CHPNIIP & PIIF SUMMER 2015

CIVIC HOUSE
This summer, Civic House sponsored twenty-three undergraduate students to pursue civic engagement work in Philadelphia, across the nation, and abroad.

Eight of these student participated in the Civic House Nonprofit Internship Program (CHPNIP), which placed them at organizations throughout Philadelphia and facilitated biweekly discussions about their experiences. The remaining fifteen received funding from the Public Interest Internship Fund (PIIF) for internships they found independently, most of which were located outside of Philadelphia.

The mission of these programs is threefold: to aid with student development by promoting exploration of identities, privilege, power, and oppression; to create a greater understanding of the intersectionality of social issues; and, finally, to build capacity for community organizations around the world.
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REFLECTIONS ON INTERSECTIONALITY

I’ve been thinking about how so many challenges faced by refugees inherently involve an intersection of many different social issues—economic disparity is forefront among the issues many of our families face, but issues such as discrimination, joblessness, inequality of educational opportunities, lack of language skills, etc. are equally important. Kids coming into our program may have difficulties reading, focusing, or interacting with unfamiliar people, but these issues are almost always a reflection of larger, systemic problems. If a kid can’t read in English, that’s indicative of a wider problem with the education system, for example, or if a kid is particularly territorial during snack time, they may not be receiving proper nutrition at home. It’s important to keep in mind that no problem exists in isolation.

-Sam Friedlander
Nashville International Center for Empowerment

Something I’ve been reflecting on is the fact that even though many of our students come from low-income and/or immigrant families, that plays out in different ways for different people. For example, some immigrants are documented and some aren’t, some speak English fluently and some don’t speak any, some are relatively well-off and other are very vulnerable economically and in terms of safety. Treating the families we work with as one monolith can sometimes heighten the awareness of these differences. A lot of what I’ve been thinking about this summer is how to help create a strong sense of community that builds off the similarities the families we work with share, while still acknowledging their important differences and individual needs. Working with young kids is a great place to start because they are so willing to learn, play, and talk with each other!"

- Emily Grablutz, Aquinas Center
The Civic House Nonprofit Internship Program and Public Interest Internship Fund aim to encourage an exploration of social issues, including an analysis of intersecting injustices on individual, organizational, and institutional levels.

Bridget Amoako discusses how food deserts harm immigrant communities in Philadelphia served by the Nationalities Service Cetner:

While many important resources are available to our clients and their communities, there are still a number of things that I have noticed to be sorely lacking. For example, after stepping off the bus near a client’s home I was looking at the surrounding businesses and noticed that there were no nearby grocery stores. After a Google search, I found that the nearest stores that sold more than milk and eggs alongside lottery tickets were at least four miles away. Given that only two of our clients have cars, ready access to produce must be hard to come by for many of the people we work with. I was reminded of this when, during a tour of local daycares, a client reached down to tug at what I had assumed to be a weed. She mentioned that it was ‘a good green for salad,’ and explained that she wasn’t able to buy greens anywhere near her house. Since she lives closer to Nationalities Service Center than a lot of our clients, I was happy to tell her that we are working won’t be too far from her house. This served as a reminder that NSC is doing a lot to make the lives of our clients easier, but that it can only do so much without help from local communities and businesses.
The biggest challenge through this work has been learning how to keep up with the various tasks assigned to me. I have to constantly follow-up with my own clients, giving them any necessary documents or filing legal material for them. Also, other attorneys ask me to assist them with their clients, whether that be creating a Deed for a client, closing cases or translating documents into Spanish. As the internship has progressed, I have become more equipped to handle multitasking, making me a much more efficient worker.

The intake sessions in particular have challenged me. At times it can be difficult to keep the client focused on the specific questions at hand, instead of ranting about their situation, which makes it more difficult for me to take notes and correctly assess the situation. The most difficult part of intake meetings is processing everything quickly enough to be able to give good legal advice.

