

Summer 2016: Local woman puts the “Lead” in “Women’s Leadership” and a poorly-thought-out pun in her blog post title

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Cory Cole newcomb@tulane.edu

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I’m always a bit surprised and confused when people ask me what my dream job is, given that most millennials I know and I have been preparing ourselves for the as-far-as-we-can-tell inevitable disappointment of an unfulfilling professional life ever since the housing market plunged the nation into a recession smack dab in the

middle of our puberties. A dream job? In this economy???? That kind of cynicism is hard to shake.

Maybe this is why I'm consistently caught off guard when people ask me what I see myself doing to put food on the table in the near future. More often than not lately, I've been answering, shakily and deeply afraid of judgement, "I dunno, I guess I want to go test water samples somewhere to make sure they're safe?" This is, without a doubt as vague a career plan as the oft-criticized "I wanna stand in a field and keep people from falling off of a cliff" trajectory proposed by Holden Caulfield in 1951, but yet, here we are. It's 2016 and I've gotten myself an internship testing water to make sure it's safe.

I guess I should have mentioned by now that my name is Cory Cole, and I'm a rising junior at Tulane working towards a double major in public health and Spanish with a minor in English. I have really strong feelings about a lot of things, including but not limited to jazz covers of Radiohead songs, speculative fiction, and conserving the tallgrass prairie ecosystem, but my strongest feelings right now are overwhelming gratitude and shock at having landed this dream internship.

Long story short, I've been taken in by a team of scientists at LSU's school of public health and a few New Orleans nonprofits working to test tap water around the city for lead content. The team, led by Dr. Adrienne Katner has already done quite a bit of testing and has so far reported results that are concerning both in and of themselves and in light of the fact that they differ so significantly from the results published by local water utility SWBNO. In light of these concerns, the team is undertaking a massive household testing study this summer in neighborhoods all across Orleans Parish. Because a project like this takes quite a bit of labor, Dr. Katner agreed to let me help out the team as an intern.

This is very exciting for me for a number of reasons; firstly; I am a major nerd when it comes to public health, environmental justice, and health policy. I have been on federal water utility regulations this year like my younger sister was on One Direction from 2011 to 2013. Secondly, because this internship is the unpaid analogue to what I've prematurely identified as my ideal career, it stands to reason that I will be learning a lot of skills and getting a lot of experience that will be ridiculously useful in the future. I've outlined these skills in my learning objectives for the summer:

1. Get first hand experience with the nonprofit sector
2. Familiarize myself with New Orleans outside of Tulane's bubble
3. Get used to work in an office setting, dressing professionally, etc.
4. Learn how to use ArcGIS
5. Gain on-the-ground experience with socially-minded research

My Hip Younger Sister(TM) assures me that none of this is cool, but I'm over here looking like this goat: (image above)

Because the internship doesn't start until June 6th, I'm currently spending some time with my family back in Kansas City, but I'm also preparing; I've ordered my ArcGIS tutorial book and am getting up to date on all of the public health literature surrounding water quality and lead contamination so I can go in on the first day with a good handle on the issue. You can find some fun resources on water quality and the study I'll be working on here at <http://sph.lsuhsu.edu/lead-preliminary-results> if you're curious.

I look forward to blogging more about this exciting internship over the course of the summer. Tune in next time to hear the story of how I managed to secure this internship, and a little more about where I'll be working and what I'll be doing.