National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF)

I interns for NAPAWF from May 27th to July 31st of 2009 through Hampshire College’s Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps Program. During my time with NAPAWF, I worked on many research and administrative projects, and attended a variety of events as well.

My first research project had me researching and analyzing advertisements for sex selection technologies. A recently proposed bill, called the Pre-natal Nondiscrimination Act, aims to ban sex- and race-selective abortions. NAPAWF’s stance, however, is that new restrictive policies will not remedy the skewed male-female sex ratio. Rather, it is the socio-cultural perceptions and media depictions that continue to perpetuate and exacerbate notions of male superiority. Many news articles have reported that sex selection service providers target certain ethnic communities—often Asian communities—who have a historical preference for the male sex. I created what amounted to a reference database, with relevant resources, quotations, citations, and examples of advertisements, grouped according to where the advertisements had appeared and whether the advertised method of sex selection was pre- or post-conception. This database served as a gathering of evidence to support the view that if society at large continues to propagate notions of male superiority, laws that punish abortion providers and restrict women’s right to abortion are not aiming at the true culprit.

An additional research project that I worked on toward the end of the summer involved the gathering of health disparity data for Hmong, Native Hawaiian and Other
Pacific Islanders, in comparison to other Asian ethnic groups as well as the overall US population. Data collection was challenging, as health statistics are almost never disaggregated to the extent where Hmong, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders are distinctly analyzed. After collecting some of the most notable health disparities, I consolidated all of the data into several charts that displayed the affected ethnic group, the health indicator, and the disparity statistic. The next step for this project, which I could not get to before the end of my internship, is to create and distribute specific fact sheets for some of the most egregious disparities.

The most extensive project of my internship was my research on green nail salons, which ultimately resulted in a ten-page memo with forty pages of additional resources. An ongoing project throughout the summer, my research on green nail salons consisted of several stages. I found some information through my own online research, but because the concept of a green nail salon is still relatively new, not much written research exists. Thus, the majority of the content of the memo came from my interviews with people working in the green business industry, as well as other advocates and activists working on improving the conditions in nail salons. This was definitely a challenge for me, because since I was new to the topic of green nail salons, I was not always sure if I was asking the right questions. As the summer progressed, however, I gradually became more informed about the issues and more comfortable with the interviews. The large network of experts directed me to a number of other relevant resources, including green business program proposals, chemical safety databases, nail salon checklists, and other fact sheets and issue briefs.
My final memo identifies and addresses three of the most frequently asked questions regarding green nail salons: 1) What standards, if any, currently exist for green nail salons? 2) What are the challenges facing green nail salons? 3) What can nail salons do to become greener? Of course, these questions cannot be answered completely, and there are still many other unanswered questions by virtue of the underdevelopment of the green nail salon industry. However, my memo acknowledged some current efforts toward green nail salon certification, identified lack of green standards, low visibility, cost, and lack of safe alternative products as challenges for the green nail salon industry, and also offered some recommendations to nail salon owners who are interested in converting to green salons. For me, this project really underscored the intersectionality of reproductive justice issues: the greening of nail salons concerns advocates across many different sectors, from immigrant rights to worker’s rights to racial justice and environmental justice.

I also worked on a few short-term assignments throughout the summer as well. I wrote for the NAPAWF blog-Warrior Prose and helped my supervisor write a summary of the discussions at a research convening on the nail salon industry. I updated and reorganized NAPAWF’s media contacts list, consolidating several Word documents into a much more user-friendly Excel spreadsheet. Last summer, Congress voted to remove the HIV travel ban, and this summer, the Department of Health and Human Services issued proposed regulations that would remove HIV as a ground of inadmissibility. HHS accepted public comments on the proposal for several weeks, so I drafted a comment on behalf of the National Coalition for Immigrant Women’s Rights (of which NAPAWF is a co-convener), supporting the removal of the HIV travel ban. My comment focused on the
This page contains a text about the discriminatory nature of the existing law and the inappropriate classification of HIV as a "communicable disease of public health significance," which is more aptly applied to diseases that spread via casual contact.

I was fortunate to not have many administrative tasks throughout the summer. The only large administrative task was the fundraiser mailing in June, which was an ongoing project spanning about three weeks. For the first two weeks prior to the scheduled mailing, I went through NAPAWF’s Founding Sister database in an attempt to update the contact information of each Founding Sister. This was actually a slow process, as there were almost 200 Founding Sisters, many of whom were listed with only their names and no additional information. I tried to track down each person with limited clues and a lot of educated guesswork, and then called and/or emailed each individual member to confirm that the contact information we found was correct. Once the Founding Sister database was updated as much as possible, I coordinated the printing of 600 letters, inserts, and mailing labels, collated the contents, sealed and stamped the envelopes. This whole effort took several days to complete, and luckily the entire staff pitched in to help expedite the process.

Along with the work I did this summer, I also helped represent NAPAWF at a number of different events, from intern brown bags, to rallies, to conferences and briefings. Some of the more memorable events from this summer were the Kaiser Family Foundation’s Health Disparities Briefing, the Health Care Town Hall in Annandale with President Obama, the 2009 Campus Progress Conference, and the many OCA brown bags on issues affecting APIs. The many events that I was able to attend offered a fantastic resource for networking and provided an interactive and engaging way of
learning. I had the amazing opportunity of meeting and hearing distinguished speakers such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Kathleen Sebelius- Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Daily Show’s John Oliver, former President Bill Clinton, Kalpen Modi- Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement, Congressman Mike Honda, and even President Obama.

I helped to organize several NAPAWF events as well, including an intern brown bag, part of a series of brown bags sponsored by Law Students for Reproductive Justice. NAPAWF also co-hosted a briefing at the Capitol called “The Impact of Immigration Enforcement on Women and Families,” whose panel included a former detainee as well as a former detention center health care worker. I put together the resource packets that were handed out at this event. Finally, NAPAWF’s summer law clerk and I organized an event for other summer interns through an organization called Defend Yourself, which offers self-defense classes. We discussed different forms of violence in our hometowns, and our instructor discussed various scenarios and different tactics of self-defense that only involved using your voice, eye contact, and other body language to establish boundaries from potential predators. We also learned various moves that target vulnerable parts of the body if we are ever physically attacked.

I have had several internships in the past, but my summer with NAPAWF surpasses all of my previous experiences. I had a direct and very personal connection to the work I was doing, and I absolutely loved the people I was working with. The national office had only two full time staff members and one part time staff member. With the summer law clerk and I, there were five people in the office at most at any given time. The NAPAWF staff and I got to know each other really well, and we became friends at
the same time that we became co-workers. In all of my previous internship experiences, I had a very professional relationship with my bosses; the relationship was strictly supervisor-intern and was essentially nonexistent outside of the office. I think I struck the ideal balance at NAPAWF: everyone had great focus and work ethic, but we also had a lot of fun both in and outside of the office. We would eat lunch together, sometimes eat dinner together, go shopping and to the movies, and everyone invited me to her house at some point in the summer. I felt incredibly welcome right from the start, and the respect and attention I received from the staff gave me more confidence about my own work.

I had an amazing experience at NAPAWF and I loved being in DC at a time where health care and immigration were at the forefront of the nation’s consciousness. I met many other interns and learned about countless organizations devoted to the same platforms, and to be surrounded by such energy is contagious and incredibly empowering. Thank you for an unforgettable summer!