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2021 Reflection Blog

This past January, I began searching and applying for internships that could serve as my MPH practicum- a planned, mentored, and evaluated work experience that allows me to apply what I've learned in my degree thus far. I remember coming across the Margolis Internship in our weekly MPH newsletter; I immediately went to the Margolis Center's website and took a deep dive into the Center's mission and recent projects. I was mesmerized by all the amazing work the Center was doing and loved the emphasis on addressing health inequities and translating research into policy. It was at that moment that I knew I wanted to be a Margolis intern. I applied and waited with bated breath to see if I'd get an interview. I was in luck! A few weeks later I received an email saying I had moved to the next round and would be doing a zoom interview. Several weeks after my interview, I got an incredibly exciting email. The Center had a project in mind for me: supporting care integration for the dual-eligible population in alignment with North Carolina's ongoing care transformation efforts. I could not have been happier!

While I was over the moon about this internship from the second I received that email, my experience as a Margolis Intern exceeded my expectations. I went into the summer knowing I was interested in improving healthcare for older adults, but I walked away with so much more. Through the program's weekly journal clubs centered around equity and the literature review I conducted on equity considerations for dual-eligible individuals, I became much more knowledgeable about structural factors that drive inequities, best practices for conducting and communicating about research, and strategies to advance health equity in policy interventions. This spurred me to register for courses on decolonizing knowledge production and developing policies that advance health equity and social justice.

In addition to shaping the type of work I hope to do moving forward, this internship also taught me about clear communication, effective teamwork, and the qualities I desire in a workplace. Prior to starting the internship, we had to meet with our mentors and develop a work plan. Compared to previous work experiences, I was able to get much more out of this internship because my mentor and I discussed everything from communication preferences and expectations around feedback to my role on the team. While seemingly small, other things that contributed to a positive experience include weekly team meetings with an agenda, time at the end of each meeting to reflect and/or give other team members a shout out, and clear responsibilities. Moving forward, I will be sure to ask about these qualities when I'm job searching. Something else that I really enjoyed about working at the Center were the bi-weekly Margolis Seminars. These seminars were an excellent opportunity to connect with the broader Margolis community and to learn about the latest research occurring at the Center. Attending these seminars made me realize how much I value working for an organization that fosters learning, especially community-based learning.

While there were many wonderful aspects of the Margolis internship, there were difficulties as well. Between working from home and adjusting to a 9-5 position, I struggled to be productive throughout the day and separate work from home, and I found myself quickly burning out. To

add insult to injury, I experienced a great deal of imposter syndrome, which impacted the quality of my work and my ability to speak up in meetings. Although these difficulties are fairly common, it's easy to look around and think that others are more intelligent, more deserving of the internship, more productive, etc. While I can't say I completely overcame these challenges, I found there were things I could do to help. I started being more intentional about taking breaks, getting outside, and meeting up with friends. I also spoke with my friends about feeling like an imposter, which made me feel less alone. In my future endeavors, I will be intentional about setting work boundaries and speaking up about/addressing imposter syndrome before it takes a significant hold.

While not without challenges, this internship was an incredible opportunity to learn about myself, health equity, the dual-eligible population, and health policy more broadly. There are many wonderful aspects of the Center, but the things that made my experience were: 1) the Center's commitment to improve health by reducing health inequities, which was evident in every facet of the Center's work 2) the endless opportunities for learning and 3) the people, especially my mentor, Dr. Corinna Sorenson, my fellow interns, and the program coordinators.