

Final Weeks at New York State Psychiatric Institute

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This summer, I wrote many blogs and fact sheets that will be featured on Columbia Psychiatry/New York State Psychiatric Institute's (NYSPI) website. The opportunity was perfect for me because as an English and Psychology double major, I got to practice my writing skills and conduct psychology research. I re-familiarized myself with PC software, became proficient in Excel and explored a variety of other web

development and publishing websites like Drupal and MailChimp. I also had the opportunity to assist in the revisions of the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC), which is Columbia's diagnostic tool for childhood disorders. Through this, I was able to meet and speak with professionals in the field, learn about disorders in more detail, and practice writing clear and concise questions.

These new skills and experiences will be extremely useful moving forward. In my experimental psychology class, I have already used some of the knowledge I gained working on the DISC in learning to analyze studies and psychometrics. Additionally, I will continue to write for *HerCampus Tulane*, *The Hullabaloo* and *The Odyssey Online*, using the skills I learned this summer to be a more concise and clear author. The connections I made at my internship were invaluable. I know I could reach out to my supervisor and other coworkers for opportunities in the future, which is really important beyond Tulane.

Now that I've completed this internship, I hope to continue to cultivate my writing skills and psychological knowledge through my coursework and future internships. I really love creative writing so now that I have worked on more of the non-fiction side of things, I would love to intern for a publishing company or film business that deals with more creative pursuits. My experience writing for three campus publications has inspired me to want to explore journalism more as well. I hope to someday intern or work at a newspaper company or site like TIME to further improve my journalism skills.

I would encourage a student interested at NYSPI to reach out to faculty directly. SO many people try to apply to internships online and through the volunteer coordinator, that it is really easy to get lost in the shuffle. There are always research projects going on (or web development ones, in my case) that could use some help. I would suggest a student contact a psychologist with similar research interests and see if he or she has any opportunities in the future. If not, they might know somebody who does and point you in the right direction. The worst that can happen is they don't answer your e-mail, which is the same result as if you didn't try to contact them at all, so may as well try!

Working in Washington Heights has definitely enriched my point of view on mental health in lower-income areas. This summer, I learned that it can be really difficult for low SES individuals to get help, which doesn't make much sense because people from these backgrounds are more likely to have depression and anxiety from the

additional stressors of their lifestyle (i.e. low wages, poor education, unsafe neighborhoods, poor job prospects, etc). I attended Grand Rounds almost every Wednesday at NYSPI, in which a leading professional came to speak about their research. Most of those speakers were men, but a few were women and it was so empowering to hear them speak, especially because they grew up in a time period when women were more oppressed than they are now. Something I noticed that was similar among all women I worked with this summer, was that they all command respect. They are authoritative, well-mannered and tenacious- they did not wait for others to take the lead. For females, we have to make an extra effort to command this respect and dignity in the workplace because it is often not something given to us by default as it often is with men. For this reason, first impressions are really important.

This experience has also taught me that mental health in the public sphere is really lacking, but also very difficult to implement, especially because of the different liability and insurance issues, and then another layer of difficulties when it comes to prescribing medication. My supervisor and I also had to exchange a lot of e-mails with psychologists this summer, asking them to work on fact sheets and resources for the new website and they very often never got back to us or were almost impossible to reach. I used to just wait for people to get back to me because I didn't want to "be annoying" but I have now learned that often times people just forget, and that things will never get done if you don't remind them. Mental health treatment is a potential solution for youth struggling with psychiatric disorders, but these problems could have been potentially avoided if they had the resources to overcome certain obstacles earlier in life. Socioeconomic status and education level are influential in mental health outcomes so these issues are much more complex than just implementing mental health programs. Also, different populations respond differently to different interventions, so it can be very difficult to cater to the needs of a particular community. To be an effective change maker in this regard, it is essential to do a lot of research on this group of people and then design a personalized intervention program based on their needs as a group, and then as individuals. Mental health is very complex and in order to really make effective change, we have to address inequality at its very roots.