This summer, I was placed with an incredible organization, Nursing Students for Sexual and Reproductive Health in Eugene, Oregon. As a nursing student outside of being a RRASC, I had a previous affiliation with NSSRH, as I am the chapter leader for a group at my college. NSSRH strives to equip nursing students at the baccalaureate and master’s level with sexual and reproductive health education, including abortion training. NSSRH supports nursing students as leaders, educators, and advocates within reproductive and social justice movements. They also offer comprehensive toolkits, scholarships, and trainings to support learning and growth.

My project for the summer was to develop a comprehensive survey that will hopefully be distributed to all of the associate and baccalaureate nursing programs in the United States. The survey will gather information to see what the overall nursing curriculum is like in regard to reproductive health. Hopefully from the results we can have more nursing professors and researchers rewrite NCLEX (the nursing licensure exam) to include the material so it is subsequently integrated in curriculum. It was a huge project to undertake, but I feel it will be beneficial and I am glad to have been a part of it. At the beginning of my internship, I had a video conference with two nursing professors with extensive research experience that would be working on the survey with me. They were also my contact people for the Internal Review Board (IRB) process and were extremely helpful. I started off by gathering previous research that had a similar focus to what I would be researching. I found two main studies and completed literature reviews on both. I modeled my survey based on those studies and use their findings as reference for the development of my survey. With help from my supervisor, we finished the first draft of the survey and sent it for further review before final IRB approval.
Along with the creation of the survey, I created a huge database of all of the associate and bachelor degree nursing programs in the United States. The database information includes the name of each school, dean or chair of the program, location, size, religious affiliation, and type of degree the program awards. It took me about five weeks to complete the database, with some help from another NSSRH intern. I am excited about the existence of the database and I know it will be a great tool for future use. They were super supportive and gave me great feedback to move forward. The rest of my internship was spent updating the database, editing the survey, and communicating frequently with my supervisor. I spent my last week of my internship working for Planned Parenthood at a clinical externship. It was a wonderful way to wrap up my stay and it was great to finally do some more hands-on nursing things. At the clinic, I was able to follow the providers and sit in on medication abortions, annual exams, and lots of contraceptive education. The staff was super supportive and I learned a ton of wonderful information which was definitely lacking from my nursing education.

The skills I used the most during my internship were communication, critical thinking, and time management. I am not the best at time management, but this internship forced me to work on this skill. I spent the majority of my internship managing my own time, especially when I was telecommuting from home. Communication was key in my success during my time at NSSRH. My supervisor was always accessible and helpful when I had questions or concerns. I used critical thinking skills in all aspects of my project, from the literature reviews to the database. It was challenging to create the survey in terms of asking the correct questions to yield the type of responses we were looking for. It was great to be able to work so closely with my supervisor and be able to bounce ideas off of her when I had uncertainties.

One of the biggest difficulties I had to overcome this summer was learning how to work
effectively as a telecommuter. I was able to split my internship time between Eugene and the Bay Area with the support of my incredible supervisor, Sarah. It always takes me a bit of time to acclimate to new situations and when I first went to Eugene, I had a few weeks to get used to working in a brand new city and on a new project. Following my first weeks in Eugene, I returned home and once again had to acclimate to working from home. However, it was a different situation at home because I live with many family members and pets, so it took a bit more time to find a work flow.

The highlights of my internship experience were being able to do work that I never imagined I would be doing at this point in my life. As a future nurse, I know that I will be working with patients in a clinical capacity as opposed to doing research. It was great to get a sense of what nurse researchers do. Another highlight was the week I spent at Planned Parenthood as an extern. The Clinical Externship Program is an incredible program that is offered through NSSRH. They place you at a clinical site that provides abortion services and other reproductive health services as well. My supervisor worked hard on my behalf to make sure that I was able to have that experience. The staff at Planned Parenthood made sure that I was able to shadow them for every opportunity available, and I am so grateful that I was able to have the experience.

The semester previous to my internship, I took the first part of a two-part nursing research course. I was familiar to the process of literature reviews and survey development, which made me feel more comfortable. However, I was not really aware of how in-depth the process is for preparing for IRB approval. It is a time-consuming process, so it was nice to be able to experience it because I will be finishing up a research project for my last semester of nursing school and will have to prepare for IRB approval for that as well.
One of the main motivators for applying for this internship is my growing interest in the reproductive justice field. I am passionate about issues surrounding abortion, contraceptives, sexual education, and racial equity. This internship helped me to look at these issues from an educational viewpoint, which is a different scope for me. It helped me to realize that I can someday make changes for nursing curriculum for future nurses. I have begun to consider working toward going to school to receive a doctorate degree.

My internship was more than I could ever have hoped for. I went into it a little nervous about working in a city that I had never been to before. I also was nervous about what type of relationship I would have with Sarah, and what my work would be during my time at NSSRH. My experience surpassed all of my expectations. As an organization, NSSRH is one of a kind. I appreciate the fact that they are nurses that value the importance of including sexual health and education in a health care capacity. Furthermore, I appreciate that the same group of nurses are working to offer support to students that share the same values. I feel that the mission and work of NSSRH is invaluable to nurses and I feel like I will be a better nurse after my internship.

The time I spent at Planned Parenthood helped me learn more about the intersections of reproductive health and social justice issues. In the state of Oregon, there is a lot of funding available for almost all reproductive health services. If an Oregonian is eligible, the state covers the cost of IUD insertions, birth control prescriptions of all forms, hysterectomies and vasectomies, and other procedures. I saw many people come to the clinic for many different reasons and all of them were able to receive the services they needed. Access to reproductive services is a social justice issue. I understand the accessibility that exists in states like Oregon and California are not the norm in many other states, and this leads to issues including racial disparities and inequity. From what I have observed, when people from lower socio-economic
backgrounds are able to receive contraceptive or other reproductive services, there are always better outcomes for the community as a whole.

My biggest suggestion for potential future interns is to be open-minded and flexible! There were a lot of events that occurred over the course of my summer that I had to face head on and navigate through that would have been very difficult if I had not been flexible. Also, take advantage of any opportunities that may arise during your time at your organization, whether that be attending conferences or meetings, traveling with co-workers and other interns, socializing, doing tourist-y things in your new city, and whatever else may come up.