

Halfway Point at Columbia Psychiatry

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

Goals & Progress

1. Familiarize myself with professional websites and digital development programs
 - I have had some exposure to MailChimp, the program used for the weekly newsletter, especially for copyediting. I also have been working on Drupal, which is the software used to edit the entire Columbia website, to edit staff profiles and add pages for the new website which has not been launched

yet.

2. Expand my writing repertoire by creating fact sheets, interactive features and resources for a diverse audience of parents, physicians and youth
 - I created fact sheets on eating and feeding disorders, disruptive behaviors, and learning disorders. I also created a blog on the department website (also through wordpress) that included some activities for children during the summer that are both economical and beneficial for mental health.
3. Gain more insight into various psychological issues facing children and adolescents today by attending weekly seminars
 - I have learned so much by attending T32 seminars (presentations hosted by postdocs) and weekly psychiatry “Grand Rounds”. So far, I have attended presentations on equine therapy for veterans, neural mechanisms in social processing, generational transmission of well-being and psychopathology, challenges in college mental health, complex animal social dynamics, social behavior of mice, self-harm and suicidal behavior, and effects of mother’s mental health during pregnancy on fetus pre and post birth.
4. Develop stronger interpersonal communication skills and expand my network of connections in the psychology field
 - I’ve gone out to lunch with several doctors in the department, which was really cool. I’m helping Dr. Prudence Fisher and her assistant with updates to the DISC (Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children) so I’ve been sitting in on phone calls and doing research on tics and substance abuse (very relevant to NOLA) . The DISC is respected diagnostic tool in the U.S. so it’s awesome that I have the opportunity to collaborate on it.
5. Learn about the processes and intricacies involved in website development under the supervision of Susan Rosenthal, the web producer for the division of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
 - There are so many aspects of web development I had not thought of before this internship. First of all, a lot of people have to approve things before they appear live on the web, which can be a time-consuming process because sometimes we must wait for approval of one thing before we can start the next. Also, we have to be super careful about what websites we use for researching fact sheets because some aren’t credible (even the ones you think definitely would be), and some of them are written by Columbia’s competitors.

Growth

Every day, I come home with tons of new knowledge about psychology, web development and writing. I have been reading a lot of new articles in the New York Times and psychology journals in my free time, which correlate with what I'm learning here. Columbia New York Presbyterian does a lot of work in Washington Heights, which is a low SES community not dissimilar to some areas of New Orleans. As a result, I've learned so much about mental healthcare in low SES families and that it's not just influenced by brain chemistry but by education level, parenting style, exposure to violence and so many other things that kids can't control. It's a horrible cycle that intertwines socioeconomic status with poor mental health that starts all over again when these kids have to drop out of school in order to get a job to support themselves and do not continue their education. This lesson, along with so many others, has taught me to see the world differently and to conduct more critical thinking of complex situations.

Current Projects

In addition to making changes to the "Tics" section of the DISC, I am working on a few fact sheets and templates for the new website, which will launch in the fall. I am currently working on fact sheets for Aggression, Temper & Disruptive Behaviors, and Fears & Phobias that includes symptoms, risk factors, treatment and lots of other resources for parents. I just finished a Q&A piece from my interview with Dr. Cristiane Duarte who leads the Boricua Youth Study, a longitudinal study that tracks Puerto Rican youth mental health in the South Bronx, NY and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Tomorrow, I am conducting another interview with someone from the Special Needs Clinic, and will write something for that for the newsletter. When the website launches, it will be cool to see what I have written on a professional website.

Becoming a Female Leader

Most people in the department and presenters at Grand Rounds are male, but there are younger females joining the team, which is really empowering. I'm becoming really familiar with PC software, which is good because a lot of businesses still use PCs, and I haven't since I was 7 playing Barbie Hairstyler on my family's dinosaur Dell computer. Computer science is still a male-dominated field but I'm becoming more familiar with coding and other computer processes. STEM, in general, is comprised of mostly men, but by working in psychiatry and computers, I'm defying

gender standards. In fact, I have found it helpful to be a female here because when creating fact sheets for eating disorders, which mostly affects girls, I am able to create more detailed, anecdotal information from the sympathetic standpoint of a girl who had to come to terms with her body and helped a few friends get through tough times with eating disorders.

Skills

I have learned so many things that will help my writing and psychology work. I've learned how to formulate better interview questions, write technically, speak up in intimidating situations, work on websites behind-the-scenes and so much more. A lot of the latter skills I have developed will help with my extracurricular writing for The Hullabaloo, The Odyssey Online and HerCampus when I return to school in the fall. Learning about the mental health of the Washington Heights community has definitely opened my eyes to problems that most definitely exist in New Orleans, and possible intervention strategies we can use to improve youth mental health. I am used to working with elderly persons but this internship has ignited a passion in me to help children and adolescents as well.