

Fall 2019 – Spring 2020: My Experiences as a Global Health Leadership Intern

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I first came across Unite For Sight while researching global health organizations to intern at for my co-op experience at my school. Co-op is a six-month period when, rather than being in classes, students are given the opportunity to work in their chosen fields and attain hands on experience. I am pursuing a degree in biological sciences with a concentration in pathobiology and a minor in global health; due to my exposure to many aspects of biology at school, including wet lab research and bioinformatics, I wanted to focus on global health during my co-op and learn more about the field during my time. I learned of Unite For Sight and its role as a leading non-profit organization in the field of global health and I was excited to work alongside people who are passionate about global health and the necessity of universal access to health care, specifically eye care in limited resource countries.

Within the first day of my internship, I was over the moon to learn about the tasks I would be assigned and my role as part of the team. During my time as an intern, I developed my scientific reading skills through reviewing abstracts and pitch proposals for the Global Health & Innovation Conference, clean and analyze data about patients provided by our partner clinics in order to assess outcomes rather than simply outputs, update the Certificate in Global Health Practice, and help organize a series of webinars with expert panels in order to provide information about important topics in the field of global health. The work that I was given was meaningful, informative, and valuable to the organization; I always felt that I could give my input on any subject because of the environment of the organization. Even as an intern, my opinions and comments were taken into consideration when making decisions and we always worked as a team which was phenomenal.

As an intern, I had an exciting opportunity to participate in the Global Impact Fellow program for one month out of my six-month internship. I traveled to Chennai, India and worked with Dr. Senthil at Pranav Eye Foundation to understand how eye care and sight-restoring surgical care is delivered in a low resource area. I can honestly say this was one of the best experiences of my life; I was able to work directly with inspirational ophthalmologists and optometrists who are dedicated to delivering eye care to people both in the city and surrounding areas. I participated in “eye camps” and traveled to schools, communities, and surrounding villages, and performed visual acuity tests on individuals before sending them to the optometrist for further examination and a prescription for eye glasses. I was also able to witness multiple cataract surgeries, laser eye surgeries, and spend one day in a diabetes retinopathy center for diabetic patients to get their eyes examined using a 3nethra machine to catch early signs of blindness. Through this experience, I was able to gain a more robust view of Unite For Sight as an organization and all of the people committed to providing eye care to the world’s poor because I was able to see the work done in the main office in New Haven, CT as well as the work done at one of the partner eye clinics.

Unite For Sight's model is truly unique and it is a multi-faceted organization that provides both educational resources, volunteer opportunities, and research opportunities. The organization's commitment to developing sustainable partnerships with its partner clinics is truly great to learn about for any aspiring global health student. My circumstances were unique because the COVID-19 pandemic happened during the tail-end of my internship; however, this was also a great learning opportunity for me because I was able to see how such organizations respond in a real global health crisis. Even through the pandemic and the transition to working from home, I still felt that I was contributing to the organization because I still had tasks to complete and deadlines to meet. I can honestly say that the six months I had at Unite For Sight absolutely flew by and I am so happy that I chose to participate in the Global Health Leadership Internship. I have taken so many lessons away from my time at Unite For Sight that I will carry forward into my future career.