

Time for Training

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Hi Everyone! It has been about a month since my last blog post so I wanted to give you guys an update on how everything is going. After talking to my peers who also have their own internships this summer, I come to a few conclusions about both internships in general and specifically my internship. The first thing that I have realized is how stressful the process of finding and securing an internship is for most people. To get my internship, I initially contacted CrescentCare's volunteer coordinator because I am very interested in working with organizations, like CrescentCare, that work to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for

everyone. When I found out about the NHBS internship I thought that it would be a great opportunity to work with CrescentCare and also get out into the community. One tip that I would give to anyone looking for an internship is to reach out to companies that align with your interests regardless of whether or not they are seeking interns. I would also suggest reaching out to smaller companies that are just starting up. These companies always need help and because they are small you have a better chance of being able to do meaningful work for them.

The second thing that I have realized, specifically about my internship, is that it is going to be a little unconventional in comparison to other internships. Like I said in my last post, my internship is going to involve doing data collection on the sexual behaviors of gay and bisexual men for the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) system. We are going to be doing data collection at sites that gay and bisexual men frequently visit, so we will often be doing data collection at night in bars and pubs. My internship is definitely not your stereotypical internship where you work in an office doing busy work and getting people coffee.

The past few weeks of my “unconventional” internship have focused on preparation for going out into the field to do data collection. On our first day, all of the interns met at CrescentCare’s main location on Tulane Ave. to be trained on how to conduct interviews with study participants. This was a very intensive daylong training session where we first went over the interview process and then partnered up and practiced interviewing with each other. This whole process was very interesting and enjoyable. I got to meet everyone that I’ll be working with and got to know a handful of them fairly well just from that one training session. Practicing the interviews also gave me the opportunity to put myself in the shoes of the study participants that we will be working with.

On June 6th-8th some of my co-interns and I participated in a 2.5 day long HIV prevention and rapid testing training in order to become certified HIV prevention counselors by the state of Louisiana (<http://www.louisianahealthhub.org/training>). During the training we received a crash course on HIV and STDs in Louisiana, the types of rapid tests that we will use to test people for HIV, and on how to counsel individuals and run a session in which we counsel and test people for HIV. The training session was the first step in becoming certified by the state. In addition to the training we have to pass a written test, observe two counseling sessions, perform two finger stick blood collections, and be observed by the Region 1 Coordinator performing a counseling session. I passed my written test yesterday and

have been going to observe sessions at CrescentCare's CAN Office in the French Quarter.

I've already learned so much information about HIV and New Orleans' HIV/AIDS epidemic through my internship. I've also learned a lot about HIV testing and counseling itself. What I expect to learn most about going forward is more personal. My internship will start transitioning from learning technical information to actually interacting with people. I anticipate that I will learn more about how to interact with people who are in a stressful situation, and how to communicate with people professionally while still being empathetic. I also expect to be pushed out of my comfort zone and learn how to deal with situations that I find uncomfortable. I'm really excited about my internship going forward and can't wait to update you guys on everything that's happening.