An aspect of this internship that I would, without a doubt, want to build on is speaking Spanish in a professional environment. I have realized how valuable it is to be bilingual in a professional setting. Through my ability to speak Spanish, I have been able to assist Spanish speaking clients, and help other attorneys translating for their Spanish speaking clients. I will be taking Business Spanish I and II at Penn in order to build my vocabulary and ability to speak Spanish in the professional field.

- Bryan Rodriguez
Philadelphia Legal Assistance
PIIF and CHPNIP encourage an exploration of self-awareness and identity through a greater understanding of privilege, oppression, and power. Students in the programs also receive valuable insights and preparation for the workplace.

While researching for Speranza, I have to keep in mind that I am writing for medical professionals (doctors, nurse practitioners, etc.). It is difficult because I am only a student, but I still need to write impactful and thought-provoking papers for these people. As a result, I am learning a lot about how to write more sophisticated research papers and develop my critical thinking skills further.

- Nora Lueth, Speranza Project

I have been researching existing laws and declarations on human rights, Indigenous rights, anti-discrimination, media access, and freedom of expression to better understand the situation and political climate in Guatemala. Most of it is in Spanish, which has been a challenge since some of it is pretty dense legal terminology. While I have some exposure to language diversity legislation, I’ve had less opportunity to explore the legal ramifications of these laws, so I’m really excited to learn more about that in the upcoming weeks.

- Abigail Graham
Cultural Survival

My work truly was what an internship should be: a professionally educating experience. It was clear that the recruitment team put in a lot of effort to ensure that we had a fulfilling and worthwhile experience. We had many chances to ask professionals and experts in the field questions about their career trajectory, their experience working at the office, and even advice on professional decisions and goals. I am extremely grateful to have had this opportunity.

- Thalia Guzman
NY State Attorney General's Office
I feel like a part of this institution at this point, which brings challenges and recently has been pushing me outside my comfort zone. It’s difficult to be the dissenting voice in a room, but that’s where I’ve been finding myself recently. Luckily, I’ve found that if I take that step to put my thoughts out there, to have meaningful discussions, others respond in kind. I’m going to be working on developing a curriculum guide for something pertaining to the intersections of race and religion and the interfaith movement so that will certainly be challenging, but hopefully a good way for me to leave my mark on the Center.

-Antonia Diener, Interfaith Center
CAPACITY BUILDING

Students in the CHPNIP and PIIF programs strive to have meaningful, long-lasting impacts on their communities and organizations. From participating in huge political rallies to helping unemployed Philadelphians apply for jobs, the interns all found unique ways to leave their mark.

This week, I finally finished Of Mice and Men with my class. Though the book is only 107 pages, we managed to stretch the material out over 4 weeks, which allowed us to dissect it thoughtfully and thoroughly. In addition, the book's short length also allowed for me to craft lessons about some of the social issues that play out in the book, such as racism, ableism, and sexism. One of the most poignant lessons I taught was about the history of the N-word. Although I felt it was necessary for me to educate my students about that language, the thought of teaching about the n-word to a middle school class was nerve-wracking. How was I going to ensure that my students discussed the topic respectfully? What if my students weren't ready or interested in learning about the history of the word? What if I was overstepping my boundaries as a summer teaching fellow? I spoke to my Dean of Students, armed with those questions, and he calmed my nerves and helped me best prepare for the lesson. Because of his help, the lesson was a hit! My students were eager to have the space to discuss race and racism, and they were more respectful and thoughtful during discussion than most adults that I know.

-Kai Kornegay
Breakthrough Collaborative
Throughout the summer, CHPNIP and PIIF interns saw their organizations’ work play out on a national stage. From the Black Lives Matter movement to Obergefell v. Hodges, students were able to use their internship experiences to develop a more dynamic and multifaceted understanding of the news.

Zach Willis - Marriage Equality - July 3
Lambda Legal

This week has been a historic one for the LGBTQ community and for Lambda Legal in particular. As of Friday, June 26th, marriage equality is law in the United States!

