

Finding My Place

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In June, I set out on my internship with the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe in a completely new place: geographically, professionally, and culturally. I spent my summer living in New Orleans and working in the bayous of southern Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes, in a completely new position as a research assistant, in a community unknown to me. I arrived with a list of learning objectives and goals to provide a framework for my experience, and not much else. Looking back on the past months, I feel confident that I have achieved what I had hope to; however, there was no way of telling exactly how I would come to do so.

My goals for this summer as a researcher for the Tribe's application for Federal Recognition have been both academic and cultural in nature. Having never before taken on a research position of this magnitude or worked with an Indian Tribe, I was very excited to have the opportunity to explore both of these areas. After spending time in various archives and in the Pointe-au-Chien Tribal Building, I learned how to access primary research materials and think critically about how to use them for my project, how to create working databases to organize my work, and how to present my work to the community this project is serving. I have gained valuable perspective on intra- and inter-tribal relationships, a new appreciation for the vulnerable land along Louisiana's Gulf Coast, and the struggles faced by the people who live there.

With my new knowledge gained from this summer, I am looking forward to the next three years I get to spend learning more and growing as a scholar and a feminist. Having gained new connections to Louisiana's peoples and places, I am excited to continue my education with them in mind. This position has reaffirmed my intentions to make my career one that benefits my community, especially women in my community. I had the privilege to work under incredible female supervisors and with a female partner that I became close friends with through our work. We also had several chances to work with female volunteers from the Tribe who came in to help our project. I am looking forward to the ways over the next four years and beyond that I'll be able to recreate this environment of women helping each other, teaching each other, and learning from each other.

I advise any students interested in any kind of internship, but one such as mine in particular, to not be afraid of asking questions. In an all-new experience, in an all-new environment, admitting that you might not have all the answers or that you need some help can be daunting. I think, however, that asking questions shows your supervisors your initiative and can help you to get your work done right the first time. Additionally, I advise interns to get to know the communities their work is a part of. Recognize your place, recognize how your work impacts the people around you, and recognize how you, as an intern, fit into all of it. It may not be in the way you expect at the beginning, so be sure to keep yourself open to everything. Anything can be an opportunity to learn.

My ideas about gender and social justice in the workplace have been greatly impacted by my work this summer. In the time I have spent researching the injustices that have been faced by the community I served, my ideas about what's right and wrong have been greatly solidified. I believe with the most conviction that

there are two sides to every story, and that it's important to do the most the find out both of them even if it takes you all the time and effort you can give. To me, this is the best way to be an effective change maker: to find ways to tell the untold story, to do it with all the heart you can put into it, and to do it with the utmost respect. Sometimes, it may not be our own story to tell—but even then, it doesn't mean we can't contribute. I realized the story of my project is one that I can add to without making it my own, and I found that I ended up being very proud of this. Finding my place in a place that is not my own required a lot of critical thinking, confidence in myself, and confidence in my ability to do something meaningful. I encourage women who aspire to work within new and different communities to embrace them fully and reflect strongly in on themselves to find their places. I am extremely excited and hopeful for the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe, and for the women who aspire and continue to do meaningful work for other people. It has been an incredible summer for me, for the Tribe, and for other interns whose experiences were made possible by the NCI. I look forward to everything in store for all of us.