

Sex Education, Policy Analysis and More at IWES

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My name is LaKia Williams and I am a sophomore studying Neuroscience on the pre-medicine track to be an Obstetrician/Gynecologist. While I care about medicine and how that relates to women's health. I also care about the social determinants of women's health, particularly reproductive health, and the ways in which laws and institutions perpetuate a lack of Reproductive Justice. Because of that I am very grateful to be interning this semester with the Institute of Women and Ethnic Studies

(IWES) where I have been able to improve my knowledge on issues regarding laws surrounding reproductive rights and justice, sex education in Louisiana, and the world of Reproductive Justice.

So far my internship has included editing multiple sex education curriculums that were created by IWES to be taught in numerous schools in New Orleans. I have also been compiling sexual health data in Louisiana as well as in the nation at large in order to create a comprehensive analysis of Louisiana with respect to sexual health and sexually transmitted diseases/infections. Another project I've been working on is policy analysis. I created a one-pager of Louisiana sex education laws to be administered to IWES' partners. I also mapped one of IWES' sex education curriculum with Louisiana's health education requirements to see how the two align.

One thing I particularly enjoy about my internship is the focus on mental health and mindfulness not only as an institute doing work in the community but also with a focus on the employees (and interns) as well. There are usually weekly staff tea times where we sit around, drink tea, and eat scones or cupcakes while listening to a lecture. One lecture that I particularly enjoyed was entitled "Treatment Options for Substance Use Disorders & Levels of Care in Greater New Orleans" which was very informative for me because I was able to learn about the different social issues involving substance abuse. The social worker spoke about the different social aspects of substance abuse and the Director of IWES, a psychiatrist, spoke about the physiological and psychological components of substance abuse and its neurological effects.

As an intern I was also able to attend a fully funded grantee conference in Jackson, Mississippi with five employees including two of my supervisors, the director, the chief program officer, and a program manager. I am grateful for this opportunity because I was able to learn more about the grassroots work that is being done in the south surrounding Reproductive Justice. I was also able to network with multiple women doing important work in the New Orleans community, from Lift Louisiana, Women with a Vision, and the Louisiana Public Health Institute and a former RRRH intern, I exchanged information with all these women which allowed me to grow my network and learn about their stories. This internship has allowed me to not only work in Reproductive Justice but to also grow my network, my networking skills, and my confidence.