lucky to work there.