The Center for Genetics and Society has two main focus areas within their organization. As a nonprofit, information, and public affairs organization, CGS encourages responsible use and efficient governance of new human genetic and reproductive technologies. My responsibilities as an intern were distributed throughout the organization to allow me to indulge in the many different topics and issues that CGS covers.

The highlights of my internship are cannot be limited to one subject. The variation of work assigned to me really enhanced my experience and gave me an insight into this field of work. I was initially assigned to work with the biotechnology and media section of CGS on a report looking at the issues surrounding somatic cell nuclear transfer. I began with gathering new research and new developments on this subject. Within the first month of my internship there were many new developments surrounding SCNT, some that had the possibility of opening the doors to successful human gene therapy and human cloning. New methods of stem cell research were found, which did not harm human embryos, one of the major controversial topics surrounding stem cell research. My research continued throughout the internship, however, the report was not published because of continuing questions and political disagreements raised by the new developments. I also worked with the Gender & Justice, a section within CGS that focuses on reproductive technologies and is planning to split off from CGS to become an independent nonprofit. Gender & Justice’s main focus is to build a national coalition consisting of many organizations with the same objectives of fighting injustice raised around reproductive technologies and their developments. I worked with two different program directors within Gender & Justice. I researched who, how, and where genetic counselors are trained and hired. This area is very important to reproductive technologies because it is often the genetic counselors who advise parents-to-be whether an abortion “needed” or not based on results of a pre-implantation diagnostic (PGD). This research was very interesting because of the little criteria and minimal certification needed to be a genetic counselor. I also worked on summarizing human right declarations and conventions concerning human genetics and reproductive technologies. The purpose of this project is to adapt the human rights language to the reproductive technologies and the injustices surrounding them. Finally, towards the end of my internship, Gender & Justice collaborated with Choice USA to launch a college
campus campaign, educating college women about the risks surrounding egg donation. CGS is providing the educational information for this campaign while Choice USA is providing the leadership and financial support for colleges who choose to promote this campaign. Before leaving CGS, I helped design the campaign by giving my opinion as a college student on what interested me within the materials to be presented. I plan to continue working with Choice USA and CGS to help pilot the workshop and help develop it if needed later.

The freedom given to me as an intern was the main highlight of the internship. Without the ability to work with all sections of the organization, I would have been limited to the knowledge I have gained. One of the most interesting tasks given to me was saving daily articles from newspapers, national and international, concerning topics CGS follows into their archives. This allowed me to view the media’s perspective on these issues while viewing new developments in these fields. This was also very valuable because it showed me other perspectives on these subjects, which allowed me to fully develop my own opinions surrounding these controversial topics.

The different topics and their backgrounds were very extensive and almost overwhelming. However, CGS allowed me time to acclimate myself to the organization and their views before assigning me projects, as described above. During this adjusting time, I assisted with the final launch of CGS’s new website and helped with administrative work. The web experience is irreplaceable because I was able to see how a truly intricate website functions and works behind the scenes. Although the time given to me was very necessary and greatly appreciated, it was over extended and I felt as though this time could have been spent on more projects. This time was not wasted because it gave me insight into another aspect of the organization, one that is not praised like the others. I was exposed to the fundraising side of nonprofit organizations, helped with research for possible grants, and even edit grant proposals. I also used this time to help with administrative work. Although this was not the most exciting part of my internship experience, it was useful to learn about databases, network spaces, and other features of administration which are the backbone to any organization.

A more personal difficulty I experienced was adjusting to a 40 hour week and the office atmosphere. The CGS office dynamic was very different than I expected because of its small size. The office was very friendly with one another, however, because of the tremendous amount of work each individual was responsible for, it was often quiet and lunches were usually skipped. This was a very pleasing surprise to me because of the
amount of passion and effort CGS put into their individual work. This small office experience allowed me to adopt the same frame of mind while I was in the office. I was able to produce a good amount of work in an eight hour day, as well as learn from the many issues I was working on. My research skills and the ability to transform massive amounts of information into concise documents summarizing the information were skills that were developed and mastered. Another skill I learned was how to interact in an office setting and contribute to the office dynamic. Although this skill sounds like common sense, it was something I had taken for advantage, and then was able to reassess my actions, presence, and performance in the office.

CGS has given me more than a summer internship experience. My time at CGS has helped focus my career goals and has given me many paths with structured direction. With a science background, it was easy for me to adapt to the scientific nature of the topics. However, CGS exposed me to the politics and policies surrounding these issues that I had been unaware of before. With this summer internship experience, I will use my scientific background to make an informed impression on the new and developing biotechnologies. CGS has given me more than I expected. I am grateful for the information that I learned through CGS, but also for the office skills that are necessary to survive at any job. Not only did CGS offer me information on developing biotechnologies and office etiquette, but also exposed me to other areas, such as social justice, racial justice, etc. that I am not usually exposed to in my undergraduate career.

Future interns who will work for CGS should have an open mind to the many controversial issues that are covered. Prior knowledge about the organization and the issues covered is also essential, so that no time is wasted and that work on exciting projects can begin right away.