

# Thankful For My Time at IWES

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Heading into finals, I can definitely say that this semester has been a whirlwind of activity. Despite COVID-19 impacting many facets of my semester, I am so incredibly grateful to have been able to intern at the Maternal and Child Health Division in the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies. I'd like to thank Meshawn Tarver, my internship supervisor, and the rest of the IWES staff for allowing me to help out on this project. This opportunity provided me with the chance to learn more about the racial disparities of birthing processes, as well as gain skills in managing qualitative research data. Applying for this internship was a spur of the moment decision, but the experience I have gained is invaluable, and I am excited to continue into next semester.

My main focus at IWES revolved around a research study focused on looking at the birthing process experiences, from prenatal to postpartum, of Black Women in the New Orleans area. I was first able to read through the transcript of dozens of interviews conducted, either in groups or individually. Both patients and healthcare workers were interviewed. Patients were generally categorized by the experiences they spoke on; we had interviews of experiences in breastfeeding, severe maternal morbidity (SMM), and the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Reading about what these women had to say really solidified my understanding of how racial and socioeconomic disparities in healthcare affect real people. Obviously, before this internship, I understood that the healthcare system was unequal and favored a certain group of people over others. However, reading these women's interviews showed me how individual people are by this imbalance; everyone's experience was unique, but underlying themes of lack of communication and trust in patient-provider relationships flowed through each. I also was able to read some interviews conducted with prenatal, labor and delivery, and NICU nurses, as well as an OB/GYN and midwives. Reading these transcripts offered me an inside perspective of the healthcare system; these providers recognized the inequality occurring in the sector of healthcare they work in and offer insight into how they try to combat that inequality. Reading through these transcripts was the precursor for writing a summary report containing a basic description of the research study and its findings. Writing this report gave me a chance to work on my research writing skills, which was a new opportunity for me! I had never written a research paper prior outside of my academic work.

After undergraduate, I plan to attend medical school and eventually become a doctor. Being able to learn more about the disparities in the medical system which I will one day have to work in is very important. Listening patients' concerns and understanding that everyone has a unique background from which they draw opinions and questions is essential to providing respectful and proper healthcare. Open communication with a patient also goes a long way in building up trust with a patient, and in many of the interviews I read, women discussed feeling dismissed by their doctors and nurses, or not being heard. This internship has given me a chance to hear their voices and help spread their messages to the greater community.

Sincerely,

Pooja Talati