

Hannah Shuffer

Two months ago, I had no understanding of the social determinants of health (SDOH) or even the broader U.S. healthcare system. Fortunately, through the Duke Huang Fellows program, I was assigned to participate in the Margolis Summer Internship program. This incredible opportunity not only sparked my interest in health policy, but it also allowed me to gain a fundamental understanding of current health policy, health policy terminology, and the ongoing plans for the future of healthcare in the U.S. This program was timely because, for the previous semester, I had planned on taking a course on “Transforming U.S. Healthcare” to equip myself with at least a basic understanding of health policy. However, this internship has gone beyond that, and now I have the background information necessary to consider how health policy intersects with my other academic pursuits. More importantly, I am now aware of the different interventions and initiatives occurring in North Carolina and know of ways for me to get involved.

My experience wouldn't have been as amazing if it wasn't for my mentor, Dr. Janet Prvu Bettger. She is the epitome of a good mentor and is someone who truly wants to see me grow. Despite being online, she did her best to ensure that my expectations were surpassed. In fact, in my initial meeting with her, I informed her that my original plan for the summer was to get experience working in a wet lab. Instead of letting that comment pass by, she made it a point to make sure that I was still able to speak with professionals who work in wet labs. Due to my mentor, I was able to get both an independent health policy-related research experience and experience the bustling nonpublic operation of programs that target SDOH in a population.

For the brief summertime that I was an intern, the Margolis Center made me feel like I was a part of the team. Inclusion in the center's weekly updates, journal club, and weekly seminar allowed me to envision a possible career in health policy. Personally, as someone planning on attending medical school, I appreciated learning about the various ways in which physicians can carry out health policy research while still doing clinical practice. Previously, I was unsure how the division between health policy research and clinical practice would actually play out. However, I was able to see how people can break up their schedules and perform meaningful work in both aspects of their careers. This experience has both exposed me to numerous potential career paths and allowed me to make meaningful connections with a variety of professionals. Overall the Margolis internship was not only an enjoyable experience, but it also provided me with valuable knowledge and skills for my future.