Prior to working with Lambda, I was very much firmly entrenched within the “radical queer” camp of the community in my beliefs about same-sex marriage. I would decry marriage equality as a tactic of normalization that seeks to integrate the queer community into the existing social conventions of the heteropatriarchy. I would argue marriage has historically been a means of commodifying women and solidifying bonds between wealthy, powerful families. Marriage, I would rebut, has nothing to do with love. Marriage has everything to do with economics, social hierarchy, and access to privilege. I would often attack the mainstream LGBT movement for attempting to give monogamous homosexual couples access to the very real socioeconomic benefits of marriage (healthcare coverage, tax benefits, assumption of parentage, social approval, etc.) instead of removing these privileges from any kind of relationship and fighting for the rights of all people to access them.

Meanwhile during this marriage campaign, trans* people and transwomen of color in particular are being murdered, raped, incarcerated, detained, assaulted, and harassed. Marriage equality serves those at the helm of the mainstream LGBT movement: white, cis, middle/upper class gay men and women. It does nothing toward eradicating the forces of racism, capitalism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia that will continue to oppress queer people of color.

Since I’ve been working at Lambda, I’ve met and heard the stories of many couples across racial, economic, sex, and gender spectrums who just truly wanted to be able to marry as an expression of love and commitment. Regardless of my personal opinions, marriage is overwhelmingly popular within the LGBTQ community and I am very happy for those who can now be married. I do consider this a victory for them and for the movement, but it is not revolutionary.
It was a very exciting an historic day to be working in the Office of the Attorney General of New York. On July 10, Governor Cuomo appointed Attorney General Eric Shniderman as the Special Prosecutor for all civilian fatalities occurring during interactions with law enforcement in cases where the civilian was unarmed or where there is great speculation as to whether or not the civilian was armed.”

The appointment was received with great hesitation from a number of district attorney who felt that this designation was undermining their expertise, experience, and jurisdiction. The Attorney General, who requested this appointment back in December, emphasized that it was necessary not only because the possibility of conflicts of interest between DA offices and the police department, but especially because the increasing appearance of conflict that has greatly deteriorated the public trust in law enforcement. Without public trust, law enforcement cannot function.

"Without public trust, law enforcement cannot function"

I personally consider this a bold courageous, long overdue, and critical move that states across the country should adopt. While this will not solve the convoluted and systemic issue that is police-civilian relations, particularly with the minority community, it is a step in the right direction.

Antonia Diener - Racial Terrorism - June 28
Interfaith Center

The terrorist attack in an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Charleston, SC left us all wondering how to respond to all the pain and hurt in the community. I recently went to an interfaith service in honor of the people killed in Charleston. I sat in the Bethlehem Baptist church in Wissahickon, PA – a church with a predominantly black congregation – accompanied by the Executive Director of the Interfaith Center and close to a thousand other people. The speakers gave us a space to work through the tragedy. I was amazed how welcoming the church was and at the number of people who attended.

I’m currently working on an academic project on Liberation Theology, which, put simply, is the way faith, doctrine, and communities respond to the very real difficulties of the human situation. Even though I am personally not a person of faith, I see this sort of theology as simply the most applicable, in that I see it as necessary to respond to the ‘messiness’ of humanity. Likewise, I would like to see the Interfaith Center respond to this messiness — and perhaps we will.

The Interfaith Center aims to serve as a ‘connector’ — the institution people turn to in order to better get to know their neighbors, or make connections. From my ivory (ivy?) tower position, I’m inclined to say the community needs to take the liberation theology approach – to respond to and work with human messiness. At the moment, though, a lot of us are still reeling from Charleston – from the horror of the event, from the structures that are implicated and brought to light by it, and by trying to figure out what it is we’re going to do next.
Education
Art & Media Access
Kai Kornegay
Breakthrough Collaborative

Because I am interested in curriculum development and teaching, applying to Breakthrough was an easy decision. I have friends who have taught at various Breakthrough sites, and they all talked about how their experience at Breakthrough helped them gain confidence in the classroom and hone their teaching abilities. Since my friends have had great experiences with the program, I figured that it would be a great way for me to see whether I will eventually want a more hands-on or administrative role in schools. Additionally, I loved the fact that the Breakthrough Collaborative works with low-income students who are primarily of color because I know that I will be able to really connect with my students. Over the course of my own public school education, I only have two Black teachers over the course of 10 years. The lack of representation in teaching faculty at my public schools made it difficult for me to see myself in my teachers and it hurt my motivation at times. As a result, I am looking forward to being able to give many of my students this summer the representation that they may not have otherwise.

