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Reflection Blog

As an environmental science major and a global health minor, the ability to work on a project that understands health through a geospatial lens seemed like perfect opportunity to supplement my career indecision: why look at environmental science *or* health when I could explore both?! At Margolis, I worked with Dr. Bradi Granger on a project that used geographic information systems (GIS) to map and target health intervention based on high risk areas. We worked together to understand the high prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in Durham County, North Carolina and the long list of variables that seem to underly these trends. In particular, we focused on the targeted implementation of community health workers in high risk areas and the relationship of environmental factors (like pollution) to diabetes prevalence. Our goals were aggressive: three abstracts and manuscripts using data from the Southeastern Diabetes Initiative (SEDI) in addition to the Margolis deliverables.

Patience and flexibility. I developed these skills early into my internship with the Margolis Center when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, forcing the Center to conduct all summer programs virtually. I am so grateful for the hard work from Margolis to make this opportunity both possible and meaningful for an already strange period of time. The focus on COVID research at Duke was particularly meaningful in this regard, and a perfect example of the proactive nature of Duke faculty. That being said, remote work had downfalls from the beginning. Though I built a great relationship with my mentor and intern partner, I wish I had gotten to know other interns better in the form of mid-day impromptu meetings to refill coffee or casual lunch conversations. Alas, nothing any of us could have done!

The other major challenge of the summer that tested my patience and flexibility came when we encountered problems acquiring the data that we needed in order to conduct the analysis that we intended. Though far less flashy and impressive, my work taught me invaluable lessons about the difficulties of any sort of extended research project. In the end our outcomes had to change dramatically. While not being able to accomplish the goals I had set out to was often frustrating, it challenged me to adapt new skill sets and engage in topics far outside my comfort zone. I took time to delve into journal club articles and read follow up papers for the fun of it. I loved the Friday Seminars where Duke faculty shared their COVID research and benefited from learning about the diverse range of other topics summer interns were undertaking. I was also able to shift away from my comfortable framework of quantitative analysis to focus and learn the literature review process and academic writing styles in more depth than ever before. In the end, I submitted two abstracts, wrote a blog arguing the importance of looking at health through a geospatial lens from a general perspective, and am working on submitting a hypothesis manuscript for publication.

As I walk away from Margolis and return to my last year of school at Colorado College, I can confidently show off my new skills and proceed more certainly towards a career centered around healthcare in a clinical setting. Though the need to understand health from an upstream political perspective is incredibly important and influential, I felt myself yearning to interact with the many patients I was reading about firsthand. The case studies that introduced many health policy topics grasped my attention often more than the intervention or policy. As I look

towards my final year of undergrad, this means a lot of cramming all my pre-med classes with a solid background of why and how healthcare practice needs to change on a large scale.

I feel incredibly lucky for the opportunities beyond my specific project that Margolis provided that expanded my understanding of health policy, especially in these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even more so I am grateful to Dr. Bradi Granger for being flexible and willing to adapt to change alongside me. We learned a ton together and certainly have high hopes for future work and research! I look forward to the possibility of continuing work when we have data in the future. It's been an awesome summer.