

Dana Guggenheim

Blog Reflection Draft

If there is one thing I've learned in my experience with Duke-Margolis these past few months, it's the power of taking initiative. As the COVID-19 pandemic first started to unravel, I found myself fascinated with keeping up to date on the evolving public health measures and starting self-teaching some of the basic epidemiology behind it. On a whim, I reached out to a professor that I would be having in the upcoming fall semester, Margolis Core Faculty member Dr. Dev Sangvai, to see if he knew of any opportunities to get involved in any COVID-related research projects. I was immediately welcomed into a growing team interested in the Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) space despite having only just finished freshman year and only chemistry wet-lab research experience. Taking the initiative to reach out to this professor turned into my place in the Margolis Summer Internship Program, with Dr. Sangvai as my mentor.

Since starting the Margolis Internship, I have become familiar with—and comfortable discussing—health policy concepts that were completely foreign to me before. To be completely honest, I knew nearly nothing about the long-term care sector of healthcare, which I have spent this entire summer focusing on, and I will now be continuing a project in the SNF space as the lead student researcher. My mentor has been continually supportive of my experience and dedicated to helping me carve out a unique path during my undergraduate career, which I am so grateful for. I have formed so many valuable connections with healthcare professionals within the Duke Health system, which I never would have been able to do had I not been a Margolis Intern this summer.

I entered Duke intending to be pre-med, and I still am. However, participating in this internship has solidified my interest in population health and health policy in addition to the clinical side of medicine and has shown me how versatile the medical field is. It has been so valuable to attend virtual events led by health policy leaders who have taken alternate routes to healthcare, and it is exciting to see and be involved in collaborative efforts between people with different types of expertise. The team I have worked with this summer included physicians, nurses, and a speech-language pathologist, all of whom have introduced me to so many people and topics related to SNFs. Each time I entered a Zoom call, I knew that I would leave knowing even a little more than I had before.

In addition to the tangible benefits that being a Margolis Summer Intern have had on my academic and career trajectory, I am thankful to have been part of the Margolis community and the intern cohort during this otherwise isolating time in quarantine. Duke-Margolis adapted so well to remote work, and I still felt so connected to everyone even though we were not working in the same physical space. The weekly seminars, webinars, and journal clubs we were able to take part in were also tremendous growth and learning opportunities.

Having just finished my first year, I had not yet been exposed to the majority of Duke's opportunities before beginning this experience. Despite this, I can say with certainty that the Duke-Margolis Center places tremendous value on its students and interns, investing in the potential of our next generation of healthcare leaders. I have felt supported and empowered through each step of this experience and feel that I now have a platform to move forward in the public health space. This experience was not without challenges; I have been through the process

of back-and-forth IRB communication, grant writing, denial, and rewriting, and having to quickly adapt. As a result of these challenges, I will be better off as a researcher and leader in the future.

The past 10 weeks have been incredibly empowering, and I am so grateful to have had access to a network of such knowledgeable and compassionate peers and faculty members. I am so excited to continue my involvement with the Duke-Margolis Center as a Margolis Scholar, where I will continue my health policy research and educational journey. Moving forward, if I ever fear advancing to the next step in my career or am hesitant to inquire about an opportunity, I will remind myself of where I started and the value of following your instinctual interests. Sometimes, a simple email turned Zoom conversation (given the current times) can completely change your path and taking initiative may lead to cultivating a passion.