

Midpoint at Oxfam America

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I have reached the midpoint of my internship at Oxfam America, and I'm enjoying every minute! Working on so many different projects enabled me to experience numerous aspects of non-profit work from research to implementation as well as keeping abreast of so many pressing issues at hand, from a political and policy perspective as well as an emotional one. I am extremely grateful for instilling a sense of confidence and responsibility by allowing me to share my thoughts and ideas and getting valuable feedback. I believe that I have met the learning objectives we outlined before I started. I have definitely improved my research skills, investigating background information for all different forms of projects as well as any supplementary work. Working at such a large and international non-profit has exposed me to the nuances of this kind of environment, and the sheer amount of

coordination (and sign off!) it takes to make things work. I have been presented with a large amount of space to brainstorm solutions to issues. And finally, I have definitely improved upon working in a fast-paced environment.

There are multiple ways I am monitoring my growth and my learning. For one, I have a large to-do list with all of the projects I have to complete. Each day I make a smaller to-do list and complete those tasks as is possible. When I finish one task I cross it off my larger list. I add to the larger list each time I am assigned something new, so it is always growing. As I move forward in this internship, I build upon what I've learned through each project and the duties involved. Further, I am capable of doing new, more challenging projects for every one I finish under my belt. This is a very tangible way to monitor my growth because I can produce more with increased nuance every time I complete one project, as I am building upon previous skills and adding to my abilities. These skills will be transferable to my academics, future career plans, and off-campus involvement in New Orleans. As I mentioned, my research skills have grown dramatically at Oxfam, which will absolutely help with my Political Science classes. As for my professional aspirations, I have realized that I would like to ultimately work at a similar organization and do similar work. I have also built upon my communication skills as a result of this internship. I have seen how coworkers discuss disagreements and work to resolve them, ensuring everyone feels heard.

I have been working on a research project as a part of a larger Oxfam report. Along with my coworker, we did the background research, building upon what was already discovered. I looked at sustainability reports and documents from companies, synthesizing it into one document. I thought this was as far as my work on the project would go. However, the consultant that was going to actually be writing the case studies with the research we completed decided to give us a chance at actually writing the case studies ourselves. I am really proud of this because my coworker and I proved that through our research we understand the issue at hand, and have the capacity to write the case studies ourselves.

As a part of NCI's mission, they support the growth as leaders of young Tulane women. My internship with Oxfam America has been integral to my growth, professionally and personally as a leader. One of the things I have been struggling with generally with the current political and social climate of the world, and especially with my work at Oxfam, has been the feeling that all the wrong in the world is unsolvable and overwhelming. A large part of the work done at Oxfam deals

with human rights violations and issues. It can become overwhelming and at times feel hopeless when there is so much wrong going on in the world. My supervisor, Chloe Christman Cole, works on land and water rights in the Private Sector Department at Oxfam. She explained that understanding and acknowledging these feelings during this kind of work is integral to mental health and the ability to continue to pursue justice.

What you are grappling with is probably something you will never feel really okay about. A former boss of mine once told me that the moment that I stopped feeling angry about the wrongs in the world was the moment that I had to change fields because it meant I was immune to the issues, that I'd been too worn down by all the bad. But you can feel angry and still live without bearing the weight of suffering - you can still buy new shoes and go to nice meals and on vacation. The world's problems are huge and complex and nuanced, the consequence of years of unjust systems, and no one person can fix the systems causing it, and the work will never actually be done, certainly not in our lifetimes.

The way I deal with this is by asking: How can I use the resources and access I have at my disposal, because of where I was born and the opportunities that provided to me, to do at least a little bit of good for the world, to contribute at least a little bit to making systems more just? (There's no one way to do this, and I don't know that there's one 'best' way either). The problems are so massive that change is really hard, and I've come to make sure I reflect on iterative progress. Otherwise, it can all feel so daunting.

-Chloe Christman Cole, June 27, 2018

This kind of outlook has helped me understand my role as an educated and engaged citizen, and even more so as a leader. I hope to help others, as Chloe helped me, understand that it's okay to feel upset. In fact, it is that exact sadness and anger at the injustices of the world, that keeps progress continuing. This is an incredibly important lesson and has shaped my perspective greatly.

One of my favorite parts of my internship with Oxfam is the opportunity to attend conferences outside of the office. One of the conferences I attended was the Annual Summit on the Economy. I have a lot of difficulties understanding economics, and much of it goes over my head. However, one of my favorite panels during the conference was a discussion on social capital and upward mobility. I felt as though I could grasp the concepts being discussed, and if it were a conversation rather than

a lecture, I felt able to contribute. The conference, similar to much of the professional world in DC, was male-dominated. There were many more men than women at the event. I felt proud to be there, and even more excited that I got to attend as a part of my internship. When I walk to work from Foggy Bottom the streets are filled with men in suits. Although there also are a lot of women, it feels different when I walk into the office, as the demographics are a lot more even. This internship has given me the opportunity to be surrounded by powerful women and now I have a lot of female role models that I can look up to in my professional development.