

Reflective Blog

I decided to pursue an internship with the Margolis Internship Program due to my dual interest in both health science and politics. Before coming to Duke, I had never considered a possible career in policymaking. The project I was assigned to fit perfectly with experiences I already had, as well as broadening my knowledge of health policy. For the past year and a half, I have done research with the Cyberpolicy initiative through the Sanford School of Public Policy. Previously, I had only done scientific research in the medical field, thus, social science research was a new skill. I am working on two projects that incorporate my previous knowledge from working in the cyberpolicy realm. My main project was with Dr. Janet Prvu Bettger which focuses on the digital divide. This work examines the inequalities that exist between those who have internet access and those who do not. I am looking at five distinct groups that are particularly impacted by the digital divide: low-income renters, low-income families, older Americans, rural citizens, and interpersonal violence survivors. My TedTalk for Margolis focused on the impact that not having internet services has on interpersonal violence survivors. Overall, I found that rather than legislating for these groups separately, policymakers should take a health-in-all policies approach. This outlook intends to legislate with the perspective of public health in mind. If internet was a social service, the increase of wellbeing for the people in these groups would increase. In our increasingly digitized world, connection is essential. In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the faults when connection is lost- from older adults struggling with isolation to the rise of family violence cases. The second project I'm working on is under Dr. Bettger and Dr. Rebecca Whitaker. This project focuses on telehealth and Medicaid, specifically in populations dealing with ailments in the areas of musculoskeletal and behavioral health.

The Margolis Internship made me seriously consider a job in the field of policymaking. In fact, it inspired me to apply to the Duke in DC program for Spring 2022 because I wanted to see if this environment is one in which I thrive. Margolis is people centered. I was worried coming into the remote program that I would not get much interaction with people in the organization, but my assumptions were wrong. Especially with the glowing support of my mentor, I feel like I know Margolis and health policy research as if I spent the entire summer in DC.

As stated, my learning experience was different than others I have been in because of the guidance by my mentor that I received. My weekly check-ins with Dr. Bettger kept me on track and made me feel connected. Without this aspect of the internship, I believe I would have felt disconnected from the workplace, especially in an online platform. I cannot thank my team enough for supporting me this entire summer; I hope they felt this support was reciprocal.

My team collaborated very well together. My fellow interns, Dr. Bettger and Dr. Whitaker, and I met once a week in order to make sure our goals were clear and to oversee the deliverables us interns produced. Additionally, we interns were provided the opportunity to join the Kate B. Reynolds team meeting each week. This organization sponsors the telehealth research. My fellow interns and I met once a week to work on deliverables and stay atop of our goals.

The most challenging aspect of the internship was completing the scientific poster. With another month of project work under my belt, I believe this deliverable would have been much more put together and cohesive. I have created scientific posters before, but I have not created a “social science” poster. This experience differed slightly. Although this deliverable was a challenge, I was happy with the end result and the opportunity to present my summer work.

Ana DeCesare

The most rewarding part of the Margolis Internship Program was getting to know the kind, wonderful people. This was an experience I will not forget. Whenever I hear “Margolis,” I will always have something positive to share or pass on. Thank you to the staff for such an educational and fulfilling summer experience.