Emily Grablutz
Aquinas Center

Run by the Catholic parish–St. Thomas Aquinas–that is located on the same block. (Fun fact: St. Thomas Aquinas was the site of Rocky’s wedding in Rocky 2.) The center is home to ESL and computer literacy classes, after-school homework help, a summer camp, and community events, and also hosts groups from around the region and country for overnight service trips. They serve a very diverse (in terms of race, language, education level, economic status, etc) community, which is an extremely important part of their mission–they believe in “building unity through diversity.”

I was attracted to the internship at the site in part because of the rich community they serve and the opportunity to learn more about the lives and needs of immigrants and refugees in the city. I also was attracted to their community garden and the chance to educate kids about healthy (and culturally relevant!) eating practices this summer while working with the summer camp.
DonorsChoose.org is an educational non-profit that connects donors with public school classrooms around the country through an online crowd funding platform. Teachers from around the country are able to log onto Donorschoose.org and post a project idea to request supplies for a project they want to see come to fruition in their classroom. Donors then log on to our website, browse through teachers’ project proposals, and submit donations to fund the classroom projects of their choosing. Funded proposals then receive their requested items thanks to the hard work of the Operations Team (my division!). Finally, teachers report back to donors on the impact of the classroom project by posting photos to our site and by sending thank you notes from the children to donors that contributed over $50. It’s an extremely personal and rewarding process, and I could not be happier to have joined the team as one of this summer’s Logistics and Business Relations interns.
Eleanor Armstrong
Cultural Survival

I am working for an organization called Cultural Survival that works for the promotion of Indigenous rights worldwide. I'm an intern for the Community Media project. It's a partnership of Cultural Survival and its sister organization in Guatemala, Sobrevivencia Cultural, supporting radio stations in Indigenous communities in Guatemala and increasingly in other parts of South and Central America.

Many Indigenous communities are very poor and/or exist in isolated, rural areas, making radio the most effective means of communication. Programs are frequently broadcast in whatever the local language is (in Guatemala the biggest Indigenous groups are Maya, which is an umbrella term for multiple groups, Garifuna, and Xinca, which in total make up more than half of the population) and, since the transmission is oral, don’t require an advanced degree of literacy. However, current Guatemalan legislation makes it illegal to run a radio station without a permit from the government, and the permits are almost impossible to obtain. The radio frequencies that are legal are extend to extremely small areas and so don’t have much impact. Commercial permits technically are obtainable, but they are distributed in auction format and it’s infeasible for local grassroots movements to financially compete with mass media companies. With all of that said, there are various laws at the national and international level that guarantee the right to access to media to Indigenous groups that explicitly contradict the current de facto prohibition. The 2007 U. N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People contains a section explicitly guaranteeing access to media, as does the 1995 Agreement on identity and rights of Indigenous groups and other legislative pieces include themes that touch on the issue.

"Radio [is] the most effective means of communication... however, current Guatemalan legislation makes it illegal to run a radio station without a permit from the government"

There have been various raids on different community radio stations in which equipment is frequently confiscated and volunteers arrested. A new proposed law would further codify this process, but there is another which would legalize stations for many Indigenous and minority groups. Cultural Survival and Sobrevivencia Cultural are working alongside the stations and have been instrumental in the drafting of new possible legislature. I am excited to be a part of this great organization.
Diana Zhou
Art Reach

This summer, I’m working at Art-Reach, a non-profit serving the Delaware Valley that brings arts to those who are typically underserved. This ranges from people with various disabilities to those who are economically disadvantaged. Art-Reach is currently located in Center City in the Friends Center, which houses dozens of other non-profit organizations in Philadelphia.

"Art access may seem like a small matter, but it is representative of greater issues in our society"